



May 6, 2026

New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

Oversight: Examining the Parks Department's Engagement with Community Based Organizations and Volunteers

Testimony by: Margaret Nelson, Deputy Commissioner for Public Programs and Community Engagement, NYC Parks

Good afternoon, Chair Hankerson, members of the Parks Committee, and other members of the City Council. My name is Margaret Nelson, the Deputy Commissioner for Public Programs and Community Engagement for NYC Parks, and I'm joined today by Karina Smith, our Assistant Commissioner for Strategic Community Engagement, and Matt Drury, our Chief of Citywide Legislative Affairs. We are pleased to be here today alongside our incredible partners at the City Parks Foundation, to testify about one of the most critical aspects of our agency, engagement with community-based organizations and volunteers.

Robust public engagement is a central plank of our agency's strategic approach, imbued within every aspect of the agency's operations, as our Parks employees have direct engagement and interaction with the public in a huge variety of ways. Whether it's a Shape-Up class instructor at a local Parks recreation center, an Urban Park Ranger leading curious park visitors on a nature walk, a City Parks Worker advising visitors where the nearest bathroom is, our local Borough staff attending Community Board meetings and Council Participatory Budget info sessions, or our Capital team hosting a public design input session – practically every member of our agency staff has the privilege of regularly engaging directly with the public, an experience we value deeply.

One major avenue for this engagement is our agency's direct relationship with countless individual volunteers and local community organizations that are working alongside us to make sure their local parks reflect their community's needs and priorities. We are very proud of the work of our dedicated staff to care for our city parks, and our efforts are bolstered and supported by engaged and empowered New Yorkers, making these spaces even more active and vibrant, and sources of community pride. Hundreds of local groups dedicate their precious time and energy throughout the year in our city's parks and public spaces, benefiting from connection to nature and one another, all while having an impact on the environment. For New Yorkers looking to get more involved in their local parks, they can visit our agency website to learn more about a wide range of potential opportunities, from becoming a member at your local GreenThumb community garden, helping plant a tree or monitor horseshoe crabs in Coney Island through our Stewardship program, or joining an "It's My Park" event in their community led by our incredible Partnerships for Parks team.

Partnerships for Parks (or PfP) is a unique public-private partnership between NYC Parks and City Parks Foundation and serves as our primary mechanism to support and champion grassroots volunteers by giving them the tools they need to advocate and care for their neighborhood parks and green spaces in a dedicated, sustained way. PfP equips people, organizations, and government with resources and opportunities to ensure these spaces are dynamic community assets.

PfP offers resources and opportunities to neighborhood organizations in all five boroughs, while driving equity by prioritizing investment in areas that have experienced historic disinvestment. Support includes tools and supplies, training and coaching on topics like group development, event planning, working with elected officials, and fundraising, and through our partnership with City Parks Foundation, PfP makes hundreds of thousands of dollars in programming and capacity grants each year and even provide fiscal sponsorship to enable informal groups to receive grants for their activities. In 2025 alone, PfP distributed over \$900,000 in grant funds to grassroots groups to conduct stewardship and programming. Through our PfP Community Engagement Coordinators and organizers, we provide direct expertise and support for park beautification, community events, strategic planning, leadership, group development, and advocacy, including ongoing help



securing permits and building stronger relationships with NYC Parks staff. The “It’s My Park” program offers support for community, non-profit, and corporate partners to revitalize local green spaces through cleaning, painting, and gardening. Further, in service of equitable community support and our commitment to underserved parks and communities, PfP employees execute focused, intensive park engagement efforts through the Catalyst Program, which equips individual leaders and dedicated park groups with the tools they need to help make positive changes in parks that need it most, focusing on equity and community representation in addressing quality of life and other critical local issues.

In Fiscal Year 2025, PfP supported over 490 active community groups involved in parks across the city, including over 400 groups that provided direct hands-on care through cleanup, gardening, and painting projects. Through the It’s My Park program, PfP organizes and supported over 1,400+ beautification projects annually, with 27,000+ volunteers from community, non-profit, civic, youth, and corporate organizations, accomplishing 102,000 hours of volunteer time.

GreenThumb is our agency’s community gardening program, facilitating free access to land, gardening equipment and materials, technical assistance, educational workshops, and seasonal programs to support community gardeners and urban farmers. Our GreenThumb agency staff provide programming and material support to dedicated garden groups. GreenThumb is the largest community gardening program in the nation, with 567 GreenThumb gardens, 391 of which are located on property under our jurisdiction, all offering a diverse array of spaces for relaxation and community engagement located on 100 acres all across the city. Our dedicated volunteer gardeners, over 20,000 New Yorkers of all ages and backgrounds, are the backbone of the GreenThumb program and we’re grateful for their efforts that make these community gardens such special places.

Our agency’s Stewardship Program engages volunteers on projects across the city’s 12,000 acres of natural landscapes, working to remove invasive plant species, care for nature trails, install protective fencing, and plant native species to enhance biodiversity. The program promotes engagement with street trees as well and our Stewardship volunteers remove litter and weeds from tree beds, cultivate the soil, and spread fresh mulch. In Calendar Year 2025, the program engaged over 6,100 volunteers who donated nearly 14,000 hours of service at 450 events caring for NYC’s trees and natural areas. This can take the form of single-day stewardship events, but our Stewardship team also engages, educates, and empowers volunteers through our Green Neighborhoods Program and works with advanced volunteers called Super Stewards. The Green Neighborhoods Program is an initiative to engage local communities in the care of street trees, forests, wetlands, gardens, and other natural resources in neighborhoods around the city. This program generates connections between individual volunteers and groups that are vested in and care about nature in their neighborhoods and works to broaden public understanding of the role and place of nature in the city. The Super Stewards program is a training and permitting program designed to support long-term ongoing volunteerism across the city. Super Stewards work independently to care for their neighborhood parks, recruit neighbors and friends, and track and coordinate their efforts with us. We’re also in the midst of our decennial “Trees Count” tree census, in which volunteers are helping us survey and count all of the trees within our landscaped parks. Over 2,500 dedicated tree-lovers came out last summer to take part of this effort, which will start back up later this month, and we welcome all of you to help us get the word out and even come out and join us in the parks.

Though each of these programs and initiatives are being implemented by different divisions within the agency, our teams work in close coordination and collaboration and find every opportunity to leverage our agency’s engagement efforts in a strategic manner. For example, as part of the development of the recently released Urban Forest Plan, the City, led by the Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice with significant support from Parks, undertook a major engagement effort, as more than 8,000 New Yorkers participated in public workshops and tours in all five boroughs, virtual focus groups, and a citywide online questionnaire, and



many of these community input activities were designed and led by our City Parks Foundation and PfP Catalyst team members. From Winter 2024 through Fall 2025, these efforts gathered over 20,000 unique comments reflecting a diverse range of opportunities and challenges for NYC's urban forest and how communities hope to be involved. In alignment with one of the actions detailed in the Urban Forest Plan, PfP is collaborating with our Forestry and Stewardship teams to plan engagement around the Neighborhood Tree Planting Program and expand tree stewardship in heat vulnerable neighborhoods, so more trees can thrive and reach maturity, and communities can directly benefit from their efforts to combat climate change. PfP will also provide community tree stewards with training and technical assistance through our Partnerships Academy Program, and educational materials that teach communities how to care for trees, and the importance of trees for human and environmental health.

At Parks, we know that information is an essential resource, and we are dedicated to transparency, making sure our volunteers, park advocates, and interested New Yorkers can get access to data and information that can help them get more involved with their green and open spaces. So we developed and launched the Vital Parks Explorer, a public-facing digital map that empowers New Yorkers with data about access to critical components of a vital park system. For the first time ever, New Yorkers can compare their community's access to park amenities and services with other neighborhoods in the city, which means they can more effectively advocate for more resources for increasing access and performance of their local parks, and help ensure there is equitable investment in their community.

