

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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June 19, 2015
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Room
16th Floor

B E F O R E:

MARK LEVINE
Chairperson

ANDREW COHEN
Acting Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Darlene Mealy
Fernando Cabrera
James G. Van Bramer
Andrew Cohen
Alan N. Maisel
Fernando Cabrera
Mark Treyger

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

Liam Kavanagh
First Deputy Commissioner
NYC Department of Parks and Recreation

Matt Drury
Director of Government Relations
NYC Department of Parks and Recreation

Tupper Thomas
New Yorkers for Parks

Brielle Kimmer Eng [sp?]
Law Office of Carter, Ledyard and Millburn
Appearing for Christina Taylor, Executive Director
The Friends of Van Cortlandt Park

Roland Lewis, President
Metropolitan Worker Alliance

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good morning,
3 everybody. Welcome. Thanks for coming here on a
4 summer Friday. I'm Mark Levine, Chair of the
5 Council's Committee on Parks and Recreation. I'm
6 happy you're here for our hearing on proposed Intro
7 154-A, whose lead sponsor is our colleague Council
8 Member Brad Lander who will be bounding up the stairs
9 any minute now. This bill require the Parks
10 Department to provide an annual report to the Mayor
11 and Council on maintenance on a park-by-park basis,
12 and it will require regular online posting of updates
13 regarding capital projects. To achieve equity in our
14 park system we need information. Here he is.
15 Welcome to Council Member Lander.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [off mic] Thank
17 you.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Specifically, we
19 need to answer two critical questions: (1) What is
20 the amount of private money flowing into those parks,
21 which are fortunate enough to have well-funded
22 conservancies, and (2) How much does the amount--how
23 much does the city--how much does the amount of city
24 resources spent vary from park to park? In February
25 the Council passed and the Mayor signed Local Law 16

2 in order to answer the first question, which Council
3 Member Lander and I co-sponsored, established regular
4 uniform reporting for conservancies of the amount of
5 private funding they receive. The legislation we're
6 taking up today seeks to answer the second critical
7 question. The Parks Department has steadily improved
8 the overall level of maintenance of our city's parks
9 in recent years. A Particularly impressive fete in
10 light of the department's stagnating expense budget.
11 But anyone who has visited a variety of parks across
12 the five boroughs knows that the quality of
13 conditions varies widely from park-to-park. There
14 are many possible explanations for this, including
15 variable rates of usage, different types of terrain,
16 and different histories of capital investment.

17 Intro 154-A seeks to shed light on
18 another possible explanation for the variation in
19 parks conditions, different level of maintenances
20 expended by the Parks Department. Specifically, this
21 bill would require DPR to submit an annual report to
22 the Council on maintenance work performed at each
23 property under its jurisdiction on or before December
24 1st of each year. This report would include whether
25 each park has prominent or local maintenance staff

2 assigned to it; the weekly average in dollar value of
3 work hours performed by maintenance staff on each
4 property on a quarterly basis; and the total weekly
5 average dollar value of specific maintenance services
6 provided at each property. We understand that the
7 challenge of determining cost allocation in any
8 organization is significant. Even well funded
9 corporations often struggle with this, and we know
10 that the Parks Department is still developing its
11 system for tracking and analyzing expenditures on a
12 per-park basis. So, Intro 154-A would allow the DPR
13 Commissioner upon 30 days written notice to the Mayor
14 and Council to amend the data included in the report
15 as its systems evolve. The bill will also allow DPR
16 to phase in reporting over the next two years.

17 Finally, Intro 154-A would give the public additional
18 information on parks capital projects to be posted at
19 least quarterly on the department's website. I look
20 forward to our discussion of proposed Intro 154-A,
21 and to moving this important legislation forward.

22 And now, I'd like to invite Council Member Lander to
23 present opening remarks on the bill. We would not be
24 here today if it hadn't been for the leadership of
25 Council Member Lander on this issue for I think three

2 years or more. He's really carried the torch on
3 this, and we're grateful that he's brought us today,
4 and now I'll pass the microphone to you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you very
6 much Chair Levine first of all, for convening this
7 hearing on a--on a June Friday. And I also want to
8 say thank you to Council Cohen for being here.
9 [laughter] I was very relieved yesterday when the
10 Budget Delegation meetings got added today so council
11 members had to be here in any case? So we weren't
12 dragging them in. But I--I want to thank you for
13 convening this hearing, and for your leadership in
14 your still relatively short period of time as Chair
15 of the Parks Committee for really driving this set of
16 issues forward, and it's great to work with you on
17 that conservancy transparency, and that information
18 now on this bill as well. I want to thank the Parks
19 Department for your work with us so that even before
20 today's hearing, we've been starting to work together
21 to make sure we get this right. And to the advocacy
22 community both parks advocates, and some of the folks
23 involved in the conservancies for helping us really
24 think this through together. The Council has been
25 working both in the lean year, and now in the

2 somewhat better ones to make sure that there's
3 adequate funding a for park system. And we did our
4 best under the chair of this Committee and now
5 Speaker Mark-Viverito to try to do as much as we
6 could. Not as successful as we would have liked to
7 prevent those cuts, and now under your leadership to
8 restore funding. And in doing that, I've tried to
9 have real oversight of the Parks Department and
10 understand what those resources are being spent for,
11 where they're going, and where they needed, as you've
12 really done. One challenge is that while we've been
13 able to focus on different types of spending to
14 understand tree pruning from programming from
15 maintenance, understanding the geo--the geographic
16 spending of those dollars and where they're going has
17 been difficult. And, I recognize that's been
18 difficult for the department, and it's certainly been
19 difficult for us and our oversight, and that matters
20 a lot. Of course, you've got to know how that money
21 is being spent, and this came up in recent years in
22 two really important ways that I think shed light on
23 what we're trying to do and why it's so important.
24 First, was the debate as you reflect around parks
25 equity, and where the conservancy dollars are going.

2 And what became clear to me as I was talking to
3 people is people have the idea, and perfectly
4 understandable, that all the parks were getting an
5 equal amount of money, almost like a per-acre issue.
6 And then the conservancy money was coming in on top
7 of that so that those parks that had conservancies
8 were getting their fair share, plus a whole lot more.
9 And I said that is what happens in our schools where
10 there's a fair student funding formula. Everyone
11 gets a fair share, and schools as well as PTAs are
12 able to have more money. That's not actually it
13 turns out exactly what's going on in our parks
14 systems because in some of those parks that have
15 conservancies. They're actually spending some of the
16 operating dollars, and Parks Department at least in
17 Central and Prospect Park is spending less tax
18 dollars on those parks because the conservancies are
19 spending some of their money on those things. Which
20 is in a certain way parks equity. We're glad those
21 private dollars are coming in and helping us do more
22 elsewhere. The only problem is it's almost
23 impossible for the public and Council and I think
24 even the Parks Department to really know how much
25 that is happening. And really understand where the

2 public dollar is going, where the private dollar is
3 going, and are we achieving a kind of equity in parks
4 dollars that we can feel is appropriate and have that
5 conversation. And that's what we've got to be able
6 to do in our budget conversations, but without the
7 information in today's bill that's really been
8 difficult, if not impossible. And, the idea going
9 forward is to be able to see that where, as much as
10 possible are the expense dollars are going, the Parks
11 Department is spending. Where, thanks to your
12 earlier bill, the conservancy dollars are going, and
13 then we can have the real conversation about is that
14 fair and equitable and how we want to do it. And
15 I'll just add that this has been a challenge on the
16 capital side as well. New Yorkers for Parks a couple
17 years ago put out a study that showed Brooklyn parks
18 were getting much more capital than the Bronx parks
19 were. Now, that capital is largely coming from
20 council members, from borough presidents at that
21 point, and not from the Parks Department or the
22 administration as well. But it led to an important
23 conversation that we've got to be able to have about
24 how our money collectively as a city is being spent.
25 This administration has already started work to

