



Hearing before the New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation  
Int 0154-A, To amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to  
an annual report on park maintenance and capital expenditures  
June 19, 2015

Testimony by: Liam Kavanagh, First Deputy Commissioner, New York City Parks and  
Recreation

Good morning, Chairman Levine, and members of the Parks & Recreation  
Committee. I am Liam Kavanagh, the First Deputy Commissioner of the New York  
City Department of Parks and Recreation. Joining me on this panel is Matt Drury,  
Director of Government Relations. Thank you for inviting me to testify today regarding  
Intro 154-A, which would compel the creation of an annual report on park  
maintenance and capital expenditures.

Thanks to the leadership of Mayor de Blasio and a strong partnership with the City  
Council, NYC Parks is making real progress towards a more equitable, and  
transparent park system. We are dedicated to distributing resources to our parks in a  
fair and equitable manner, and making sure that all parks are all held to a high  
standard of cleanliness and overall quality.

As an important step towards creating greater transparency, in October 2014, we  
launched a new Capital Projects Tracker on our website. As you know, NYC Parks  
oversees hundreds of capital projects at any given time, and the capital process can  
be complicated and difficult to follow, making it a challenge to keep the public and  
elected officials informed of the status of projects. The Capital Projects Tracker is  
updated weekly and outlines the current status of each capital project as it makes its  
way through design, procurement and construction. In addition to a projected  
completion date, the Tracker includes background information about the funding of  
the project, and a designated staff liaison that can be contacted for more information.  
The Tracker is emblematic of our focused effort to significantly reform, streamline and  
improve our capital process, so that we can deliver park improvements to your  
constituents more quickly and efficiently. I'm happy to report the Capital Projects  
Tracker has been a tremendous success, receiving close to 60,000 hits since going  
live. We're dedicated to this spirit of transparency and openness and we're glad that  
the public has shown tremendous interest in the progress of their neighborhood parks.  
To help guide our strategy for future capital improvements, we were pleased that the  
Mayor's Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2016 included \$200,000 in initial funding  
to begin the development of an ongoing Capital Needs Assessment, a data-driven  
process to identify specific necessary capital improvements for parks throughout the  
system.

NYC Parks looks forward to working with the Council to provide the public with useful  
and accurate information about our maintenance operations and we agree that the  
proposed report will mark an important step towards even greater transparency. We  
are hopeful that the Council will find additional data and information about our  
maintenance operations helpful, but it should be noted that our maintenance efforts  
in our parks are results-driven. Our maintenance crews are tasked with cleaning a  
park for as long as it takes to make the park as clean and attractive as possible—a  
task that may take several workers several hours, or a single worker a single hour—  
and this circumstance may be difficult to glean from a report based on work-hours.

It is important to keep in mind that our resource allocation among parks depends largely on a variety of factors. Many of our parks are more heavily utilized than others, or are utilized in a manner that requires additional maintenance resources. For example, a park where weekend barbecues are popular will require a different approach for maintenance than a field used for active recreation, or one used for quiet reflection and appreciation of nature. In other words, not all park acres are created equal. It is important that the eventual results of the annual report that the legislation would mandate, be seen through this filter – the volume and type of usage that a park experiences is central to the maintenance efforts and related spending required to keep it in good condition.

We currently have a rich anecdotal understanding of who uses our parks and how they use them, but we hope to measure park usership in a more systematic and consistent way. With \$175,000 in funding provided in the Mayor's Preliminary Fiscal Year 2016 budget, we will be able to begin the initial stages of preparing a citywide Park Usership Survey. With more detailed information, NYC Parks will be able to better understand how many people use our parks and what they choose to do while visiting. This comprehensive information will allow us to allocate our resources more efficiently.

When it comes to keeping our parks in good condition, NYC Parks and our Maintenance and Operations have always been committed to using our resources in the smartest, most efficient way possible. With this in mind, we launched a new agency division focused on Innovation and Performance Management, which will work closely with our other divisions. To significantly improve our service delivery to the public, this month we are nearing completion of Phase One of our Ops21 program, which increases the efficiency of our mobile work crews tasked with the daily cleaning of parks. By establishing clear guidelines and optimizing the travel routes of our cleaning crews, we have been able to save an average of 30 minutes per crew per day - the productivity equivalent of adding 63 full-time maintenance staff. This effort will result in cleaner parks and smarter use of our resources.