One important way that local organizations help activate and energize our parks is through special events and programming, as well as athletic tournaments and league play on our fields and courts, including everything from soccer tournaments and Little League matches, to movie nights and cherry blossom viewing parties. NYC Parks is pleased to work with special event organizers and sports leagues, to support events beyond the 20,000 free public programs provided by the agency each year, as we feel that activating our parks with a wide range of recreational and cultural activity helps make them more robust and dynamic public spaces for everyone to enjoy. We recognize that these special events and athletic activities provide tremendous added value to our parks system, and we are committed to offering fair and equitable access to these spaces for organizations and individual New Yorkers alike, while ensuring that proposed activities are appropriate and avoid negative impacts on our shared open spaces. For example, in November 2024, we updated our agency rules and permit fee schedule for athletic fields and courts, to allow for more equitable access for non-profit community organizations, increasing transparency and improving customer service for in-demand ballfields and courts. In addition, we implemented process improvements for our athletic permits to ensure a faster, more streamlined request experience, while introducing new system features designed to enhance usability and expand access to available permitted time. We also hold pre-season field and court public information sessions to help guide leagues and civic leaders through our permit process.

We heard from local community organizations that our special event permitting process could be difficult for some to navigate, so we hosted 9 public input meetings in all five boroughs, with support from our Borough Offices and PfP staff, and are undertaking a variety of process improvements, including updating the Special Events landing page to make it more user friendly and easier to navigate. We also have plans underway to update our permit application portal on our agency website. Parks is also producing a "how to hold a special event guide" for community groups in multiple languages, so they can better understand the special event permit process.

New Yorkers need and deserve vibrant parks that serve their local communities. While our agency invests considerable staffing, capital improvements and dynamic public programming across our network of green spaces, we know that bringing residents together in our parks through volunteering builds social capital in a community, fostering trust, understanding, cohesion and unity. We are proud to be the agency responsible for building and maintaining our city's park system, in collaboration with our partners and friends groups, ranging



NYC Parks

from larger conservancies with formal license agreements to small informal gatherings of neighbors organizing volunteer clean-up events, and of course, the individual New Yorkers and park visitors who use our parks every day and do their part by treating these public spaces with the respect and dignity that they deserve, so we can all enjoy this vital resource that we all have to share.

Thank you for allowing us to testify before you today and for your continued advocacy and support for our city parks. After we hear from our colleagues at the City Parks Foundation, we will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Committee on Parks and Recreation

**Oversight - Examining the Parks Department's Engagement with
Community Based Organizations and Volunteers
May 6, 2026**

Chair Hankerson and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks Foundation, the "private" in the public-private program that is Partnerships for Parks. We also serve as administrator of the 45-member NYC Parks and Open Spaces Partnerships coalition of nonprofit stewardship organizations; and we manage and administer the NYC Green Fund, a pooled fund that makes grants to grassroots and medium-sized stewardship and programming groups working in parks and open spaces. And, of course, although not the subject of today's hearing, we bring hundreds of free sports, arts, and environmental programs to parks across the city.

The primary benefit of a public-private partnership is that we, as a private, nonprofit organization, are able to bring diverse funding to the table. In addition to the Council's own Parks Equity Initiative (\$780K lump sum plus \$358K in discretionary grants), we raise funds from private individuals, corporations, and foundations. In total, we add \$3.6 million in support for Partnerships for Parks. Additionally, as the administrator of the NYC Green Fund, we are adding another \$2.6 million each year in grants to grassroots and medium sized partners that directly support free, community-led arts & culture, environmental and health and wellness programming along with stewardship activities across the city. Another benefit of our public-private partnership is that as a private organization that has been working with communities for 37 years, we have built up a level of trust that has strengthened the relationship between residents and their local government. Navigating city systems can be difficult, especially for volunteer-led groups, and our role is to provide the support, structure, and flexibility that allows communities to take action.

There are several programs within Partnerships for Parks that are supported exclusively by City Parks Foundation, the first of which is Catalyst, an intensive outreach effort that historically and to this day focuses on disadvantaged communities or those that have experienced disinvestment and inequity. Catalyst embeds a community engagement coordinator in just 3-5 parks at a time, a much smaller portfolio than a typical coordinator, in order to build deep and lasting relationships and networks. We identify local leaders, foster connections, and create the conditions for sustained engagement where it does not yet exist, empowering communities to become civically engaged in a way that hasn't previously been possible or accessible. Examples of past Catalyst projects include the creation of the Bronx River Alliance, or our work in Coney Island Creek and Kaiser Park, where deeply rooted environmental justice issues were addressed through community involvement in park planning, advocacy, and the restoration of critical environmental infrastructure.

Our funding also supports a new forestry outreach team that helped collect community input through more than 7K unique responses for the city's first ever Urban Forest Plan. This team of 3 FTEs will now develop and support street tree stewards throughout the city so that our existing trees thrive and increase their canopy.

The technical assistance team is also CPF-supported and offers skills-building workshops and seminars on everything from how to start a park group to how to host a family day. The team provides fiscal sponsorship for 200 groups that are either not registered as 501c3s and/or do not want the responsibility of managing funds. By handling administrative requirements, we enable community leaders to focus on the visible, on-the-ground improvements their neighborhoods need. Finally, the technical assistance team also includes staff that review, distribute and manage the NYC Green Fund's grassroots grants. They currently oversee 144 active grants worth \$910K. I will point out here that the Green Fund distributes more than \$2 million annually, so on top of the grassroots grants program, we also make grants to medium-sized nonprofits with budgets of up to \$2.5M and we have staff who manage those grants separately. The vast majority of all grants we make are directed to environmental justice communities and are run by BIPOC leaders.

To round out our work, CPF oversees corporate engagement through the It's My Park program, generating both awareness among and funding from our city's corporate community, encouraging them to be good corporate citizens and to better understand the role that parks play in the wellbeing of our city.

I do want to say a word about the Parks Equity Initiative, which is a City Council directed initiative that was created in 2014 to match the administration's addition of \$1.4 million so that NYC Parks could hire more community engagement coordinators to reach more parks and more people, particularly in under-resourced neighborhoods. That investment has been critical to the program's success. This year, we are requesting an expansion of funding for the Parks Equity Initiative to increase support for Partnerships for Parks and the groups we serve. There are so many parks and public spaces that still lack organized stewardship, and many communities are eager to be engaged but need support to do so.

In addition to our work with Partnerships for Parks, City Parks Foundation co-founded and now serves as administrator for the NYC Parks and Open Space Partners Coalition, a network of nearly 50 conservancies and other nonprofit park stewards. Originally set up as a way for groups to share information during COVID, it has turned into an association that provides a support system for the many nonprofits that work in the field. The median annual budget of our members is just \$2 million so while these groups are incorporated and may have staff, the majority are small, and just about half are without license agreements, but are a bit too large to work directly with Partnerships for Parks. We have been working very closely with the team at NYC Parks to help address some of the issues that these organized nonprofits face, especially when they are small and have very modest funding. This includes offering shared services like training, HR or finance consulting, and other services that



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address traditional management concerns.

Finally, through the NYC Green Fund and a special set-aside specifically for systems change, we have been able to support research, convenings, and stakeholder engagement to better understand challenges that open space stewards face and to help advance solutions across the public realm. With Green Fund support, the Trust for Public Land was able to document the economic impact of parks in NYC. The Center for an Urban Future was able to identify multiple ways to secure alternative funding for parks and The Design Trust was able to research how permitting is handled in other cities and make recommendations that would make the process easier in NYC. We have a convening scheduled for next week, at which time we will identify action steps for the next year.