2 address the equity issues through its Parks Equity
3 Initiative that the department, the Commissioner, the
4 Mayor and the Chair have worked together on. And I
5 appreciate how much work has already gone into
6 building the infrastructure and systems that will
7 help report on these things through the parks capital
8 track or the Ops 21 work. And I understand how
9 difficult it is to explain or describe or put forward
10 exactly how much money is being spent in every park
11 since our parks are so different in nature and kind
12 in the staffing. It's not like the fair student
13 funding formula where you can run a calculator, you
14 now, use a calculator and say oh, here's how much
15 money we're sending to that principal. But we have
16 to find some way to do it, and I want to--appreciate
17 the work you've done so far, and Mr. Chair, you've
18 done so far to get us here, but we're-- I look
19 forward to finding a way to having this hearing today
20 figure out exactly what this law should look like
21 leaving enough flexibility for the department to do
22 its work going forward. But providing enough
23 information that we can have the conversation that
24 we're required to have as a Council on behalf of the
25 public, and how the money is getting spent in our

2 Parks Department. So, sorry to go on for a little
3 bit, but that's the idea behind this law, and we
4 really appreciate the opportunity to have it heard,
5 and for you to be here to help us move it forward and
6 get it right. So thank you very much.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you so much,
8 Council Member Lander, and now I'd like to invite the
9 Administration to present its testimony on this
10 important topic. And first of all, we're going to
11 ask our committee counsel Kris Sartori to offer the
12 affirmation.

13 LEGAL COUNSEL: Kris Sartori Committee
14 Counsel. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
15 truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony
16 before this committee today?

17 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Take it away,
19 Commissioner.

20 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Okay. Good
21 morning Chairman Levine and members of the Parks and
22 Recreation Committee. I am Liam Kavanagh, the First
23 Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Department
24 of Parks and Recreation. Joining on the panel is
25 Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations. I want

2 to thank you for inviting me to testify today
3 regarding Intro 154-A, which would require the
4 creation of an annual report on park maintenance and
5 capital expenditures. Thanks to the leadership of
6 Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Silver and a strong
7 partnership with the City Council, New York City
8 Parks has made real progress toward a more equitable
9 and transparent park system. We are dedicated to
10 distributing resources to our parks in a fair and
11 equitable manner, and making sure that all parks are
12 held to a high standard of cleanliness and overall
13 quality. As an important step towards creating
14 greater transparency, in October 2014 we launched a
15 New Capital Projects Tracker on our website.

16 As you know, New York City Parks oversees
17 hundreds of capital projects at any given time, and
18 the capital process can be complicated and difficult
19 to follow making it a challenge to keep the public
20 and elected officials informed of the status of
21 individual projects. The Capital Projects Tracker is
22 updated weekly, and outlines the current status of
23 each capital project as it makes its way through
24 design, procurement and construction. In addition to
25 a completion date, the tracker includes background

1 information about the funding of the project, and a
2 designated staff liaison who can be contacted for
3 more information. The tracker is emblematic of our
4 focused effort to significantly reform, streamline
5 and improve our capital processes so that we can
6 deliver park improvements to your constituents more
7 quickly and efficiently. And I'm happy to report
8 that the Capital Track--the Capital Projects Tracker
9 has been a tremendous success already, receiving
10 close to 60,000 hits since going live in October.

12 We're dedicated to the spirit of
13 transparency and openness, and we're glad that the
14 public has shown tremendous interest in the progress
15 of the neighborhood parks. To help guide our
16 strategy for future capital improvements, we were
17 pleased that the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for
18 Fiscal Year 2016 included \$200,000 in initial funding
19 to begin the important--the development of important
20 ongoing capital needs assessment, a data driven
21 process to identify specific necessary capital
22 improvements for parks throughout the system. New
23 York City Parks looks forward to working with the
24 Council to provide the public with useful and
25 accurate information about our maintenance

2 operations, and we agree that the proposed report
3 will make an important step towards even greater
4 transparency. We're hopeful that the Council will
5 find additional data and information about our
6 operations helpful. But it should be noted that on
7 maintenance efforts in our parks are results driven.

8 Our maintenance crews are tasked with
9 cleaning a park for as long as it takes to make the
10 park clean as attractive as possible. A task that
11 may take several workers several hours, or a single
12 workers a single hour. And this circumstance may be
13 difficult to glean from a report based--based solely
14 on work hours. It's also important to keep in mind
15 that our resource allocation among parks depends
16 largely on a variety of factors. Many of our parks
17 are more heavily utilized than others, or utilized in
18 a manner that requires additional maintenance
19 resources. For example, a park where weekend
20 barbeques are popular will require a different
21 approach for maintenance than a field that's used for
22 active recreation.. Or, one used for quiet
23 reflection and appreciation of nature. In other
24 words, not all parks are created equal. It is
25 important that the eventual results of the annual

2 report that the legislation would mandate would be
3 seen through this filter.

4 The volume and type of usage that a park
5 experiences is central to the maintenance efforts and
6 related spending required to keep it in good
7 condition. We currently have a rich anecdotal
8 understanding of who uses our parks, and how they use
9 them. But, we hope to measure park usership in a
10 more systematic and consistent way. With \$175,000 in
11 funding provided in the Mayor's Fiscal 2016 Budget,
12 we will be able to begin the initial stages of
13 preparing a citywide park usership survey. With more
14 detailed information, New York City Parks will be
15 able to better understand how many people are using
16 our parks, and what they choose to do while visiting.
17 This comprehensive information will allow us to
18 allocate our resources more efficiently.

19 When it comes to keeping our parks in
20 good condition, New York City Parks and our
21 Maintenance and Operations Division have always been
22 committed to using our resources in the smartest,
23 most efficient way possible. With that in mind,
24 we've launched a new agency division focused on
25 innovation and performance management, which will

2 work closely with all of our other divisions. To
3 significantly improve our service to the public, this
4 month we are nearing the completion of phase one of
5 our Ops 21 program, which increases the efficiency of
6 our mobile work crews' tasked with cleaning--for
7 daily cleaning of parks. By establishing clear
8 guidelines, optimizing travel routes of our cleaning
9 crews, we've been able to save an average of 30
10 minutes per crew per day. The productivity
11 equivalent of adding 63 full-time maintenance staff.
12 This effort will result in cleaner parks, and smarter
13 use of all resources.

14 Where suitable facilities were available,
15 maintenance and operation hubs were created as part
16 of Ops 21 at Mill Pond Park in the Bronx, Kosciusko
17 Pool in Brooklyn and Forest Park--Forest Park in
18 Flushing Meadow, Corona Park in Queens. These hubs
19 allow the pooling of staff, vehicles and equipment
20 reducing the amount of time spent traveling, reducing
21 down time for vehicles and equipment--equipment
22 repair and increasing the number of staff available
23 for mobile crews and special projects. We are
24 currently assessing additional hubs that can be

2 crated through--through the modification of existing
3 facilities or construction of new ones.

4 We're also developing new outward facing
5 performance measures and metrics that can offer
6 insight into the impact of the New York City--impact
7 of the New York City Parks--Park system, the health
8 and condition of the system on an individual park
9 basis, as well as on internal operational efficiency
10 and effectiveness measures. Additionally, earlier
11 this year we instituted a success--a successful pilot
12 program in five park districts to test the use of
13 handheld devices and tablets by mobile chiefs to help
14 track our mobile crew cleaning efforts. The results
15 were very encouraging with a positive response from
16 our personnel and a very low error rate for data
17 entry. We are exploring options to introduce a long-
18 term citywide system, which will allow us to
19 implement real time assessment in the field to
20 increase our productivity even further.