Where suitable facilities were available, maintenance and operations hubs were created as part of Ops21 at Mill Pond Park in the Bronx, Kosciuszko Pool in Brooklyn, and Forest Park and Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens. These hubs allow the pooling of staff, vehicles and equipment -- reducing the amount of time spent traveling, reducing downtime for vehicle and equipment repair and increasing the number of staff available for mobile crews and special projects. We are currently assessing whether additional hubs can be created through the modification of existing facilities or construction of new facilities. We are also developing new outward facing performance measures and metrics that can offer insight into the impact of the NYC Parks system, the health and condition of the system on an individual park basis, as well as internal operational efficiency and effectiveness measures.

Additionally, earlier this year, we instituted a successful pilot program in five park districts to test the use of handheld devices and tablets by mobile crew chiefs to help track our mobile crew cleaning efforts. The results were very encouraging, with a positive response from our personnel and a low error rate for data entry. We are exploring options to institute a long-term citywide system, which will allow us to

implement real-time assessment in the field, and increase our productivity even further.

Continuing our efforts towards greater equity and transparency, NYC Parks looks forward to working with the Council to provide the most useful and accurate information possible about our maintenance operations. As such, we'd like to offer a brief overview of how NYC Parks approaches the maintenance and cleaning of our properties.

Our work is guided by a clear goal, to provide clean, safe, attractive, and functional park and playground facilities for all New Yorkers to use and enjoy. NYC Parks is responsible for maintaining 2,500 Greenstreets, 1,941 parks and playgrounds, 1,800 basketball courts, 800 athletic fields, 682 comfort stations, 700 miles of hiking trails, 602 tennis courts, 67 pools, 60 dog runs, and 148 miles of waterfront parks with 14 miles of beaches.

We use a maintenance and operations strategy that is employed seven days a week and 365 days a year. The Maintenance & Operations division of the agency includes the borough-based maintenance and operations functions, Central Forestry, Horticulture and Natural Resources, Citywide Services, the Urban Park Service, and the agency's lifeguard program.

Parks' Borough Operations have primary responsibility for the daily management, operations and maintenance of the City's parkland. The boroughs have similar organizational structures, with each borough divided into districts that correspond with the city's community boards, as mandated by the City Charter, plus a varying number of additional districts used to manage larger parks, such as Flushing Meadows Corona Park and Van Cortlandt Park. The boroughs all have Borough Commissioners, Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs of Operations, Forestry Directors, Park and Recreation Managers in management titles and non-managerial supervisors who direct day-to-day activities and an array of field titles who perform different work functions. Each borough also has centralized units for forestry, skilled trades, horticulture, heavy equipment operators and specialized crews that operate as needed throughout the borough.

Caring for parks is a complex and dynamic operation. The boroughs all share the challenge of maintaining parks to a high level of quality and participate in the initiatives designed to make the agency more efficient, effective and analytical for planning and operational decisions. Those initiatives include effectively harnessing information technology through an asset management system called "AMPS" and standardizing daily operations to make them more consistent, accountable, and comparable across the entire agency.

We have full time year-round staff, seasonal staff and Job Training Participants (JTPs), who are referred to the Parks Opportunity Program by the Human Resources Administration (HRA). Staffing patterns match the seasonal nature of the operation, with peak season starting in the spring, when ballfields and picnic areas become active and gardens start to bloom, and continuing through summer with the opening of beaches and pools, through to Labor Day. While somewhat quieter, the fall and winter seasons still bring many visitors to our parks, as we focus on leaf collection and snow removal.

At parks or playgrounds where there is a comfort station building that can support the staff, fixed post staff can be assigned, if available, to one location for a full shift for daily maintenance. Deployment is based on availability of operable comfort stations, appropriate staff and usage patterns at individual parks. As staffing increases in the spring and summer months, borough operations have additional seasonal and JTP staff to assign to fixed post locations. Fixed post staff primarily maintain comfort stations and their amenities and clean the surrounding playground or park area. Where properties are close by to one another, often in walking distance, split post assignments can be made for staff to be assigned to one location and maintain one or more sites.

Many sites, however, lend themselves to be more readily serviced by mobile crews, in which staff are assigned to a vehicle and work in a crew, responsible for maintaining a route of assigned sites. Crews, which include a crew chief and a number of JTPs, gather at a hub location in their sector or district, receive route assignments from park supervisors, mobilize with cleaning tools and supplies and travel from site to site on a daily basis to clean parks on the route. Packer drivers also have routes within a district or sector to pick up bagged garbage and empty garbage cans.