Thank you for shining a light on the critical community engagement work that Partnerships for Parks supports. While we all can get caught up in the day-to-day minutiae of our work, in the end, I am regularly reminded that what Partnerships for Parks is doing is building civic engagement across our city. Numerous studies have demonstrated that volunteering in parks has a spillover effect. Civic engagement is meaningfully associated with park volunteering and environmental identity is a key mediating factor. In a city like New York, where parks serve as our backyards and our living rooms, the work we are doing at the hyper-local level is critical for addressing many quality of life issues and building and supporting our democracy.



Testimony of the Water Safety Coalition On the Parks Department’s Engagement with Community Based Organizations and Volunteers

NYC Council Parks and Recreation Committee, May 6, 2026 1pm

Dear Councilmember Hankerson and Members of the Committee for Parks and Recreation,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to your Committee concerning the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation’s (“NYC Parks”) engagement with Community Based Organizations (“CBOs”) and volunteers.

About the Water Safety Coalition

The Water Safety Coalition (WSC) is a network of New York residents, community groups, and non-profit organizations committed to making water safety an essential right for all, to save lives, and to create a more inclusive recreation community. Founded in 2021 by Rockaway-based organizations, WSC emerged in response to recurring drownings on the peninsula. We work with elected officials and communities to advance policies and strategies that prevent drownings and promote water safety across New York City and New York State. Today, our efforts span advocacy, policy, education, and programming citywide.

NYC Parks Engagement with the Water Safety Coalition and Member Organizations

Over the years, we have had many conversations with NYC Parks officials, to varying degrees of success. *We recognize that NYC Parks is an overburdened agency without the appropriate funding and staffing that it and New Yorkers rightly deserve for their public spaces. We hope this changes during this Administration. **But there are many ways that NYC Parks can collaborate and partner with CBOs that can vastly improve public safety around the water, help New Yorkers better understand water safety, and increase aquatics and water safety equity and access.***

We thank Commissioner Shimamura and her team for already meeting with us and listening to our proposed water safety and aquatics recommendations. Already, they have heard our suggestion of increased signage about the dangers of rip currents (with an image and how to interact with one) and implemented some incremental change. This is a great step, and more are needed.

Recommendations for Collaboration with Water Safety CBOs

1. Allow Nonprofits and CBOs to use and rent NYC Parks pool facilities.

Since the COVID pandemic, NYC Parks has been unable to provide the amount of free swim lessons it once provided. There are many nonprofits and CBOs ready and willing to fill in this gap, if only they could use the public aquatic infrastructure already out there to do so. Many organizations in our group provide free and low cost swim lessons to a range of age groups, but often struggle to find available pools at affordable rates to conduct their programming in. *NYC Parks can and should work with small nonprofits and CBOs to better reach in need communities with aquatics and water safety knowledge and skills.* Other major city parks departments in the United States, including Washington DC, San Francisco, Seattle, and Chicago, allows amateur swim teams and CBO/nonprofit groups to use reserved lanes for affordable workouts and lessons. Parks can amend its regulations now to allow CBO

permits of rec center and outdoor pool lanes for affordable swim programs. Parks can set permit fees to recover the cost of earlier/late opening in summer by charging swim teams for lane rentals. This is a win for everyone and increases aquatics access and knowledge, making for a more water safe city and providing much needed revenue to NYC Parks.

2. Better Communicate Access and Maintain Existing Aquatic Infrastructure

For too many communities, they find out without any notice that their local NYC Parks pool is down for maintenance/repairs for an inexplicable amount of time. We should prioritize the existing aquatic infrastructure we have and not wait until systems are failing to make improvements, resulting in delays and unused pools, limiting water safety programming and aquatics access. The Red Hook and Metropolitan pools in Brooklyn are recent examples, but this is not new. If something happens, give local communities clear communications and timelines about reopening and prioritize maintenance of these precious spaces to prevent closures.

3. Collaborate and Hear CBO and Community Needs When Building New Pools

NYC has limited aquatic infrastructure, so when the opportunity for a new pool presents itself - a splash pad or wading pool is better than nothing, but it is not helping us significantly bolster aquatics and water safety knowledge and skills. Prioritize pool construction that can provide lifeguard training, aquatics programming, and provide local communities with year round aquatics access.

4. Work with Local CBOs and Nonprofits with Use of PEP on Shorelines

For many New Yorkers, beach closures at the end of a beach day are met with endless whistling and horn blowing from PEP officers imploring New Yorkers to get out of the water. While the water is closed to swimming when lifeguards are not on duty and some of this enforcement is warranted, wading or simply by putting your feet in the water should not be treated as near criminal offenses. For so many, the simple act of walking in a few inches of water along the shorelines presents an opportunity to connect with nature and friends and family. PEP officers repeatedly harassing people not to do so is the opposite of what we should be encouraging New Yorkers to do in parks. NYC Parks and PEP can collaborate with local CBOs on ways to enforce and encourage compliance with no swimming when lifeguards aren't on duty, and have a commonsense approach to enforcement around people enjoying their local shoreline.

We call on NYC Parks to collaborate and uplift water safety nonprofits and CBOs, working together we can make for a more water safe and aquatics equitable city.

Sincerely,

Shanna Blanchard
Chair
Water Safety Coalition



New York City Council Parks Committee
May 6, 2026
Oversight Hearing
Examining the Parks Department's Engagement with
Community Based Organizations and Volunteers.

New York City's parks system is a lifeline for New Yorkers.

So much so that the public's frustration from decades of disinvestment has led to a massive ad hoc quasi-public-private system to maintain these public spaces citywide.

The city has over 40 not-for-profit parks conservancies. There are nearly 500 volunteer organizations supported by Partnership for Parks across the city, with the sole focus of improving their local parks. And the agency itself notes that there are more the 230,000 volunteers citywide that choose to spend their free time maintaining their parks.

While this may seem like a reason to rejoice in civic engagement, it begs a question: why do we need the population of a small city of volunteers to do the work that the Parks Department should be doing itself?

The answer, of course, is funding. Public funding for the Parks Department has been an embarrassment for the city for 40+ years, and during that time we've seen the system descend in national rankings, and the inequity in access to clean and safe parks become a flashpoint.

What's worse is that the city wants to have its cake and eat it too, at the expense of New Yorkers.

Having that cake means millions of private dollars go to conservancies to maintain marquis parks, and millions of free volunteer hours for basic maintenance of the agency's parks. And eating that cake means that the administration continues to pull resources from the agency, while making it extremely difficult for conservancies, small organizations and volunteers to do this work.

License agreements, insurance and indemnification, permitting have all been a constant source of frustration for groups of all sizes.

To its credit, the Parks Department has made significant steps recently towards streamlining permitting. But the agency suffers from depleted staffing at all levels, notably administrative and events staff, the very people who can help on these issues. And funding for Partnership for Parks, a critical support organization for hundreds of volunteer groups citywide, is constantly on the chopping block.

While there has been progress within the agency in identifying key issues for larger parks not-for profits (license agreements, insurance, and indemnification), the Parks Department is tethered to the City Law Department, which drags its feet when real reform is needed.

The council, the administration, and the agency must prioritize further reform so that New Yorkers across the city can benefit from our chaotic parks system.

Adam Ganser
Executive Director
New Yorkers for Parks



May 6, 2026

**Testimony of Matt Malina on behalf of NYC H2O before the New York City Council
Committee on Parks and Recreation**

**Public Hearing: Examining the Parks Department's Engagement with Community Based
Organizations and Volunteers**

Thank you, Chair Hankerson and members of the New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation, for convening this hearing and providing the opportunity to testify about the Parks Department's engagement with community based organizations and volunteers.