21 Continuing our efforts to greater equity
22 and transparency, New York City Parks looks forward
23 to working with the Council to provide the most
24 useful and accurate information possible about our
25 maintenance operations. As such, we'd like to offer

2 a brief overview of how we approach the maintenance
3 and cleaning of our properties. Our work is divided
4 by a clear goal to provide clean, safe, attractive
5 and functional park and playground facilities for all
6 New Yorkers to use and enjoy. New York City Parks is
7 responsible for maintaining 2,500 green streets and
8 1,941 parks and playgrounds; 1,800 basketball courts,
9 800 athletic fields, 682 comfort stations, 700 miles
10 of hiking trails, 602 tennis courts, 67 pools, 60 dog
11 runs and 148 miles of waterfront parks including 14
12 miles of beaches. We use a maintenance and
13 operations strategy that is employed seven days a
14 week, 365 days a year. The Maintenance and Operation
15 division of the agency includes the borough based
16 Maintenance and Operation functions, Central Forestry
17 and Horticulture, and Natural Resources, Citywide
18 Service and the Urban Park Service, and the agency's
19 lifeguard program. Parks Borough operations have the
20 primary responsibility for the daily management,
21 operation and maintenance of the city's parklands.
22 The boroughs have similar organization structures
23 with each borough divided into districts that
24 correspond with the city's community boards as
25 mandated by the City Charter. Plus a varying degree

2 of additional districts used to manage larger parks
3 such as Flushing Meadow, Corona Park and Van
4 Cortlandt Park. The boroughs all have borough
5 commissioners, chiefs and deputy chiefs of
6 operations, forestry directors, park managers, and a
7 variety of supervisors who direct day-to-day
8 activities, with an array of field titles who perform
9 different work functions. Each borough also has
10 centralized units for forestry, skilled trades,
11 horticulture, heavy equipment operation and
12 specialized crews that operate as needed throughout
13 the boroughs.

14 Caring for parks is a complex and dynamic
15 operation. The boroughs all share the challenge of
16 maintaining parks through a high level of quality and
17 participate in initiatives designed to make the
18 agency more efficient, effective and analytical for
19 both planning and operational decisions. These
20 initiatives include effectively harness--harnessing
21 information technology through an asset management
22 system, called AMS, and standardizing daily
23 operations to make them more consistent, accountable
24 and comp--comparable across the entire agency. We
25 have a full-time year-round staff, a seasonal staff

2 and job training participants who were referred to
3 the Parks Opportunity Program by the Human Resource--
4 Resources Administration. Staffing patterns match
5 the seasonal nature of our operation with the peak
6 season starting in the spring when ball fields and
7 picnic areas become active and gardens start to
8 bloom. They continue through the summer with the
9 opening of the beaches and pools through Labor Day,
10 at least for now.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [off mic] That will
12 be quieter. [sic]

13 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: [laughs] Well,
14 somewhat quieter. Actually, the fall isn't much
15 quieter. The early part of the fall is--is often as
16 busy as the summer, but in winter seasons they still
17 bring many visitors in parks, and we--where we focus
18 on leaf collection and snow and ice removal. At
19 parks and playgrounds where there's a comfort station
20 building that can support the staff, fixed post staff
21 can be assigned, if available, to one location for
22 its full shift of daily maintenance. Deployment is
23 based on the availability of operable comfort
24 stations, appropriate staff and usage patterns at
25 individual parks. As staffing increases in the

2 spring and summer months, borough operations have
3 additional seasonal and JTP staff to assigned to
4 fixed post locations. Fixed post staff primarily
5 maintain comfort stations, and their amenities and
6 clean the surrounding playground park area. When
7 properties are close by one another, often in walking
8 distant, split post assignments can be made for staff
9 to be assigned to one location and may maintain one
10 or more other sites. Many sites, however, lend
11 themselves to be more readily serviced by mobile
12 crews in which staff are assigned to a vehicle and
13 work on a crew responsible for maintaining a lot of
14 assigned sites. Crews, which include a crew chief
15 and a number of JTPs gather at a hub location in
16 their district or sector, receive route assignments,
17 and park supervisors mobilize with cleaning tools,
18 supplies and travel from site to site on a daily
19 basis to clean parks on their route. Packer drivers,
20 those are the trash collection vehicles, also have
21 routes within a district or sector to pick up bagged
22 garbage or empty garbage cans. Staff assignments are
23 guided by internal service level agreements, which
24 organize properties into three main categories
25 generally based on frequency of use. The A level,

2 which require five to seven visits per week. B
3 requires three to five site visits per week and C,
4 which requires one to two site visits per week. For
5 example, many of our playgrounds are prioritized for
6 nearly daily visits in category A. Busy locations
7 that see large lunch time crowds that often--that--
8 and the litter that comes with them also fall into
9 this category. Green streets, however, are usually
10 smaller in size with less--less trash, and can be
11 serviced one or two times a week while still
12 maintaining, you know, an acceptable appearance.

13 In addition to our daily cleaning work,
14 our park supervisors conduct inspections of park
15 conditions in align with the internal standards--in
16 line with our internal standards, and create work
17 orders for repair by skilled trades or other
18 centralized units with specialized equipment such as
19 forestry. But our forestry incorporates these
20 requests for park work into their work plans, which
21 involve responding to conditions received through
22 311. These requests are primarily related to street
23 trees, but also an avocation [sic] to folks on parks
24 in high usage areas within parks.

2 While our forestry staff are often
3 literally up in the trees pruning dead or dangling
4 limbs, our horticulture staff--horticultural staff
5 are taking special care of our green spaces on the
6 ground. As I'm sure you've seen through the past
7 couple of months, springtime in New York City parks
8 just can't be beat, and the work of our gardeners
9 really makes the city shine. Beyond the spring
10 blooms, greeting gardens at park entrance that
11 welcome the public and other planned horticultural
12 areas of parks or on green streets regular
13 maintenance of their own, including watering,
14 greening and mulching. As well as staff trained in
15 horticulture to care--to care--horticulture care to
16 stay healthy throughout the entire year. During
17 summertime, many staff are promoted from district
18 operations into seasonal step-up positions and to
19 oversee operations of beaches and pools. Often,
20 these are our most experienced field staff who are
21 trained in operating these seasonal facilities
22 including oversight of pool mechanical systems, and
23 can handle the demand of large summer crowds.

24 We internally rate and track the
25 conditions of city park properties through the Parks

2 Inspection program. The Parks Inspection program or
3 PIP is administered and managed by the Operations and
4 Management Planning Division in parks. PIP is a
5 comprehensive and objective outcome based performance
6 measurement system that generates frequent and
7 detailed inspections of our parks and playgrounds,
8 which are randomly selected. Originally, when PIP
9 was established in 1994, the program focused
10 exclusively on neighborhood parks and playgrounds.
11 Over time, the program became more comprehensive and
12 continued to expand the number of ratable properties
13 by including large parks and green streets. Today,
14 PIP inspects more than 3,200 properties in over 6,000
15 annual inspections. The program has been designed to
16 reflect conditions encountered by the public when
17 using public facilities. PIP ratings provide park
18 management with a broader rate--a broad indicator of
19 the condition of New York City parks. Inspection
20 data is published annually in the Mayor's Management
21 Report and posted monthly through the Citywide
22 Performance Reporting Tool. Additionally, rating
23 information for each individual--individual park is
24 made publicly available and can be found on the Parks
25 Department website.

2 In Fiscal Year 2015 to date our overall
3 condition rating is 86% acceptable and our
4 cleanliness rating is 92% acceptable, currently
5 meeting our MMR targets in these two categories. For
6 each round of inspection 250 sites across all five
7 boroughs are selected randomly based on pre-set
8 parameters. Through the use of a comprehensive
9 program standards manual the team of trained
10 inspectors assesses the condition of as many as 16
11 park features such as the presence of glass or
12 graffiti, and the condition of play equipment, safety
13 surface and athletic fields. And assigns an
14 unacceptable--acceptable or unacceptable rating for
15 both overall condition and cleanliness at each site.
16 Our PIP ratings help us allocate staff and other
17 resources properly, and ensures that we maintain
18 consistent standards among our many parks.
19 Additionally, any hazardous conditions encountered by
20 the inspector are flagged as requiring immediate
21 attention and shared with park managers for immediate
22 correction. In February 2008, the Daily Immediate
23 Attentions Application was created to provide an
24 interface for Parks staff to view and track the
25 resolution of hazards found by PIP inspectors.