Staff assignments and routes are guided by internal Service Level Agreements, which organize properties into three main categories, generally based on frequency of use: A, which require 5-7 visits per week; B, which require 3-5 visits per week and C, which require 1-2 visits per week. For example, many of our playgrounds are prioritized for nearly daily visits in category A. Busy locations that see large lunchtime crowds, and the litter that comes with them, would also fall into this category. Greenstreets, however, are usually smaller in size with less trash and can be serviced 1-2 times a week.

In addition to our daily cleaning work, our Park Supervisors conduct inspections of park conditions in line with internal standards and create work orders for repair by skilled trades or other centralized units with specialized equipment, such as forestry. Borough forestry incorporates these requests for park work into their work plans, which involve responding to conditions received through 311. These requests are primarily related to street trees, but also have occasion to focus on trees in high usage areas within parks. While our forestry staff are often literally up in the trees pruning dead or dangling limbs, our horticulture staff are taking special care of our green spaces on the ground. As I'm sure you have seen throughout the past couple of months, springtime in New York City parks just can't be beat, and the work of our gardeners really makes the city shine. Beyond the spring blooms, greeting gardens at park entrances that welcome the public and other planted horticultural areas in parks or on Greenstreets require regular maintenance of their own—including watering, weeding and mulching—as well as staff trained in horticulture care to stay healthy throughout the year.

During summertime, many staff are promoted from district operations into seasonal step-up positions to oversee the operation of beaches and pools. Often these are our most experienced field staff, who are trained in operating the seasonal facilities, including oversight of pool mechanical systems, and can handle the demands of large summer crowds.

We internally rate and keep track of the conditions of city park properties through our Park Inspection Program. The Parks Inspection Program, or PIP, is administered and managed by the Operations and Management Planning (OMP) Division in Parks. PIP is a comprehensive and objective outcome-based performance measurement system that generates frequent and detailed inspections of our parks and playgrounds, which are randomly selected.

Originally, when PIP was established in 1994, the program focused exclusively on neighborhood parks and playgrounds. Overtime, the program became more comprehensive and continued to expand the number of ratable properties by including large parks and Greenstreets. Today, PIP inspects more than 3,200 properties in 6,000 annual inspections.

The program has been designed to reflect conditions encountered by the public when using park facilities. PIP ratings provide Parks' management with a broad indicator of the condition of NYC parks. Inspection data is published annually in the Mayor's Management Report (MMR) and posted monthly through the Citywide Performance Reporting (CPR) tool. Additionally, rating information for each individual park is made publically available and can be found on the Parks Department website.

In Fiscal Year 2015 to date, our overall condition rating is 86% acceptable and our cleanliness rating is 92% acceptable, currently meeting our MMR targets in these categories.

For each round of inspection, 250 sites across all five boroughs are selected randomly based on preset parameters. Through the use of a comprehensive program standards manual, the team of trained inspectors assesses the condition of as many as 16 separate park features such as the presence of glass or graffiti and the conditions of play equipment, safety surfaces and athletic fields and assigns an "Acceptable" (A) or "Unacceptable" (U) rating for both Overall Condition and Cleanliness for the entire site. Our PIP ratings help us allocate staff and other resources properly, and ensure that we maintain consistent standards among our many parks.

Additionally, any hazardous conditions encountered by the inspector are flagged as requiring "Immediate Attention" and shared with Parks Managers for immediate correction. In February 2008, the Daily Immediate Attentions application was created to provide an interface for Parks staff to view and track the resolution of hazards found by OMP inspectors.

Keeping our playgrounds in top condition is a priority for NYC Parks, as we work to ensure that these playgrounds are safe and clean for the children who visit them. To help maintain our playgrounds, we were pleased that the Mayor's Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2016 increased baseline funding to \$700,000 for playground assessment and repairs, as well as new tools to be utilized by borough playground managers.

We are very proud of our efforts to keep our parks clean, safe and attractive. Our maintenance crews are dedicated and hard-working employees. But we recognize there are always improvements that can be made. We have the responsibility to be thoughtful stewards of public dollars, eliminating waste and inefficiency whenever and wherever possible. Our Maintenance and Operations division, working with our

new Innovation and Performance division, will lead the charge on those efforts, and we expect to share continued progress with the Council over the coming months.

The Parks Department is deeply committed to ensuring our operations are as transparent as possible and we look forward to working with you to obtain the most accurate information that reflects the work being done in parks. Our staff works incredibly hard to maintain our parks and implement capital projects, and we hope to provide the public with a full and accurate picture of those operations.