Good afternoon. My name is Avery Wallace the Communications and Operations Manager at NYC H2O, a nonprofit organization that has been stewarding the Ridgewood Reservoir in Highland Park for the past ten years.

In that time, we have maintained and improved the site, removed invasive species, including phragmites, restored native habitat, and brought over 9,000 New Yorkers — schoolchildren, families, and community members — to experience this remarkable natural resource. We have provided over \$3M in services at no cost to the Parks Department.

We are here today because the Parks Department's ad hoc approach to do this work is unsustainable; we need the ability to enter into a license agreement, similar to what's in place for larger parks.

A license agreement would allow us to raise private and public funds to improve the Reservoir's two historic gatehouses for community use, and to build public trails inside the basins. Without one, we cannot enter into contracts, hire contractors, or accept capital grants tied to Parks property — no matter how strong our track record or how clear the community benefit.

The cost of that barrier is not abstract. In 2025, State Senator Julia Salazar committed \$770,000 to electrify the East Gatehouse — a building that has sat unused for two years since Parks spent \$5.3M to renovate it. We asked for a license agreement to manage the work, offering to use contractors already on Parks' approved vendor list but were denied by parks.

So we made a second offer. We would transfer the grant entirely to Parks — they would do the work — and we asked only for a license agreement to use the building for a community kayaking program. Parks said no again. And the gatehouse still sits unused.

Senator Salazar withdrew the funding and the Ridgewood Reservoir community and the park lost \$770,000.

This outcome was preventable and NYC H2O is not alone in our experience. CBOs across this city face the same wall when trying to formalize partnerships with Parks — partnerships that would benefit communities at no cost to the city.

We are asking the Council to direct Parks to establish clear, time-bound protocols for CBO license agreements — so that organizations with proven track records can do more for New York City, not less.

Thank you.

Testimony of Hayley Gorenberg, volunteer with Forest for All, Friends of Mount Prospect Park, and community resident voting member of Brooklyn Community Board 8's Parks, Youth and Education Committee, delivered at City Council Oversight Hearing Wednesday May 6, 2026: "Examining the Parks Department's Engagement with Community Based Organizations and Volunteers"

(link to Public Design Commission and Brooklyn Community Board 8 public meeting video clips, included below)

Thank you for this opportunity to shed light. My name is Hayley Gorenberg, and I volunteer for multiple New York City parks-oriented organizations, including as a community resident voting member of Brooklyn Community Board 8's Parks, Youth and Education Committee – which I'm highlighting today.

I started attending CB8 committee meetings because CB8 was one of two boards longtime on-record as attached to my neighborhood's park, Mount Prospect Park, and Mayor Adams had suddenly announced a huge, concrete skateboard facility would be built there. I attended so many meetings that I became a voting member.

Parks Department practices with this volunteer organization are alarming. Parks fails to give materials in advance of showing a design, sometimes insisting on a vote in the same meeting. Why not give materials in advance? We are told that's just not something they do. Even when we know that reasoned input would involve materials in advance, so that volunteers would have time to formulate questions or address agency misrepresentations – sometimes flagrantly inaccurate statements – when meeting with Parks.

But when they went to the Public Design Commission on March 23, 2026, after the Mount Prospect design was disclosed days earlier, what did project reps tell the mayoral appointees? Oh, they said they had given the CB8 committee materials in advance.

They also told the mayoral commission that CB8 had "explicitly" said the community board wanted the skate facility built on Mount Prospect Park's beloved, historic green parkland. They also said CB8 had verified that messages in support came from within the CB8 district. But CB8 district and committee leadership say none of that is true – that they don't verify messages of support, and that the City is, to quote, "steamrolling" this project at this location, with no community consultation on siting. That tracks with everything else we know.

My conclusion is that NYC Parks and the City are using CB8 volunteers as a fig leaf to falsely portray community support and legitimacy for a wildly inequitable, damaging and even dangerous project sucking up millions of dollars of taxpayer money.

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This video compiles clips from public meetings indicating misrepresentations by the CEO of Tony Hawk's foundation to the Public Design Commission of mayoral appointees, and reactions from Brooklyn Community Board 8 leadership:

https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/folders/1_oFzduZbgMOT5zO-KejYXtvEggpkKgLE



CENTER FOR EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Committee on Parks and Recreation

May 6, 2026

Dear Chair Hankerson and Committee Members,

My name is Isabel Greenberg, and I am a Policy and Business Development Associate with the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO). Thank you to Chair Hankerson and the members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony. CEO's mission is to provide immediate, effective, and comprehensive employment services to individuals recently returning home from incarceration.

As the largest provider of reentry employment services in New York, we have served over 47,000 New Yorkers since 1996. Independent evaluations show that our program reduces recidivism by 22% and increases employment rates by 52%. We are submitting this testimony to highlight how our partnership with the NYC Parks Department—specifically through the Treetime Initiative—serves as a model for how the city can engage community-based organizations to build a safer, greener, and more equitable New York.

Justice-involved individuals are at the highest risk immediately following release. By providing immediate transitional employment through work crews, CEO stabilizes individuals during this critical time. Our crews provide high-quality cleaning, beautification, and maintenance services that allow justice-involved New Yorkers to reinvest in the communities they call home.

On June 1, 2026, CEO is launching a crew with NYC Parks through their Treetime Initiative. Through this partnership, CEO participants will assist with tree maintenance and watering in Central Queens. This crew provides an opportunity for our participants to provide critical environmental services and gain valuable "green" job skills that lead to long-term, living-wage careers. While this is currently a summer crew, expanding our partnership presents a significant opportunity for the Parks Department to gain year-round support. Our crews can provide vital services, including landscaping, maintenance, and snow removal across NYC parks all year long. Scaling our work crews would allow us to offer participants consistent employment, ensuring the financial stability needed for successful reintegration and allowing us to deepen our impact on the city's environmental health.

Immediate transitional employment is a powerful public safety tool, as it stabilizes individuals during the critical, high-risk time immediately following release from incarceration. Each CEO work crew provides approximately 60 formerly incarcerated individuals annually with access to immediate work and daily pay, which is essential for their successful reintegration. Our litter abatement, maintenance, and beautification service contribute to the understanding that a clean city is a safe city.



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**Committee on Parks and Recreation
May 6, 2026**

With the Committee's support, we can scale our community-based programs, provide essential support to New Yorkers returning home, and ensure our city's parks remain a resource for all. Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.

Isabel Greenberg

Isabel Greenberg
igreenberg@ceoworks.org
Associate, Policy and Business Development



Testimony of Kathy Matson, for the Cultural Row Block Association

Oversight Hearing: “Examining the Parks Department’s Engagement with Community Based Organizations and Volunteers” (New York City Council Wednesday May 6 @ 1PM)

My name is Kathy Matson, and I’m representing Brooklyn's Cultural Row Block Association, an organization of volunteers who work to improve quality of life and solve community problems. CuRBA's block includes Mount Prospect Park.

I moved onto Eastern Parkway in 2004. I was delighted by the green space, especially Mount Prospect Park. It has been a wonderful retreat for the community to enjoy. I use the park to exercise, walk around the oval, read a book and to enjoy the quiet outdoors close to home.

For the past two years CuRBA has been extremely concerned about the plan secretly created by a handful of officials, to turn the center lawn of Mount Prospect Park into a large, mostly paved skateboard facility. The community was not consulted about the decision to convert the park.

For years, CuRBA volunteers in Mount Prospect Park have been doing trash pickup and weeding in the park, and last year we helped mulch around the trees. A CuRBA volunteer secured a free donation of professional soil aeration and reseeded for Mount Prospect Park in early 2024. NYC Parks policy says that kind of volunteer support is supposed to be welcomed. But instead, Parks authorities rejected the improvement and have left the space neglected. (They also closed out multiple 311 requests for basic lawn maintenance, marking them "condition corrected," when no work had been done.) Our community could have been enjoying improved green space for more than two years. Then they tell us that the skateboard construction project is the way to make the lawn greener.