2 Keeping our parks--keeping our playgrounds in top
3 shape is a priority for New York City Parks as we
4 work to ensure that these playgrounds are safe and
5 clean for the children who visit them. To help
6 maintain our playgrounds, we are pleased that the
7 Mayor's Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2016
8 increase baseline funding to \$700,000 for playground
9 assessment and repairs as well as new tools to be
10 utilized by borough playground managers. We are very
11 proud of our efforts to keep our parks clean, safe
12 and attractive. Our maintenance crews are dedicated
13 and hard-working employees, but we recognize there
14 are always improvements that can be made. We have
15 the responsibility to be thoughtful stewards of
16 public dollars eliminating waste and inefficiency
17 whenever and wherever possible.

18 Our Maintenance and Operations Division
19 working with our new Innovation and Performance
20 Division will lead the charge on these efforts, and
21 we expect to share continued progress with the
22 Council over the coming months. And the Parks
23 Department is deeply committed to ensuring our
24 operations are as transparent as possible, and we
25 look forward to working with you to obtain the most

2 accurate information that reflects the work being
3 done in Parks. Our staff works incredibly hard to
4 maintain our parks and implement capital projects,
5 and we hope to provide the public with a full and
6 accurate of those--of those operations and all of
7 that great work that's being done. We will update
8 you as we make progress in our borough efforts to
9 ensure that all of our parks and facilities are in
10 the best condition possible for all New Yorkers to
11 enjoy. I thank you for the opportunity to testify
12 before you this morning. My colleagues and I will be
13 happy to answer any questions you may have.

14 [background noise, pause]

15 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: Thank you,
16 Commissioner. I'm going to open the questioning up
17 to Council Member Lander.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you very
19 much Acting Chair Cohen, and I appreciate that we've
20 been joined by Council Members Treyger and Van Bramer
21 and Cabrera as well. Thank you guys all for--for
22 being here. And thank you Deputy Commissioner for
23 being here and for all of your work on everything
24 that you talked about and described for a long time
25 as well as the current efforts to strengthen the

2 operating system through Ops 21 and provide the
3 additional dial [sic] in transparency. So let must
4 start broadly on the--on the bill itself. The--the--
5 the department is open to working with the Council to
6 finalize the details of this bill and move forward on
7 a reporting system either with--much like the one
8 described in the bill.

9 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Great. All right
11 so that's a--that's a very good starting place, and
12 I'm looking forward to working with you. And I also
13 want to appreciate we've had conversations and been
14 working together prior to today to really try to make
15 this achieve what the Council is eager to get. And
16 recognize the work that is--has been done, and still
17 needs to be done by the department to be able to do
18 it. So, let me ask a couple of questions just about
19 that. I guess I'll start with can you describe--I
20 think the way you described it helps explain some of
21 the challenges in getting what we want. But let me
22 just start by do you have a s sense of either what
23 number or percent of parks have fixed post staff
24 versus the mobile crews as just as sort of a
25 beginning? A kind of rough estimate.

2 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It's something
3 that varies by season. During the summer there are
4 more sites that have fixed post staff, and in the
5 winter there are fewer sites. But roughly during the
6 summer it's about 23% of the sites have fixed post
7 staffs.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay, and I would
9 say that's--that's either--that's fewer in the
10 winter.

11 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes, it's--it's--
12 I think it drops down to about between 17 and 18%.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So most of the
14 parks are being maintained by the mobile, primarily
15 by the mobile crews?

16 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Now, obviously
18 the bigger parks are more likely to be the ones that
19 have fixed post staff. So that's not an estimate of
20 what percent of staff time is spend there since the
21 big parks have--have fixed post staff.

22 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: The fixed post
23 are--are a combination of fixed and mobile crews for
24 the most part. We are--you know, there's a heavily
25 used playground with a comfort--an active comfort

2 station. You might have fixed post person there, but
3 given the nature of the larger parks, you need mobile
4 crews to roam through the park on a regularly
5 scheduled route to, you know, provide maintenance
6 services.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And talk to me
8 about what--what terrain a mobile crew will cover.
9 Are they all assigned within a single parks district?
10 So how are those mobile crews organized?

11 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Our basic
12 organizing principle is the community district, or
13 the community board line. We--we--you know, we're
14 coterminous with them. We group districts together
15 to form sectors, you know, to take advantage of some,
16 you know, geographic benefits of having things close
17 together. We try to work in a sectors, you know, to
18 take advantage of some, you know, geographic benefits
19 of having things close together. We try to work in a
20 sector framework so, you know, our crew can cross-
21 district lines if the geography makes sense. But,
22 for the most part, they largely are district based.
23 So, you know, there will be a number of sites that
24 are grouped geographically. Within a given community
25 board, a crew reports to a central location, receives

2 their assignments, their--their tools, the vehicles
3 are there and then they, you know, are--are
4 dispatched to again their--their cleaning round.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So just so I
6 understand, a sector is a few districts or a sector
7 is a subpart of a district?

8 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: No, it's--it's--
9 it's a few districts.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay. So the
11 organization level is there's parks and even a park
12 is a pretty rough because it could be a little green
13 street triangle or it could be, you know, Central
14 Park. But there's parks. Those parks are then for
15 your purposes organized within districts, which match
16 community boards.

17 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Those districts
19 are then grouped in sectors. How many sectors are
20 there?

21 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: There is a bit
22 depending on the size of the community board. For
23 example, community board one in Brooklyn is--is
24 enormous in terms of the number of park properties
25 there are, probably about 120. Other community

2 boards have significantly fewer. So Community Board
3 1 in Brooklyn is a standalone by itself. It doesn't,
4 you know, sectorize right now.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [interposing]
6 It's a district and a sector?

7 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It's a district
8 and a sector unto itself. Other sectors, you know,
9 for example typically Districts 6 and 7 because of
10 their--their, you know, contiguous have very similar
11 park properties within them. That would be a sector.
12 So there's probably--you know, Staten Island, of
13 course, is different. There are only three districts
14 there, and each of them functions individually. But
15 in the other boroughs there's between four and five
16 sectors in each borough.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And then those--
18 then there's borough attention or management, right.

19 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So those sectors,
21 and, you know, we still have, and we love it. In
22 Brooklyn we've got our borough commissioner.

23 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: An each borough
25 commissioner essentially has some oversight or

2 responsibility and relationship to the sectors in
3 their borough.

4 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay. So have
6 you previously or do you currently look at how
7 resources are allocated at sort of any of those
8 levels? The bill obviously is trying to get down
9 there as much as we can to how are resources
10 allocated, you know, in terms of dollars spent by--on
11 maintenance personnel roughly by acreage. But
12 obviously, you know, there are-- Well, let me just
13 ask the question that way. Do you look at either the
14 park, the district, the sector or the borough level
15 as meaningful management indicators as you're
16 thinking about assignment of dollars, staff,
17 specialty crews in your efforts to manage the Parks
18 Department?