We will update you as we make progress in our broader efforts to ensure that all of our parks and facilities are in the best condition possible for all New Yorkers to enjoy. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this afternoon. My colleagues and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.



**Testimony of Tupper Thomas, New Yorkers for Parks  
City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation  
June 19, 2015**

Good morning, I am Tupper Thomas, executive director, New Yorkers for Parks, and thank you for allowing me to speak today. We are very pleased that the Parks Department is currently working with the Council to report out on how and where their workforce is deployed. We are also pleased that the Council is working to understand how our tax dollars are actually allocated. All of this information will then make it possible over time to ascertain how much more money must be put into the Parks budget to insure that all parks are equitably funded.

I am concerned that this bill as currently written may not really be able to capture the information necessary to understand completely how resources are allocated. The largest 100 parks may give you information that is not as telling as you might think. Many of the largest parks have acres of amazing natural areas which really need to be better managed with a much larger workforce but may also have heavy usage in other areas which means more cleaning crews. It would be useful for the Council and NYC Parks to work closely together to assure that the information the Department is making available is going to provide the information you need to understand the issues. We believe that as it is currently written the public and the Council will not be able to understand how the agency has allocated resources across number of users, types of needs, types of uses. All these metrics affect resource allocation.

It might be interesting to trace how new resources are being allocated. PEP has been increased. Where are they? What has been the outcome of their assignment. In CPI zones how is staff allocated, have ratings gone up in the areas where there are more staff assigned, who and how many people are coming to the recreation activities?

It will be useful to have usership numbers from the Department in a few years and very useful to have a Needs Assessment done, both funded this year by the Administration. This will also provide more of a sense of how to allocate resources.

Our parks are essential infrastructure, and very important to the health of all New Yorkers. All this information will help with allocation of resources but in the long run the understanding of the overall needs of our Parks. It is imperative that DPR and the Council work together to collect the most useful information for making important decisions on allocations of our scarce funding.



The New York City Council  
250 Broadway  
Committee Room, 14<sup>th</sup> Fl.  
New York, NY 10007

June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the Board and the staff of The Friends of Van Cortlandt Park, I am writing today in support of Proposed Intro No.154-A to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to an annual report on park maintenance and capital expenditures.

The Friends is an independent community based organization which actively promotes the conservation and improvement of Van Cortlandt Park. We believe that there is a parks equity issue among neighborhoods and parks in New York City and that parks are not adequately funded and maintained at a level that is consistent throughout the city. The Friends was founded in 1992 in response to the declining budgets for parks like Van Cortlandt that lacked wealthy benefactors. But over twenty years later, the Bronx Parks Department is still not adequately funded. With the largest NYC Park, Pelham Bay, and the 3rd largest park, Van Cortlandt, the Bronx has more parkland than any other borough. But we often wonder if we are getting our fair share of the Parks Department's budget to maintain these parks at the level that Bronxites deserve.

In 2014, NYC Parks published the first ever master plan for Van Cortlandt Park. The Friends has joined NYC Parks, the park's conservancy and others in exploring ways to fully implement the plan. Currently, however, it is very difficult to determine how much the Parks Department is spending in Van Cortlandt Park, which is critical to our addressing shortfalls in its funding. This legislation would require reporting that would allow expenditures to be reported in a fashion that is clear and easily understood. This report should be made available to the public and allow a fuller public debate about equitable park funding.

The Friends of Van Cortlandt Park therefore fully support Proposed Int. No. 154-A.

Sincerely,

80 VAN CORTLANDT PK S.  
SUITE E1  
BRONX, NY 10463  
Tel: 718-601-1460  
Fax: 718-601-1574

WEBSITE:  
[www.vancortlandt.org](http://www.vancortlandt.org)  
EMAIL:  
[info@vancortlandt.org](mailto:info@vancortlandt.org)

CHAIR  
CHRISTOPHER RIZZO

VICE CHAIR  
TERESA GRANT STOETH

TREASURER  
DEEPAK BUTANI

SECRETARY  
TOM CAREY

CHAIRMAN EMERITUS  
ROSCOE C. BROWN, JR. PH.D

MARCIA ALLINA  
HILARY BAUM  
PAULA LURIA CAPLAN  
DIANA CECIL  
EDWIN DELEON  
IRENE FLEMING  
FELICITY NITZ  
CAROL SAMOL  
WENDY SCHMIDT  
ERIC A. SEIFF  
ZACHARY SMITH  
DORIS SPENCER