This park has easy access for those that can’t make it to Prospect Park or handicapped in such a way that it is easier to go up the ramp by paving the park. It’ll take away the coolness of grass and not be as welcoming.

I regret I cannot be there in person today, but I'm grateful for the opportunity to share a few words. On behalf of Friends of Commodore Barry Park, I am especially grateful to be given this opportunity to express our appreciation for Partnerships for Parks. Doing so reminds us that our work, and our community, are seen.

As the Founding Member of Friends of Commodore Barry Park, I want to express my deep appreciation for Partnerships for Parks and the impact they've had on our work as park stewards. From the very beginning, their support has been steady and truly empowering.

Their commitment to environmental stewardship has strengthened everything we do. They have partnered with us on gardening and park cleanups to programming and community events. The workshops they offer have helped build our skills and confidence as organizers and leaders. Their guidance has also translated into real, tangible outcomes for our group. For example, our inclusion in the Catalyst Program in 2017 provided our group with critical support and structure. Ted Enoch and his Catalyst team helped us organize, identify community stakeholders and, as a result, expand our impact. An offshoot of that was the invitation to join the Cohort Visioning. This program gave us the tools to plan and lead a Visioning Session in the Park in the summer of 2018. That work culminated in a Scope meeting in November of the same year, attended by over 100 community members. It remains one of our proudest accomplishments, which is even more meaningful now, as the redesign of Commodore Barry Park may begin this year.

Over the years, the engagement coordinators we've worked with have been exceptional and deeply invested in our success. I want to thank them all: Emily Sherrod, Delancey Nelson, Hannah Bossio, Carmine Raimondi and presently, the amazing Curtis Sherrod! Thank you!

On a personal note, I've grown tremendously in my role, and Partnerships for Parks has been a constant source of learning and encouragement. I can honestly say I don't know how we would do this work without them. I am truly grateful.

What makes Commodore Barry Park so unique is that it is shaped by generations of families who have grown up here, returned here, and continue to pass it on. I have felt that continuity. To have a partner who recognizes and believes that as much as we do

means more than words can fully capture. With that said, we are proud to have received Partnerships for Parks' Legacy Award in 2019. It continues to be an acknowledgment and affirmation of the importance of our community-led work.

Thank you,
René Scotland



Written testimony of volunteer George Sands for Friends of Mount Prospect Park to City Council Parks Committee Oversight Hearing May 6, 2026 (also delivered via zoom)

Thank you for this opportunity to share our insights. My name is George Sands, and I volunteer with Friends of Mount Prospect Park.

The Parks Department plans to commandeer Mount Prospect Park’s lawn for a largely paved skateboard facility, behind barriers. The City has driven volunteers to organize: 3,000 petitioning park-lovers, Brooklyn CB 9, and environmental health, historical, and climate-conscious skateboarding groups all call on you to protect the park.

When people in power aren’t hiding behind “deference,” they acknowledge the plan contradicts the tree canopy law, Urban Forest Plan, and policies to address the dangerous paved heat-island effect. Also, paying for the water management undercuts climate budgeting – because the taxpayers are legally required to pay for extra engineering for this environmental harm. You’re paving permeable parkland and cutting and endangering shade trees in Brooklyn, which has the least green space per person and the worst tree canopy in the City, and also has more than 40% of the City’s skateboard facilities – mostly around Mount Prospect Park. So much for equity!

This project was a secret deal: Participatory Budgeting was used to direct hundreds of thousands of dollars voted by District 39 – with no site disclosed, even though it had been picked – to pave a park in District 35, which had no vote.

We volunteers want an investigation for violating the City Council’s Adopt a Park law. It requires preserving a park’s integrity, but the plan pours concrete throughout the center of this National-Register-eligible park. And the sponsor is supposed to donate maintenance money and indemnify the City. But documents indicate the City zeroed out million-dollar funding from California celebrity skateboarder Tony Hawk’s organization. And safety issues pinpointed by experts raise taxpayer liability for injuries to park-goers, passersby, and skateboarders, due to flawed site selection.

We call on you to correct course, before permanent damage is done.

—

Attachments:

1. 2024 draft rendering (stamped with Mayor’s logo, shows small facility in back corner with greenscape open lawn preserved, although City had already signed to build a large structure in

the center oval heart of the neighborhood park), versus actual design disclosed spring 2026, tracking the 2024 agreement

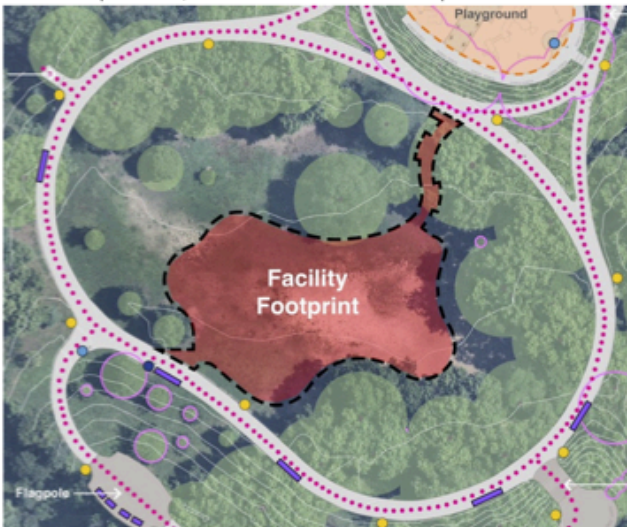
2. Document indicating zeroed-out \$1M funding for maintenance
3. Request for investigation pursuant to City Council's Adopt a Park law

Misleading publicly presented image, followed by actual design – disclosed and immediately voted upon by mayoral commission:

March 2024: Officials publicly display Mayor's logo-stamped rendering with construction in small back corner, with central greenscape virtually untouched – even though the City agreed months earlier in writing to large concrete construction in center oval "heart of the park" greenscape. "DRAFT CONCEPT RENDERING" does not show topography of hilltop park: illustration flattens sloped sides of hilltop park, although center oval ringed with trees is what public/community relies on for recreation/relaxation.



March 2026: Officials present design footprint consuming central greenscape landscape architecture of Mount Prospect Park; announce CB 8 will vote in April – but move for immediate PDC approval



Successive drafts of City’s Adopt a Park agreement with megamillionaire celebrity Tony Hawk’s foundation:

3. Obligations of Sponsor.

a) Sponsor shall contribute Six Hundred and Thirty-Five Thousand Dollars (\$635,000) in in-kind services (and which, for the sake of clarity, Sponsor shall pay to a **construction** company – *may have an in-house designer*) and One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000) in monetary support to improve the Property. Any improvements to the Property shall meet with Parks’ approval. Moreover, no work shall be performed by the Sponsor at the Property prior to receiving a construction permit from Parks’ Capital Projects Division. All work shall be performed in accordance with all New York State and New York City rules and regulations.

3. Obligations of Sponsor.

a) Sponsor shall contribute Five Hundred and Twenty Thousand Dollars (\$520,000) in in-kind services (and which, for the sake of clarity, Sponsor shall pay to a **construction/landscape architecture** company – *may have an in-house designer*) ~~and One Millions (\$1,000,000 in monetary support~~ to improve the Properties. Any improvements to the Properties shall meet with Parks’ approval. Moreover, no work shall be performed by the Sponsor at the Properties prior to receiving a construction permit from Parks’ Capital Projects Division. All work shall be performed in accordance with all New York State and New York City rules and regulations.