19 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: We look at both
20 the district and the borough level to, you know,
21 because of the nature of our workforce it fluctuates
22 over the course of a year. And there are sort of
23 additional nuances that due to the nature of the--of
24 the job training participants, and how--how they are
25 assigned to the Parks Department. So we--we

2 constantly look at the distribution of staff at the
3 borough sector, at the borough sector and division
4 level. We don't typically look at the--at the
5 individual park level, however.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Go it. And is
7 any of the--and of the--so the--so that's helpful and
8 I think, you know, it helps me understand once we
9 start getting these reports, there--you know, the
10 bill, you know, imagines the reporting as much as
11 possible at the park level. I'm wondering--well, but
12 I guess actually it's, you know, it's both at the
13 park and then the regional district and the borough
14 wide level. So we'll be able to see that. Is there
15 information that you guys have been tracking already
16 that you have that you might be able to share with us
17 at any of those levels even prior to the reporting
18 coming out that just gets at some of what you just
19 described? Either that you already made public, and
20 we just haven't seen or used in that way? Or, that
21 you might be able to share that you already have that
22 doesn't, you know, that won't even prior to December
23 1st, 2015 when these reports--?

24 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Some--some of
25 that we--we definitely have. Certainly at the

2 borough level we every other week we look closely at
3 staffing levels from the borough wide perspective and
4 look at trends, you know, in comparison to previous
5 years. We are as part of our Ops 21 program, we're
6 developing more information about--about how those
7 resources are used on a daily basis. So the service
8 level agreements that I mentioned in my testimony are
9 something that we're developing. We're--we're
10 tracking how often we visit parks on a daily basis.
11 And, you know, it's been a challenge to aggregate all
12 of the data effectively. You know, the--the mobile
13 device that I mentioned in my testimony, we think is
14 going to help us do that much, much more efficiently.
15 But we are accumulating that information. We analyze
16 it again on a biweekly basis through our regular
17 management meetings. We look for trends, we look for
18 improvements, we look for thing that are--you know,
19 one of the--one of the goals is to look for, you
20 know, possible imbalances in resources that are
21 preventing us from meeting the service level
22 agreement. We haven't gotten to that level of
23 analysis yet, but that's ultimately something that we
24 want to do with that tool.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: That's helpful.

3 So let me just ask this, and then I just have one
4 question on the capital side, and then I'll turn it
5 back to the chair and other colleagues. We--we're
6 giving you I think for good reasons a long time until
7 December 1st, 2016 to get this in place because
8 you're just--well, you'll start the new fiscal year
9 July 1 and, you know, what that will mean as
10 starting. You know, in some ways I'm thinking of
11 this bill as starting July 1st, 2015 because that's
12 the fiscal year you'll report on by December 1st,
13 2016, and really be able to just get down to the park
14 level. And I get that that's a big new system that's
15 taken a lot of--

16 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: [interposing] Uh-
17 huh.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: --work in
19 transition. It would be great if you could think
20 about it by saying, you know, we need to put this in
21 the bill. But, you know, give us what reporting you
22 can on the fiscal year that's just concluded with the
23 information that you already have. And whether
24 that's at--how detailed you can go between boroughs
25 or district. Help us start to move in this direction

2 by giving the information that you can. I don't
3 think we need--that will be different than the annual
4 reports to come out, but I think whatever you can
5 share with us sooner would be very--would be very
6 helpful.

7 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: We'll be happy to
8 do that.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Great. Thank
10 you, and then just one question on the capital side.
11 I have become--I am an enthusiast to Parks Capital
12 Tracker. I use it in my office. My constituents
13 like having it. I'm clear, though, from the way
14 we've drafted the bill that the annual report you'll
15 start to provide will go in the city's open data
16 portal, and--and therefore be downloadable and usable
17 by some of the advocates in the room who then want to
18 conduct their own analysis and come and testify.
19 It's less clear to me from my Use of Parks Capital
20 Tracker whether you're sharing it into the City's
21 Open Data Portal, and it is--it becomes, you know,
22 it is at points in time down, you know, downloadable
23 in that way. So that you go to it because you care
24 about one park. And, you know, and I want to know
25 about when that park is going to go into design, when

2 its construction is being--is going to be completed.
3 It's very useful for that purpose. There should also
4 be a way for people who want to then take all of that
5 data and be able to say, you know, I want to make
6 sure that the Bronx isn't, you know, isn't getting
7 short changed as the New Yorkers for Parks Report
8 showed that it was a few years ago. Just to be able
9 to kind of look and analyze across all that data. So
10 I just--do you know if it's being shared with the
11 Open Data Portal or there's a way that it can be
12 downloaded in aggregate, and then used by researchers
13 who would want to do that?

14 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I--I--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [interposing] It
16 looks like we don't know today.

17 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I--I--I don't--I
18 don't know if it--I don't think right now it's in the
19 Open Data Portal. I would have to think that, you
20 know, given the goal of the Administration to be more
21 transparent and provide access to--to government
22 information that we'll be moving in that direction.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So that's great
24 instinct. If you guys could just follow up and let
25 us know, you know, is there a plan in place to get it

2 there? And if not, I guess I'm asking that there be
3 a plan, but it sounds like you share that goal as
4 well. Because that will help them make sure not only
5 is it real--I like it like it is so I don't want you
6 to make it so it's not very user-friendly with a
7 person who wants to see one park. But, you know,
8 move towards us making all the data available to
9 researchers and organizations who can then take it
10 and look across the system. That's great. Thank
11 you. Those are my questions. I'll turn it back over
12 to the Acting Chair.

13 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: Thank you,
14 Council Member. Council Member Cabrera.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so
16 much to the Acting Chair. Just a couple of things.
17 Council Member Lander mentioned the Bronx. So if I
18 could peel back a little bit on that, and I--I truly
19 believe that the reason why the elected officials in
20 the Bronx have refrained from putting funding is
21 because it takes so long to get the project through.
22 Case in point is the Grant Avenue Playground. I put
23 money in 2011. I went to the Tracker just right now,
24 and it says that it was supposed to be completed in
25 2014. It then says all right now it's going to be

2 finished in January of 2016. But very last time that
3 the Commissioner spoke, I asked the Commissioner. I
4 asked him when is this park going to be finished, and
5 he said in 2017. And this, which is updated on 6/17.
6 So either we're not getting accurate information into
7 the Tracker or something just changed between the--
8 the very last hearing. Can you explain to me are we
9 getting good data on the Tracker, or is it that I got
10 this information or something changed?

11 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Council Member, I
12 can't explain, you know, the difference that you
13 brought up here. I know that we focus on providing
14 accurate information in the Tracker. It's updated on
15 a weekly basis, and our capital staff takes very
16 seriously the responsibility to update it on a
17 regular basis, and ensure that accurate information
18 goes into the Tracker. I--I can't explain why, you
19 know, you heard different information in another
20 setting, but I promise you that after this meeting I
21 will get you the accurate information and explain
22 what--how the discrepancy occurred.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Yes, if you
24 could get back to me and so I can know. This project
25 is just literally taking too long. I mean it's just-

2 -to be honest with you, it discourages me to put in
3 more funding. I--I don't--I'm looking at the capital
4 now. I don't want to put more funding because, you
5 know, it's going to take five or six years to get a
6 project to move. And I give it to the Bureau of
7 Education and I get I get immediate results on that
8 year. And they--they used to be lousy about it.
9 They were--they were horrible at one time. Somehow
10 they were able to get their act together, and now,
11 you know, whatever is rewarded is repeated.

12 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Uh-huh.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: And so--so
14 hopefully I could get that information back. I meant
15 to ask you also a second question. It's kind of a--
16 well, here's the question. In terms of the triangles
17 is--are--are there--are they supposed to have some
18 kind of sign that says you can only stay here until a
19 certain time? You know, the--the little park
20 triangle--I wouldn't call them parks but it's part of
21 Parks.

22 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Uh-huh.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Can, you know,
24 it's open until 10 o'clock at night. Are those
25 posted at the sites?