ADVISORY  
FRANCES BEINECKE  
DENNIS BURNS  
ELIZABETH COOKE-LEVY  
JON DEVEAUX  
SUSAN MORGENTHAU  
JANE SOKOLOW  
DART WESTPHAL

EX-OFFICIO  
HECTOR APONTE  
HON. ANDREW COHEN  
HON. RUBEN DIAZ, JR.  
HON. JEFFREY DINOWITZ  
HON. ELIOT ENGEL  
HON. JEFFREY KLEIN

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
CHRISTINA A. TAYLOR





## Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance

Testimony of Roland Lewis, President & CEO  
New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation  
June 19, 2015 Committee Hearing  
re: Int. No. 154-A

The Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance (MWA) is a bi-state coalition of over 800 community and recreational groups, educational institutions, businesses, and other stakeholders committed to restoring and revitalizing the New York and New Jersey waterways. Our waterways have been revitalized with active recreation, environmental education, and waterborne transportation, and the harbor has for centuries been a vital conduit for commerce and an engine of economic development.

**MWA supports Intro 154-A requiring NYC Department of Parks & Recreation to “publish updated information regarding the status of capital projects in City parks on its website.”** We salute the leadership of Commissioner Mitchell Silver, and the Department’s initiative to prioritize streamlining its capital process. This bill will greatly improve transparency, giving New Yorkers up-to-date information about the status of their playgrounds, ballfields, comfort stations, and other important public amenities. However, the Department can and must improve its mechanisms for making repairs to its facilities.

**Last year, MWA was proud to partner with NYC Parks and Council Member Vincent Gentile to welcome over 3,000 people to free, public programming at the Bay Ridge Community Eco Dock,** a small, floating dock accessible from the American Veterans Memorial Pier at 69<sup>th</sup> Street. Community Eco Docks are tools for opening up the New York City waterfront to a broad range of vessels, such as kayaks, canoes, sailing ships, and historic boats, and serve as satellite classrooms for local schools and educational organizations, providing a destination for fishing instruction, ecology lessons, and more. Thanks to the generous support of the Council Member the creativity and tireless effort of NYC Parks marine division, and the participation of hundreds throughout the maritime and education communities, residents of Bay Ridge and surrounding neighborhoods enjoyed free weekly programs and events, such as sunset cruises, educational sails, fishing clinics, and more. Participants learned how to raise sail, identify plankton, and simply enjoy the open waters during sails and dockside open-house tours aboard tug boats, replica schooners, and more. Students raised oyster gardens, tested water quality, and learned about the rich maritime history of this city.

**Yet this summer, it is possible that this community will not enjoy access to the same programming.** Over the winter, the gangway connecting the Eco Dock to the pier became dislodged, and is currently awaiting repairs. NYC Parks is procuring gangway redesign and reconstruction, but because there is no standing contract for the work, the repair is proceeding as if it were a new capital construction project. Gangway reconstruction is not uncommon in the maritime world, and private sector operators can build and install repaired gangways in a matter of weeks. There must be a “third way” to expedite maintenance needs that fall somewhere between a minor repair and a major capital improvement, so that important playgrounds – and Eco Docks – do not lie fallow. We recommend that this Committee call on NYC Parks to study the feasibility of holding standing contracts for maintenance and repairs, in order to improve the process through which New Yorkers can regain access to their important recreational facilities.

**The Bay Ridge Community Eco Dock has successfully proved the concept that the public’s call for access to the waterways is widespread, and growing.** Yet as New Yorkers rediscover our waterways, there are still too few communities with access to the full scope of educational, cultural, and environmental resources they can provide. MWA calls upon this Council and the Administration to fund a \$10 million citywide capital program to bring Community Eco Docks to ten new districts. Efforts to expand this program to northern Manhattan and Astoria, Queens are already underway. Residents of Staten Island, the South Bronx, northeast Queens, Coney Island, and all across the city deserve the same opportunities. We look forward to continuing to work with this Committee, and the Council, to expand the access across our city of water to the unique recreational and educational benefits of our harbor and waterways.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 154 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 6/19/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Liam Kavanagh

Address: Central Park

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 154 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 6/19/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matt Drury

Address: Central Park

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: 06/19/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brielle Kilmerlin

Address: 43 Roberts Rd. Englewood Cliffs NJ

I represent: Friends of Van Cortland Park (on behalf of Christina Taylor)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tupper Thomas

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: New York's 4 Parks

Address: 35 Broad

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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Roland Lewis

Address: 217 Water St

I represent: Metropolitan Waterfront Assoc

Address: 217 Water St / NY 10038

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