Link to a pending request for investigation under the Adopt a Park law:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/65c18944fe2295736471c7c9/t/6977c305809bef5851067cf3/1769456389145/Mount+Prospect+Park_NYC+Comptroller+investigation+request+1+20+2026+%284%29.pdf

Testimony Committee on Parks and Recreation

Re: The Importance of Involving Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in Community Pools and their Programming

Good afternoon, members of the New York City Council. My name is Alan Mukamal. I am the founder of [Friends of Red Hook Pool](#). Last year, the Red Hook Pool was closed for most of the summer swim season due to a mechanical failure (pipe burst) that went undetected and unannounced until the day the pool should have been open. The parks department worked hard to open the pool after community uproar and managed to salvage the last 3 weeks of the short outdoor swim season. Red Hook Pool is one of 4 major outdoor pools with a free learn to swim program, so with its unanticipated closure, NYC lost ¼ of its capacity to teach kids to swim during the summer.

I am speaking to you today to stress how important partnerships with CBOs (like Friends of Red Hook Pool) are in terms of how the pool operates. During last year's closure, I came to learn that the Red Hook Pool was scheduled for complete renovation with money secured from both Federal and City sources after the damage inflicted by Hurricane Sandy. Despite this being planned for years, there was no community outreach and only after CM Aviles got involved did the Parks Dept hold a Town Hall. At the town hall last September, the parks department *did* take community input about hopes for the rec center and pool reconstruction, but they did *not* share their plans whatsoever. Furthermore, since then, they have not shared any plans or a schedule or even provided a summary of the meeting.

Why isn't the Parks department consulting with Red Hook community organizations on community needs? The community should be a full-fledged partner as this once-in-a-generation reconstruction is planned. Otherwise, I can assure you that this opportunity will be squandered and the needs of the community will not be met.

This is not an isolated case. There are so many stories of plans that are not vetted with the community and consequently fall flat. Parks need to be more transparent and take advantage of the insight that CBOs can bring to the table.

But even major projects aside, CBOs can provide valuable input in programming as well as augment services that the Parks does not have the resources to support. Outdoor swimmers have wanted lap lanes at all pools. Yet frequently, the pools do not support such simple things. Another question the community has raised but is unanswered is why

police officers must be present to open an outdoor pool. Surely, this is not necessary and with community engagement, an alternate approach could eliminate this hurdle.

There are CBOs that can provide low-cost/affordable/free swim lessons for New Yorkers in need. If there's a lifeguard shortage (and there is!), partnering with CBOs to simplify the process of training and testing lifeguards could turn that around. There are so many intelligent and dedicated people involved with swimming in NYC, it is boggling to me that Parks do not actively tap into CBOs to meet their mission to provide quality recreational opportunities to all NYC residents.

Sincerely,

Alan Mukamal

Friends of Red Hook Pool

<https://friendsofredhookpool.org/>

347-321-0277

aemukamal@gmail.com

Testimony Provided by
[Name , Role , Community Garden Affiliation]
For the Oversight - Examining the Parks Department's Engagement with Community Based Organizations and Volunteers.

May 06, 2026

Thank you to Chairman Ty Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Ixchel Austin . I am a member of Grant Shade Garden located in Harlem. Grant shade garden was formerly The Arboretum. We share a wall with the George Bruce library. Our garden has been a reading space in years past and is a vital green space in our neighborhood.

I am also speaking as part of the Green Guerillas Council of Gardeners' Steering Committee, a volunteer-led coalition uniting community gardeners across New York City. We appreciate the Committee's attention to how the Parks Department engages with community-based organizations and volunteers because community gardens are sustained almost entirely through volunteer labor and grassroots stewardship.

Community gardeners dedicate countless unpaid hours to maintaining public green spaces that provide culturally relevant food, climate resilience, environmental education, youth engagement, and safe third spaces for residents of all ages. Community gardens are not simply beautification projects — they are critical neighborhood infrastructure. In fact, this Summer we look forward to hosting several youth groups.

For this reason, sustaining and strengthening the relationship and funding between the Parks Department, specifically GreenThumb, community-based organizations, and volunteers is essential. Community-based organizations such as Green Guerillas play a vital role in supporting gardeners across the city by providing technical assistance, leadership development, advocacy, educational programming, and resources that help gardens remain sustainable and community-centered.

We urge the committee to prioritize the following:

Parks Equity Initiative – We urge the NYC Council to increase funding for the Parks Equity Initiative (PEI) and allocate \$300,000 to pilot a simplified, equity-focused regranteeing program administered in partnership with community-based organizations such as Green Guerillas. Many community gardens struggle to access traditional city funding opportunities because of administrative barriers and capacity limitations. This will enable community gardens to directly access funds for maintenance, beautification, safety, and community engagement.

Preserve Our Gardens, Protect Our Future – We call on New York City officials to introduce strong, enforceable legislation that permanently protects NYC community gardens from development pressures that threaten the cultural fabric and sustainability of our neighborhoods.

A Greener NYC – We encourage continued investment in local organizations in providing youth with green jobs, infrastructure, and advocacy opportunities. Ensure community gardeners receive support from youth-focused organizations for effective garden maintenance and expand funding opportunities for programs that promote environmental education, advocacy, and community service, contributing to the improvement and conservation of the City's natural resources.

Community gardens are one of New York City's greatest examples of grassroots civic engagement. Volunteers and community-based organizations continue to fill critical gaps in environmental stewardship, public health, and neighborhood resilience. The City must invest in these partnerships accordingly.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and for your continued support of New York City's community gardens and the volunteers who sustain them.

Ms. Ixchel Austin
Group Leader
Grant Shade Garden

**Submitted to the New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
Hearing Date: May 6, 2026**

Name: Aydon Gabourel

Organization: Laru Beya Collective

Good afternoon,

My name is Aydon Gabourel. I am the Founder and Executive Director of the Laru Beya Collective, a nonprofit in Far Rockaway that offers free surf therapy and water safety education to young people across New York City.

Let me begin with a simple truth:

Proximity to water does not equal access to water.

Each summer, we meet young people who live just steps from the ocean but have never learned how to be safe in the water. Our programs exist because there are still big gaps in access, infrastructure, and coordination.

Last summer, a young person in our program had lived in Far Rockaway all their life but had never been in the ocean. On the first day, they were afraid to step into the water. By the end of the session, they were paddling out with confidence and knew how to stay safe. This kind of change happens when access and education work together.

We appreciate the work of the Parks Department, but stronger partnership with community organizations is essential to meeting real needs.

Community Organizations Are Filling Critical Gaps

Groups like ours offer free and low-cost water safety education, often to young people who would not have access otherwise. We are not repeating City services; we are filling the gaps.

To do this effectively, we need:

- Clear and consistent pathways for nonprofits to access Parks pools and facilities
- Fewer administrative barriers
- Recognition that community organizations are essential partners in public safety

Transparency Around Pool Access Is Critical

Our programs rely on having steady access to water.

When pools close unexpectedly, maintenance issues arise, or schedules change at the last minute, we may have to cancel entire days of programming. This affects many families.

We need:

- Advance notice of closures or maintenance
- Clear and timely communication from Parks
- Greater consistency so organizations can plan safely

Include Communities in Planning and Design

The people who use these facilities should have a say in how they are designed.

Groups like ours are closely connected to the communities that Parks serves. Every day, we work with the young people and families these facilities are meant to support.

We encourage:

- Early and meaningful engagement with local organizations
- Input from youth and families
- Designing facilities that reflect actual community needs

Shift from Enforcement to Education on Shorelines

We understand the importance of safety rules, especially when lifeguards are not on duty.

However, enforcement alone does not build a culture of safety—it can create fear and disconnect.

We believe in:

- Education-first approaches to water safety
- Clear communication about risks and conditions
- Respectful engagement with community members

Putting your feet in the water should not be treated as a criminal act—it should be an opportunity for education.