2 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes, all of our
3 parks and playgrounds and sitting areas and triangles
4 should have signs with the name, the rules and
5 regulations that pertain to that particular park or
6 playground and the operating hours.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: But here's my
8 problem. My problem is we have a group of people who
9 came from the Post Office. They--they had camped out
10 there, you know, homeless, and now they decided to
11 camp on Devanney Triangle. So we called Bronx Works.
12 Bronx Works tried to work it out, you know, to see if
13 they would go into a shelter. They refused. So they
14 called the Police Department. The Police Department
15 said we can go in only if there's a sign. So we
16 called the Parks Department, and we still have yet to
17 get a response back and it's been days. I mean I
18 have the whole community complaining about--

19 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: [interposing] Uh-
20 huh.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: --you know, them
22 taking over the park and want to use the park. And
23 it--it just, you know, there's a lot of garbage now.
24 I mean it was on New 12 of this week. And so, can
25 you explain to me what's the process when it comes to

2 the signs? From the moment you put in a request is
3 there a time that you're supposed to get it back or
4 put a sign up or--?

5 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: If there is no
6 sign on Duvanney Triangle right now, and I'm sure
7 based on your question that there isn't, we will have
8 one up by the end of the day.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Thank you so
10 much. I really appreciate that.

11 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: And I just want
12 to say in response to your, you know, your question
13 about Grant--Grant Park, it has taken a long time.
14 Commissioner Silver shares your, you know, sort of
15 frustration over that. As you know, from previous
16 testimony that he has made before this committee,
17 he's committed to improving that process. And, you
18 know, he's working. He directed us to work to get--
19 at least that, you know, that street open in Grant--
20 that will become part of Grant Park open this summer
21 as a play street, and we're working towards
22 accomplishing that. But I will get back to you, but
23 the difference in the--in the dates for the --for the
24 completion of the park and we'll confirm that the
25 sign is up in Devanney.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: I really, really
3 appreciate that. I'm looking forward to the young
4 people playing there. I--I just allocated \$2.7
5 million. So, you know, it's not chump change.

6 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: [interposing] And
7 thank you for that.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: No, that is the
9 people's money. I just [laughs] made sure to give
10 that. [sic]

11 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: But it could have
12 gone some place else.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Yes, indeed.
14 Thank you so much Commissioner. Thank you so much.
15 Thank you so much.

16 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: Thank you.
17 Just a couple. One, I guess I'm still, you know, a
18 new council member I really enjoy giving capital
19 money to my parks and I--I hope that my faith is
20 rewarded someday. One, the first thing I'd like to
21 do is acknowledge that we have a new borough
22 commissioner, Iris Rodriguez Rosa, and we're very,
23 very happy that we have a new borough commissioner,
24 Iris [sic], and we are grateful and we look forward
25 to her. I think her first day is--I mean she's on

2 the job now. So we are very excited about that.

3 Thank you. Just following up on a question or two

4 from Council Member Lander like in theory you could

5 tell us today or relatively quickly how many

6 maintenance workers are by borough. That information

7 is available?

8 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

9 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: And how many
10 dollars that equates to by borough.

11 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

12 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: I would be
13 interested in seeing that information, you know, that
14 Council Member Lander was sort of, you know, when you
15 have it. But that information doesn't seem to be
16 readily available, and I--and I would definitely--

17 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It is and we can
18 provide it to you.

19 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: I would be
20 interested in that. All right. I have no further
21 questions. Oh, Council Member Treyger. I'm sorry.
22 Council Member Treyger.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: You know, you
24 have to figure Council Member Treyger has a question
25 on parks. Thank you Chair, and I also thank my

2 colleague Council Member Lander. I think it's a
3 really great bill, and I would like to definitely add
4 my name to it as well. So the question that I have
5 for you, Deputy Commissioner, is that the Parks in--
6 in my neck of the woods are really--border the coast.
7 I know that we have a Parks Tracker. Does the Parks
8 Tracker take into account pending FEMA projects as
9 well, because we've been waiting for quite some time
10 now on projects or Army Corps to move forward. So
11 for, you know, there are--we have a lot of damaged
12 parkland and Parks property. So does the Tracker
13 take into account pending FEMA work or Army Corps
14 projects?

15 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It does when
16 they're funded projects. You know, for example, when
17 the Army Corps has a project in either design or
18 construction that's funded where the city and state
19 are their local partner and provide some of the
20 funding for it, it would be tracked through the
21 Capital Tracker Application. If it's--if it's a
22 project that is still sort of in the planning stages,
23 it wouldn't show up in Capital--in the Capital
24 Project Tracker until money is actually allocated to
25 the project.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: The reason why I
3 asked is that certainly Parks are a vital
4 recreational public space and a use for many
5 communities. The park--the parkland in my district
6 and other districts also serve as infrastructure.

7 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Really the first
9 line of defense against, you know, coastal events,
10 coastal storms. So we, you know, this is an issue
11 that I know that I know that for example in the
12 beaches in Southern Brooklyn the Army Corps had
13 replaced some sand that had eroded as a result of
14 Sandy, but where I'm hearing talks that--because I've
15 been pushing for another resiliency study for
16 Southern Brooklyn. But I--I just--I think it's
17 critical that we--we coordinate with obviously the
18 Parks Department and the Mayor's Office of Recovery
19 and Resiliency on prioritizing capital maintenance of
20 parks, but not just for recreational purposes, but
21 really for public safety purposes as well. And, for
22 example, there's a study underway I'm aware of, of
23 Coney Island Creek. And I'd just like to just to
24 hear what types of coordination does the Parks
25 Department have with EDC and the Mayor's Office for

2 Recovery and Resiliency on that? Because that creek
3 borders both Kaiser Park and Calvert Vaux and Dreier
4 Offerman Park. Where in the previous administration
5 committed a lot of capital to--committed our capital
6 to Dreier Offerman and it never actually
7 materialized. It's a separate conversation. But,
8 I'd just like to know how does this factor into
9 prioritizing capital spending in the Parks
10 Department. We're looking at not just recreational
11 purposes, but actually public safety purposes.

12 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Well, I can tell
13 you that we're very much involved in the planning for
14 Coney Island Creek with both EDC, the Office of
15 Resiliency and Recovery. Our Natural Resources group
16 has been involved in the details of--of how that
17 project might be executed. And we work closely with
18 the Army Corps of Engineers not only on--on that
19 planning project, but others throughout the entire
20 New York City. We have a bi-weekly call--a standing
21 bi-weekly call with the Army Corps, the OLR, the
22 State Department of Environmental Conservation, to
23 review projects that are either in planning, design,
24 construction. And, you know, we--we do our best to
25 coordinate as closely as possible. In fact,

2 following last hearing where you raised the question
3 about, you know, comprehensive study for Coney
4 Island, that was one of the--the topics we discussed
5 with the Army Corps in our call. And they are very
6 open to reopening the--the Coney Island planning, the
7 feasibility study that, you know, led to the original
8 reconstruction of the beach back on the '90s.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: I'm--and I'm
10 aware of that. I am--I appreciate that because it's--
11 -it's an entire coastline beyond my district that's
12 really from Sea Gate to Coney Island, to Brighton
13 Beach, Manhattan Beach, Sheepshead Bay. It's an
14 enormous swath of land. I would just like to say
15 that Council Member Cabrera mentioned his frustration
16 with sometimes I guess time. My issue is also cost.
17 When you look at some of the park land that's been
18 damaged, you know, for example the Promenade by
19 Bensonhurst Park--

20 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: [interposing]
21 Yes.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: --and others,
23 it's much more than--you know, that's Council Member
24 Gentile's district. Even if him and I combined our
25 pots of capital together, that's still not going to

2 be enough to cover the full damage and the scope. So
3 I'd just like to really double down on making sure
4 that these FEMA applications and Army Corps projects
5 are actually moving. Making sure that there are
6 additional funds. We have to push the federal
7 government in order to do so because that's been our
8 biggest frustration, not just the time but also the
9 exorbitant costs. And I'd like to continue working
10 with your department to finally get these things
11 done.

12 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: We are prepared
13 to do that, Council Member.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you.
15 Thank you very much.

16 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: Commissioner,
17 I just thought of one more. In--in terms of the
18 staff level, I guess maintenance that's your biggest
19 category of staff, I would imagine is maintenance.

20 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes, it is.

21 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: But I guess
22 you--there are other categories. I mean
23 administration comes to mind. Can you share with us
24 what are the categories that the staff falls into?

2 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Well, the major
3 categories are Maintenance and Operations,
4 Administration as you noted. It's a large
5 organization. We have budget personnel, benefits,
6 all of those things that have to--have to happen in
7 order to make the--the organization work. We have
8 our programming, a recreation division, which does
9 tremendous work operating the recreation centers and
10 providing programming in parks and playgrounds around
11 the city. In fact, we're--you know, we're--as part
12 of the Community Parks Initiative, we're expanded
13 pretty dramatically. The Kids in Motion Program so
14 that there are playground associates and more
15 playgrounds in the CPI zone this year than there were
16 last year. We direct a lot of our programming in
17 Shape Up, Zumba and things like that into the Parks
18 and Playgrounds during the summer months. So
19 there's--there's a whole programming division. We
20 have our--our I guess public outreach, which includes
21 the Partnership for Parks and Green Thumb and
22 divisions like that, which interact with the
23 community on a grassroots level. And they really do
24 terrific work in helping people help their parks.
25 And then, of course, we have the Capital Projects

2 Division, which includes, you know, professionals,
3 engineers, architects, landscape architects,
4 surveyors and all the big professional skills that go
5 into planning, designing and building parks and
6 playgrounds.

7 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN. Is it possible
8 while we're looking at maintenance that we could also
9 track recreational resources?

10 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: We--we do, of
11 course, track them. Not in the same way as we're
12 tracking maintenance because they have sort of the
13 different sort of a--they do things differently than
14 us. The deliverables are different. Let me put it
15 that way. And so, we're looking to have a clean
16 park, a safe park. They're looking for the number of
17 kids engaged, and the number of programs delivered
18 and stuff like that. But yes, we can provide
19 information on where and how we're delivering those
20 services through recreation.

21 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: I think we
22 would be very interested in that, too. Okay,
23 anybody else? Thank you, Commissioner.

24 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: You're welcome.
25 Thank you.

2 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: Thank you.

3 Now it's on. Okay, Tupper Thomas. Brielle and
4 Roland Lewis.

5 [pause]

6 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: Tupper,
7 please.

8 TUPPER THOMAS: Well, good morning.

9 [laughs] I'm Tupper Thomas, Executive Director of
10 New Yorkers for Parks. Thank you for allowing me to
11 speak to you today. We are really, really excited
12 about this bill, but really about the work that the
13 New York City Department of Parks is doing to track
14 all of this information. It makes a huge difference
15 for all of us who are--who are trying to be sure that
16 the Parks Department actually has enough money and
17 resources to do all the work that they need to be
18 doing. And we feel that this is really going to be a
19 great addition as well. So that one of the things
20 we're all looking for is what's that magic number?
21 How many maintenance workers. How many other--how
22 many PEP officers and so on and so forth. So I think
23 this is going to make a big difference in helping all
24 of us look at not only how are they allocating, but
25 what more do they need in order to really make every

2 park equitable and be able to do that work. I'm a
3 little concerned that the bill as currently written
4 may or may not capture all of the--a full
5 understanding of the resources as allocated.
6 Hopefully, the--the largest hundred parks is really
7 not maybe what--what you're looking for. Some of
8 those are all natural areas. Other than other
9 things, it might be interesting to look at CPI zones
10 as a way to look at this. There may be a number of
11 ways to look at for your first collection to work
12 with Parks on what is it that you're really looking
13 for in the--in this. And then, understanding how
14 that works. Is it the CPI zones or is it comparing
15 large parks that have conservancies with large parks
16 that don't. And so, if you were comparing large
17 parks with conservancies versus the ones that don't
18 then this is a good measure. But is that all you're
19 looking for. So I--I think that there should be, and
20 there seems to be terrific give and take between the
21 Council members and the Parks Department. So it's
22 really just so that both of you understand what the
23 purpose of the bill is in the long term. So the
24 other thing that I would like to say is that--is
25 really all of that. But I'm very interested also in

2 the concept of PEP and CPI and how we can best trace
3 the money that's now being put into those very
4 significant things. So we have now already had an
5 addition we know has been put in for the PEP program.
6 Where are they--where are they going, where are they
7 allocated? How will that--how will that be measured
8 in terms of whether it's producing better quality of
9 life for those parks? So I think measurement is a
10 really important thing again. So that, you know, if
11 the PEP forces need more people, how will we--how
12 will we know that? What are the numbers that can
13 help us trace--sort of track that? So I think it
14 isn't just maintenance, because boy PEP is very, very
15 close to how we help do maintenance. So I think
16 maintenance is--is greatly helped by having
17 enforcement around. And so it's--it's important to
18 look at all of the aspects of the Parks Department.
19 And I think that's what Council Member Cohen was
20 just bringing up is that these are the kinds of
21 things that really all fit together. It isn't just
22 maintenance, and capital is important. All of those
23 things are being tracked. But as new money is being
24 allocated, it seems to me that it's useful to see
25 what the effect of that new money has been, and is

2 there a way to measure. But in general, I am so
3 excited about the usership study that's going to be
4 done, and very--we're very, very excited about the
5 needs assessment. I think all of these things in the
6 long term are going to lead us to a real--a strong
7 answer to that question. Is it a One Percent for
8 Parks or is it--is it a real number of what we need
9 to really be able to make every park as good as every
10 other park. Thank you.

11 [background comments]

12 BRIELLE KIMMER ENG: Good morning,
13 everybody. My name is Brielle Kimmer Eng [sp?]. I'm
14 here from the Law Office of Carter, Ledyard and
15 Millburn, but I'm speaking on behalf of Christina
16 Taylor, who is the Executive Director of the Friends
17 of Van Cortlandt Park, the community based
18 organization. It's very concerned with park equity
19 and works very hard to improve parklands in the
20 Bronx. So I'm speaking on behalf of her today, and
21 so her testimony states that on behalf of the Board
22 and the staff of the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park.
23 I am writing today in support of Proposed Intro No.
24 154-A to amend the Administrative Code of the City of
25 New York in relation to an annual report on park

2 maintenance and capital expenditures. The Friends is
3 an independent community based organization, which
4 actively promotes the conservation and improvement of
5 Van Cortlandt Park. We believe that there is a parks
6 equity issue among neighborhoods and parks in New
7 York City, and that parks are not equitably funded
8 and funded and maintained at a level that is
9 consistent throughout the city. The Friends was
10 founded in 1992 in response to declining budgets for
11 parks like Van Cortlandt that lacked wealthy
12 benefactors. But over 20 years later, the Bronx
13 Parks Department is still not adequately funded.
14 With the largest New York City Park Pellham Bay and
15 the third largest park Van Cortlandt, the Bronx has
16 more parkland than any other borough. But we often
17 wonder if we are getting our fair share of the Parks
18 Department's budget to maintain these parks at the
19 level that Bronxites deserve. In 2014, New York City
20 Parks published the first ever master plan for Van
21 Cortlandt Park. The Friends has joined New York City
22 Parks, the Parks Conservancy and others in exploring
23 ways to fully implement the plan. Currently,
24 however, it's very difficult to determine how much
25 the Parks Department is spending in Van Cortlandt

2 Park, which is critical to our addressing shortfalls
3 in its funding. This legislation would require
4 reporting, but would allow expenditures to be
5 reported in a fashion that is clear, and easily
6 understood. This report should be made available to
7 the public, and allow a fuller public debate about
8 equitable park funding. Therefore, the Friends of
9 Van Cortland Park fully support Proposed Intro No.
10 154-A. Thank you so much for having me.

11 ROLAND LEWIS: All right, my turn. I'm
12 Roland Lewis, President of the Metropolitan Worker
13 Alliance, an alliance of over 800 community groups
14 and businesses and civic organizations dedicated to
15 an open and accessible and healthy harbor for all of
16 us. We're happy to support Intro 154--1-5-4-A to
17 update information by the staff on the capital
18 projects. But, I'd like to focus on something closer
19 to my home or to what we do, which is the--the
20 ability to fix and fund things on a--on a timely
21 basis that the Council Member was referring to a
22 little while ago. We have--you know, we have a
23 poster child for this--for this issue, which is eco
24 dock that Councilman and your colleague Councilman
25 Gentile in partnership with the Parks Department and

2 Borough President in Brooklyn helped established. It
3 was a--I'm an optimistic guy, but it was a success
4 even beyond my imagination. In paltry city of 3,000
5 young people everybody from South Brooklyn got to use
6 that dock. Dozens of boats came there. It was an
7 outstanding success. So, now as often happens in
8 the--in the maritime world, again they give way, and
9 it gave way under harsh conditions in the off season.
10 So we have a built-in gangway. So, we normally fix
11 in a marina in other situations, re-engineer and fix
12 it. For the Parks Department right now it's fallen
13 into this middle world. It's not a major capital
14 improvement. We're not rebuilding the dock. The
15 dock is robust and going to stay there. When it's
16 now a minor repair we can just send someone out to
17 tighten a screw. But it's something it's in between,
18 and so we hope there could be a--a standing--a
19 standing contract--the ability for the Parks
20 Department to do what EDC does when a--a bulkhead
21 breaks or what other, other agencies can do when
22 they're--when it's not completely construction and
23 not a minor repair, a way to get something done
24 quickly. Where you've--where we've lost a season
25 already, and I'm afraid if we go down the normal path

2 or route, we now lose multiple seasons, which is just
3 a crime given the fact that it's sitting right there
4 for that community to use. Eco docks are now to be
5 established--well we have one funded up in Inwood in
6 Ydanis Rodriguez's district. Costa Constantinides is
7 going to have one in Astoria. There's a bunch of
8 them. I'm hoping also that the Parks Department will
9 consider a--making this into a program that instead
10 of a one-off each time we go--they--they've proven to
11 be tremendously exciting and successful for the
12 communities. And just for the private developer,
13 actually on the--on the South Bronx Waterfront he
14 wants to build one on his own as part of an
15 industrial development down there. So it's an
16 inexpensive and great way to open up waterfronts.
17 But the point of my testimony besides the part for
18 the Intro is to talk about that third way. Find a
19 way for the Parks Department to efficiently, quickly
20 not close the playground down because a swing is
21 broken or a jungle gym cannot be fixed. We must be
22 able to find a way do these repairs whether it's a
23 gangway or a--or swing set or whatever. So thank you
24 very much for the opportunity to discuss this issue

2 on eco docks, and I'm open to any questions you might
3 have or I'll defer to Tupper probably.

4 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: Council Member
5 Lander.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you. I
7 first want to thank all of you guys for being here,
8 and not just for your support of the legislation, but
9 for the partnership over a long period of time that
10 has helped us understand the issue. And both its
11 importance on the ways you spoke about on equity and
12 also the--the complexities of getting it right. I
13 have been talking with Chair Levine for some time
14 about, and he's been really pushing and working very
15 proactively with the Administration and the
16 Commissioner on the capital issues that council
17 members mentioned. I think that at some point before
18 too long, it would be great if we can have a--have a
19 hearing that sort of brings forward where we are.
20 Just the progress that we've made on those issues. I
21 think there is actually a lot of progress to a report
22 that I've been seeing on my projects in my district
23 not only on the transparency on the Tracker, but
24 really moving it forward. It's a big--it's a lot of
25 work that they're doing. So I think at some point it

2 would be great if we can kind of update, you know,
3 the Council and the public on those--on those
4 systemic changes. I'm mindful of these and in
5 looking at the bill and in hearing Council Member
6 Cohen's questions and then Tupper yours as well, that
7 there might be--you know, the bill focuses on
8 maintenance and getting down to the park level, which
9 I think is important and hard. It may be that
10 there's some other things we want to capture that we
11 have to get at the district or sector or borough
12 levels. And I guess I just want to ask Tupper. So
13 we've heard PEP officers, which is another thing I
14 guess we can follow up on and try to figure out in a
15 way that's manageable for the system, but meaningful
16 how that's captured and tracked the programming. You
17 know, that's the summer, folks that are in the--the
18 seasonal employees that do programming. Are there
19 other categories like that that we should just
20 explore and talk to the department and see if at one
21 of those levels it's possible to get that information
22 where it would be meaningful, you know, without, you
23 know, a whole new Ops 21 level of--of effort.

24 TUPPER THOMAS: [off mic] Well, it's--I
25 think they certainly can answer that--

2 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: Tupper, could-
3 -could use the microphone, please?

4 TUPPER THOMAS: [on mic] I'm sorry.
5 Okay. All right. Plumbers, you know, all of those
6 electric--those electricians, all of those people
7 that are behind the scenes are--are very much an
8 important part of getting everything ready in the
9 spring and turning all the drinking fountains on and
10 all that kind of stuff. How they're allocated, what
11 they do, how many of them are there? Are there
12 enough to take care of all of those things? The park
13 rangers, the natural resources crews. Certainly, if
14 you start looking at the large parks, you'll really
15 need to be able to look at the maintenance of those
16 natural areas, an area that we had a hearing on
17 earlier in the year that I think very much points out
18 the--how many more people are probably necessary if
19 we're going to maintain our natural areas. And the
20 Bronx has an enormous number of acres as does Queens
21 in those--in those things. So I think all of those
22 things if we--if we get started with this maintenance
23 and which I think is the most obvious and out there
24 topic. Then I think once you all have that going,
25 the Parks Department is going to be really ready to

2 take on the other issues. I was more trying to make
3 the point that when we make new--when you all make
4 new allocations or the Mayor makes new allocations,
5 how can we measure whether those allocations have
6 been used for what would be then certified. [sic]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So just two
8 points there. So just so you--I mean you mentioned
9 the 100 parks. That's just the first year.

10 TUPPER THOMAS: [interposing] Yes.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: You know, the
12 second year they'll start being for all the parks--

13 TUPPER THOMAS: [interposing] Yeah,
14 right.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: --in the system.
16 We just try to phase them in a way that's reasonable
17 for them to--to accomplish over time.

18 TUPPER THOMAS: Right.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And then part of
20 the idea, at least as we had it is--and this is where
21 the advocated and the data analysts and the Council
22 come in, you know, there's a lot in the Mayor's
23 Management Report and the--the PIP.

24 TUPPER THOMAS: Yes.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So you have to
3 track and, you know, as the Deputy Commissioner said,
4 they look at outcomes obviously comparing
5 expenditures and outcomes. That's what we're
6 supposed to do with all this information.

7 TUPPER THOMAS: Yes, we are.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So we have some
9 of that. It might make sense to go back and look--
10 and this is our job as well--at the Mayor's
11 Management Report and make sure we are getting in the
12 MMR the outcomes type of data that helps us sort of
13 look at and compare. So we welcome your continued
14 partnership in doing that. So thank you.

15 TUPPER THOMAS: Uh-huh.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council
17 Member. Council Member Cabrera.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: Yes, thank you
19 so much. I just wanted to be asked to be added to
20 the bill and congratulate Council Member Brad Lander
21 for such an excellent piece of legislation and
22 looking forward to it passing in the Council. Thank
23 you so much.

24 ACTING CHAIRPERSON COHEN: Thank you very
25 much. This concludes our hearing.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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2 [gavel]

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1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date June 23, 2015