Closing

Water safety is a public health issue. It is also an equity issue.

Community-based organizations are already doing this work—on the beaches, in the neighborhoods, and with the families who need it most. With stronger coordination, transparency, and partnership, we can reach more people and keep more people safe

Thank you for your time and your commitment to improving water safety for all New Yorkers.

May 6, 2026

Chair Ty Hankerson
Committee on Parks and Recreation
New York City Council
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Testimony for Parks Committee Hearing May 6 “Oversight - Examining the Parks Department’s Engagement with Community Based Organizations and Volunteers”

I am writing to express my concern over the management of the Sunset Community Garden in Ridgewood, Queens. I spent 9 years advocating for its construction and funding only to have it be mismanaged and privatized under the watch of the NYC Parks Department.

I was involved with the Newtown Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant Settlement Fund distribution via NYC Parks Foundation/Partnership for Parks. I volunteered to help find locations for environmental projects covered by the settlement. I suggested a space on NYC DOE property at Willoughby and Onderdonk Avenues for an established community garden group that was being evicted from their space underneath the M train in Ridgewood. It took 9 years of advocacy for a Memorandum of Understanding to be signed between Parks and DOE and for the project to be funded. The group that was supposed to run it had found another space during the lengthy waiting period and felt they could not handle two locations.

Instead, it became a Greenthumb garden, and the leader of this new group was handpicked by NYC Parks personnel who she had a connection with. In 2022, I signed up many of my neighbors who were excited about the opportunity to grow their own food, and things started off well, albeit disorganized. The garden was soon turned into a purely political space, focused more on providing hours restricted to QTBIPOC people, and turning those away who did not fall into that category. They also actively blocked membership for anyone who believes in Israel’s right to exist, which is most Jewish people. Other members got turned off and many of them left. The group running the garden changed the focus of this community resource from that of welcoming all who would like to engage in gardening, to one that requires approval via a private Instagram account ([@friendsofsunsetgarden](#)) and allegiance to certain political causes as a membership requirement. Please see their past posts here:

<https://www.viewsocials.com/profile/friendsofsunsetgarden?tab=posts>

All of this went on with no oversight from Parks. In fact, it turns out that many of the people who work for Greenthumb believe in the same things that the gardeners do, so they allowed this to go on for 2 years.

It is a First Amendment violation to force participants to agree to political speech to gain access to a public amenity. This is a local resource which should be open to all. The group running the garden has hosted events that encourage open hatred of Jewish people, and its members have publicly attacked those who have expressed concerns about how they operate, including me. After I complained in confidence to Parks Dept leaders about the way the site was being run, they told the garden group it was me who had spoken up, and they began to threaten violence against me via social media (see screenshots below).

The site is littered with political propaganda which is not allowed in other NYC parks. It also hosts a religious altar where offerings are made to someone that died of a drug overdose who they have declared a "saint" but had no connection whatsoever to this garden. Parks decided to call it an "art piece" and allowed it to stay. Does that mean altars dedicated to other deities will be allowed as well? We are headed down a slippery separation-of-church-and-state slope.

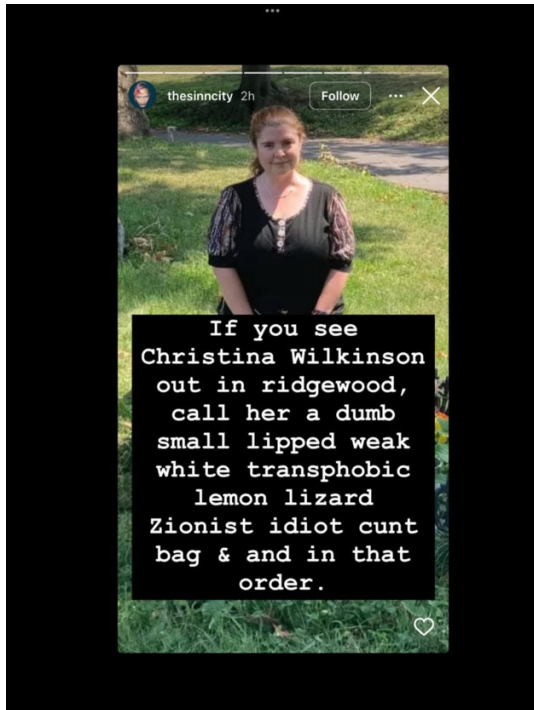
Instead of replacing this group with one that will run the garden in a non-discriminatory manner, the Corporation Counsel last month decided to cut a deal with them to allow them to continue to operate the garden.

Parks needs a better method of selecting community garden leadership and oversight of their activities.

Sunset Garden was built with public funds on public land and is supposed to be open to any member of the public who wishes to garden. Its intended purpose was apolitical and it's wrong for the City to allow a private group to force a political agenda on participants. I hope the Council as overseers can stop this insanity.

Thank you.

Christina Wilkinson
Ridgewood





 Sasha Annyiah

 **Sasha Annyiah**
sashaanniyah · Instagram

22:29

Try honoring Earth Day by stopping the harassment of community gardens & its most marginalized member with your colonizing pal, Ridgewood neighborhood terrorist - Christina Wilkinson - @nutrichrisnyc .





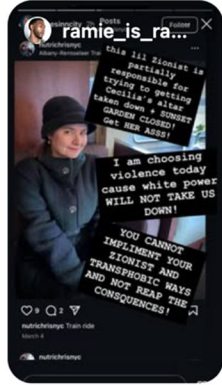
Ramie Ahmed

Ramie Ahmed

ramie_is_ramie · Instagram

1:13 PM

Shared Ramie Ahmed's story



5:54 PM

You can unfollow, remove, even block but now everyone I know knows your face and what you have done and planning on doing 😬

Accept message request from Ramie Ahmed (ramie_is_ramie)?

If you accept, they will also be able to call you and see info such as your activity status and when you've read messages.

Block

Delete

Accept



80 1 22

queers.gambit 🌸 Come through 5/5 at 6:30-9pm for a beautiful night focused on connection to queer community and the land, in resistance to racist, Zionist, transphobic repression of @friendsofsunsetgarden ! ❤️ !

New York Post, Sunday, September 22, 2024 nypost.com

ISRAEL UNDER ATTACK 6

HATE GROWS HERE 2

Hezbollah big dead in IDF airstrike



'Palestine Poppies' in Queens garden anger area's Jews



A slew of senior leaders of Hezbollah's elite fighting force were killed alongside top commander Ibrahim Aqil in a rare Israeli airstrike Friday in Beirut as the longtime enemies inch closer to a full-blown war, military officials said.

The Israel Defense Forces said Saturday morning that the strike killed not only Aqil, the head of Hezbollah's military operations and commander of its Radwan Force, but also eliminated 15 other senior commanders and members of the terror group who had gathered beneath a high rise apartment building in the Dahiya area of Beirut.











The terror group acknowledged that along with Aqil, Friday's attack killed senior



@sunsetgardenridgewood

Community Garden on the corner of
Onderdonk & Willoughby 📍 Open: April 1-Oct 31



-  [Become a member • unirse a la membresía](#) 
-  [Sunset Garden Community Agreements](#) 
-  [Sunset Garden FAQ](#) 
-  [Bodyhack's Masterdoc for a Free Palestine](#) 
-  [The Sunset Garden Handbook \(English and Español\)](#) 

* [Join sunsetgardenridgewood on Linktree](#)

May 6, 2026

To whom it may concern,

I have been a resident of Ridgewood, Queens since July of 2008. In this time I have seen the neighborhood go through many changes, but never imagined seeing blatant bigotry accepted and viewed as a form of social justice. When Sunset Garden first came to be, it had the potential of a green space I could visit with my very young children and then possibly, when they were older, become a member of. Very quickly, it was taken over by people who seemed to be under the impression that tending to a green space and growing produce was synonymous with expressing very open disdain towards the state of Israel and hostility towards anyone who did not share this sentiment. In an attempt to veil this very old form of prejudice, the new "care takers" of Sunset Garden create a pledge where those who wanted to join must agree to stand against all forms of hate and sandwiched in between words like racism and sexism, was the word Zionism. Anyone who did not agree that Jews must stay in the diaspora and never be allowed to live in their homeland was not only viewed as someone synonymous with the KKK, but would be harassed on-line, in person and in some cases doxed. Other members of Sunset would have on-line campaigns claiming that anyone who disagreed with their view on Israel, was automatically labeled anti-trans, anti-queer and anti-person of color. On top of the need to ensure that only xenophobic people were allowed to be a part of the garden, this new administration began to use the garden for anything but gardening. The green space meant for flowers and vegetables became used for fund raising to pay someone's rent, fund raising to send money to Gaza, arts and crafts events where children were encouraging to draw and paint pictures and slogans showing bigotry towards Israelis (which encompasses Jews, Druze, Bedouins, Arabs, Christians, Muslims, BIPOC, Asians and LGBTQIA+). It became used for acupuncture, clothing drives and vape commercials while allowing whatever plants there to be overgrown on the property or die. I have seen other community gardens throughout the five boroughs. There are no flags, no monuments, no threats or harassment and no litmus tests. Just groups of people who have no idea where anyone stands politically or otherwise, growing vegetables and keeping the garden in perfect working condition so that everyone interested in farming is able to do so in peace. This is what Sunset Garden was meant to be and should be. Please consider having the leadership turned over to someone(s) whose priority is gardening and not exploitation of what is ultimately a gift and a privilege to the community.

Sincerely,

Sara Schraeter-Mowers

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of preserving the tree canopy and all of the green space in Mount Prospect Park. My name is Janet Linde and I'm a member of Friends of Mount Prospect Park (FoMPP). I live across the street from Mount Prospect Park and I'm a frequent user of the park. I am a senior citizen and I have a disability (MS). I treasure the park as a quiet and easily accessed place for the exercise that is crucial for me to remain mobile despite my disability. My particular illness makes me hypersensitive to light and noise, so the shade and quiet of the Park is very important to me.

In addition to my personal concerns about proposed developments in the park, I believe that wider city concerns regarding heat, tree canopy and even the needs of the skateboarding community dictate that a better site be found for the proposed skateboard site.

Please take into account the following outpourings from a wide range of NYC residents in opposition to the paving of a beloved and historic park:

— Thousands of petitioning park-lovers object to to the siting of the skateboard facility in Mount Prospect Park. (See the petition on the FoMPP website <https://www.friendsofmountprospectpark.org/petition>)

— Brooklyn Community Board 9 analyzed the project and voted a detailed 25-point resolution against it as “bad public policy” based on its many climate, process and safety flaws – urging that any new construction happen on already-paved space, where it would be welcomed with open arms.

— A growing group of organizations have united in a public statement urging that officials protect Mount Prospect Park's green space. Signatories include 2030 or Bust/World On Wheels skateboarders, 350Brooklyn, Citizens' Climate Lobby Brooklyn, Cultural Row Block Association (CuRBA), Friends of Fort Greene Park, Inc., Friends of Mount Prospect Park (FoMPP), G-REBELS, Historic Districts Council, NYC Bird Alliance, Planet Over Profit, Preserve Our Brooklyn Neighborhoods, Sunrise NYC, and Third Act NYC.

— In addition, please consider the following points:

- We had believed irreplaceable shade trees, planted mid-century in a park officially eligible for the National Register, were protected.
- But despite reams of city provisions, and opposition from thousands of New Yorkers and a roster of impressive organizations, concrete construction that could damage or kill our neighborhood's stately shade trees is apparently moving forward. The construction would happen on top of the root systems, and will cut through roots of trees planted decades ago, including some trees believed to be nearly a century old.

- The City wants to spend over \$11 million of our public money to build a new paved heat island, when we well know that heat islands sicken and kill New Yorkers every year. And the heat is getting worse. Greenspace and tree canopy are “free AC,” routinely more than 10 degrees cooler.
- Brooklyn ranks low for cooling green and tree canopy. Trees boost our health and wellbeing.
- Brooklyn also has the most skate sites, but they are very inequitably distributed and many are in poor condition. Why not renovate one of these and include plantings to increase not decrease overall green space?

— Please also consider the following information from New Yorkers for Parks:

- In addition to the demonstrated value of capital investment in tree planting, the data make a strong case for the need for maintenance and protection of mature trees. A coarse proximity analysis of tree

canopy change suggests that most of the citywide gain in tree canopy from 2017 to 2021 can be attributed to the growth of existing trees rather than new plantings.

- The urban tree canopy cools neighborhoods, reduces the heat island effect, improves air quality, captures stormwater, absorbs greenhouse gases, supports wildlife, and provides mental and physical health benefits.
- Trees enhance quality of life and improve health and wellbeing for people by cleaning and cooling the air and reducing heat-related illness.
- Local Law 148 of 2023 codified the goal of achieving 30% canopy cover citywide, echoing the commitments made in PlaNYC and the endorsements of the majority of Councilmembers. (As of 2021, there was 23.4% canopy cover citywide, an increase from 22.2% in 2017.)
- [Tree canopy change data](#) (from 2017-2021) from The Nature Conservancy

demonstrates that investment in trees works.

- Trees offer year-round benefits that are harder to quantify, too, like attracting migratory birds to watch, providing places to picnic, and offering respite, even during the recent pandemic.

Our city and our borough of Brooklyn deserve the best decisions; this plan is a bad one. It creates an environmental justice problem and ignores your constituents' needs – now and for future generations. We urge you to shift any such construction to already-paved space, and not support the plan to pour concrete on Mount Prospect Park.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Best regards,
Janet Linde

I am a Red Hook resident of over 30 years; My husband and I have been RH Pool swimmers over those 3 decades and we raised our children here, also users of the pool, every summer! Now, as Program Director of PS58 PTA Carroll Kids Afterschool and SUMMER CAMP, I have even more use of the pool. We bring our students to the pool on summer weekdays. PLEASE, PLEASE! Make sure the pool is open and in good working order by end of June. THANK YOU!

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 5/6/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sabina Saragoussi

Address: Director of PFP

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 5/6/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Karina Smith

Address: Asst. Commish. for Comm Engagement

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 5/6/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matt Dury

Address: Chief of Citywide Leg Affairs

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 5/6/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MARGARET NELSON

Address: Deputy Commissioner of Public Programs +
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT NYC PARKS

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 5-6-26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jermaine Sean Smith

Address: 177-01 Baisley Blvd. Jamaica NY 11434

I represent: Southern Queens Park Association

Address: same as above

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 5/6/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Heather Lubov

Address: _____

I represent: City Parks Foundation

Address: 830 Fifth Ave

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 5/6/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matt Malina

Address: 410 East 6th St

I represent: NYC H2O

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 5/6/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Leon Johnson

Address: _____

I represent: STIP

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 5/6/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shawniaue Woolfalk

Address: 8 West 126th St, NY 10027

I represent: Art in the Park inc.

Address: 8 West 126th St NY 10027

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 5/6/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kara Nowakowski

Address: [REDACTED] Ridgewood, NY 11385

I represent: Team New York Aquatics

Address: 1178 Broadway, #1548, NYC, NY 10001

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: May 6, 2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Leona Chin

Address: 4540 193rd Street, Flushing, NY 11358

I represent: Kissena Synergy

Address: 4540 193rd Street, Flushing, NY 11358

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms