

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 1

2 CITY COUNCIL

3 CITY OF NEW YORK

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5 TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

6 Of the

7 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND

8 RECREATION

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10 November 24, 2025

11 Start: 1:22 p.m.

12 Recess: 3:18 p.m.

13 HELD AT: 250 Broadway - 8th Floor - Hearing

14 Room 1

15 B E F O R E: Shekar Krishnan,

16 Chairperson

17 COUNCIL MEMBERS:

18 Gale A. Brewer

19 David M. Carr

20 Robert F. Holden

21 Linda Lee

22 Julie Menin

23 Mercedes Narcisse

24 Vickie Paladino

25 Sandra Ung

Susan Zhuang

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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

Mark Focht

Acting First Deputy Commissioner, New York City
Department of Parks and Recreation

Matt Drury

Chief of Citywide Legislative Affairs, New York
City Department of Parks and Recreation

Asha Harris

Assistant Commissioner Urban Park Service,
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Bonnie McGuire

Director of Urban Park Rangers, New York City
Department of Parks and Recreation

Alex Butler

Director of Parks Inspectors Program

Ralph Baselice

VP Local 983, DC 37

Jim Burke

34th Avenue Open Streets Coalition

Afia Henriques

Taste of Waste New York City

Maria Kessler

EsplanadeFriends.org

Merritt Birnbaum

Riverside Park Conservancy

Cory Hasson

New York Restoration Project

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COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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

- Anne Lee
Fort Greene Park Conservancy
- Adam Ganser
New Yorkers for Parks
- Michael Ring
Disabled in Action
- Max Barton
Self
- Jennifer Seda
Self
- Christopher Leon Johnson
Self

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon and welcome to the New York City Council Hearing on the Committee on Parks and Recreation. At this time, can everybody please silence your cell phones? If you wish to testify, please go to the back of the room to fill out a testimony slip. At this time and going forward, no one is to approach the dais. I repeat, no one is to approach the dais. Chair, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Sergeant. [GAVEL] Good afternoon, everyone. It's so nice to see you all here. Thank you for joining us today for our Parks Committee hearing on Improving the Maintenance of Park Bathrooms and Drinking Fountains, a critical issue across our city. We will also be hearing a bill by my colleague Council Member Susan Zhuang in relation to requiring the Parks Department to report on the staffing levels for Park Enforcement Patrol or PEP officers and Park Rangers.

I want to thank you all for joining today as we examine these critical issues. Issues that pertain directly to the infrastructure, safety of our park systems. Bathrooms and water fountains are universal public good that makes our parks usable, makes our

city usable and accessible. This is something that it's not only it's critical to our parks but we're hearing more and more conversation, and we've been working at the City Council to increase access to public restrooms across the city.

By definition, if you're increasing access to public restrooms across the city, then we have to do so in our parks as well. We're talking about a basic public good. These features are what make our parks a safe community hub. It's strengthening their ability to be a place where New Yorkers can come together.

Since I've been Parks Chair and for years before, I've argued that the Parks Department continues to be denied enough resources to fund their most basic functions. We've seen the effects of Administration after Administration failing us and not fulfilling the promise of funding the Parks Department at one percent.

Year after year, we have to fight tooth and nail to preserve the things we know are the most basic elements of the system, such as maintaining staff levels or tree pruning cycles. This is an issue that frankly we should have already addressed, and we

should be talking about how much we could be expanding access. Not only to public restrooms but expanding and increased investment in our parks. Instead, we are here talking about how we invest to make sure our parks have the basic services that they need, and we deserve.

We could be and we should be dreaming bigger with our parks and green spaces. But because we don't get the funding we deserve, we also failed our parks workers and are stuck working to stretch a very small budget.

Not adequately maintaining or funding our parks bathrooms and water fountains is an issue that also hurts our workers. It hurts our parks maintenance, the quality of parks bathrooms across the city. Clean, safe, and accessible public restrooms in the city's parks are non-negotiable.

This is a matter of equity and accessibility. Over 700 restrooms are in the care of the Parks Department. The job of keeping them accessible and in good working order is staggering and I want to thank in particular our parks workers, who day in and day out clean up parks, make them safe, clean the bathrooms, make sure they stay open. They are doing

so much for so many with so little and that is what we need to address in this city.

Last year, the City Council conducted an investigation of parks bathrooms and how New Yorkers feel about their condition. The investigation examined 102 parks bathrooms throughout the five boroughs and focused on the cleanliness, conditions, functionality, safety and accessibility of each one.

These locations were chosen based on constituent complaints, received by Council Member offices. The investigations results showed the effects of an underfunded system, finding that 68 of 102 inspected restrooms were closed. Oh, sure. Alright, we'll take a break here in case anyone has to use the bathroom.

BREAK [00:04:31] - [00:06:26]

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Can I get an audio check for the Zoom please. Audio check for the Zoom.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: All good.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. You can continue.

CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR: Alright. We are back on track. Before continuing with my opening statement, I'm going to recognize our colleagues here today because I know we have a number of things happening

at the same time this afternoon. We've been joined by Council Members Narcisse, Zhuang, lee, Menin, and Council Member Holden on Zoom, and Council Member Ung is walking in right now. That should be it so far. Alright, so New Yorkers - so the investigations results show that we have - the effects of an unfunded system. Finding that 68 of 102 inspected restrooms were closed or found to have health or safety issues, including litter in 40 percent unsanitary conditions and 23 percent a lack of garbage cans at 30 percent and only 8 percent of restrooms being equipped with menstrual product bins and 25 percent missing baby changing stations.

New Yorkers rely on our parks for us, for our families, and our green space as a place to form community and get together and they lose accessibility when there's no clean restrooms. When it's open when it should be. When your toddlers diaper needs to be changed as I've experienced myself in a park or your park doesn't have a trash can in the restroom. And I want to be clear; our Parks Department is doing all they can with the resources you have. This is a larger systemic failure where we have not recognized the importance of investing in

our parks. When we don't do that, when we fail to consistently do so and my hope and expectation is that changes sooner than later. It not only effects the experience for all New Yorkers, but it effects the ability of our parks workers to do their job.

These bills today go the heart of keeping our parks safe and clean, and if they're not safe and clean, then I'm not quite sure how we keep our city safe and clean. These are all basic necessities we're talking about. The Council did a similar analysis and report when it came to the conditions of water fountains. The Parks Department maintains over 3,500 outdoor fountains. Council Member Brewer and staff in her office analyzed the condition of 216 drinking fountains in her district, including Central Park, parts of Riverside Park, and various playgrounds. The survey found that 17 of the water fountains were broken without city water flow.

Further, 20 percent of fountains in playgrounds did not work and finally, 17 locations that were listed as having water fountains and city materials, did not actually have water fountains present. This is clearly an unacceptable situation, and efforts have been made to try and improve it, stretching a

thin budget to do better in the long term. For example, the Council has passed numerous bills recently to require diaper changing stations in parks bathrooms. Require reports of bathrooms that failed inspect. Require online information and also to report on the various conditions of bathrooms in parks.

These are necessary and good steps that we must take but we also need to address the underlying problem. That's what today's hearing is about. It is an issue that effects every aspect of our parks system. Everyone works in it or uses our parks. Our Parks Department is strangled in a mess of underfunding and it's hurting the heart of our city. Our children, our neighbors and the space that all of us use that make our city such as green and cultural place to be.

Today, we are also considering a piece of legislation, as I mentioned before, sponsored by my colleague Council Member Susan Zhuang, that would require the Parks Department to submit a quarterly report on the staffing levels of PEP officers and park rangers. As well as the incidents responded to by PEP officers in city parks. This is a common-

sense bill that will better our parks. Concerns have long been raised regarding the lack of sufficient numbers of PEP officers assigned to keep our parks safe and enforce the rules throughout the park system.

And a lack of transparency regarding where such officers are assigned. You have probably heard at our hearings in the past the deep inequity when it comes to the number of PEP officers, not only for parks in the city but for borough. Vastly underrepresenting how many officers we actually in our parks throughout the city. This bill will make sure that policy makers and residents alike, know where PEP officers are located and how many there are at given times, so we can understand how best - not only to allocate resources, but also to improve resources and support our PEP officers and park rangers.

I look forward to exploring this bill and the issues regarding park maintenance in greater detail today and I welcome and thank the Administration advocates who have come to this space and this hearing.

I'm now going to turn it over to Council Member Zhuang to make an opening statement about her legislation.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Thank you Chair. First of all, I want to thank Parks Officers, Parks Rangers, with very limited resources to keep our parks safe. Thank you.

And also, I want to thank Chair Krishnan to cosponsor this bill. When I spoke to the Parks Department, they made it clear. The intention of PEP officers and the park rangers will not respond to crime. Yes, I understand that, but we missed the large part of concept of safety. Safety is also about crime prevention. Our PEP officers and park rangers conduct programming in our parks. They are trained to engage with our community. Research is stated to show engaging community members is one way to prevent the crime. I actually brought printless articles here and also, when I - this summer, my district parks have a lot of reckless moped drivers and the violence with the staffing at my most used park. I called parks. I saw two PEP officers there one time. When they showed up, all the mopeds and the dirt bikes left.

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2 Finally, I got the information from a lot of
3 internal resources. We only have four, four PEP
4 officers in the whole Brooklyn Board. Maybe the
5 number will be different but the information I get is
6 four.

7 Interestingly, some portal actually has more and
8 also, I personally see some nicer areas. I actually
9 PEP officers, but I only seen one time in my district
10 by living there more than decades and my kids also go
11 to the park, and we never see PEP officers there
12 because I know it's not enough.

13 But this is the issue in our city. There is no
14 transparency and our constituents also deserve to
15 know where are the PEP officers. Where are the park
16 rangers? Which park they are? Where is the
17 personnel, our staff that's throughout the borough
18 and we need to understand why. Our Council is
19 fighting for funding to allow parks to do their job,
20 but we must know where are the problems before we
21 resolve it.

22 Safe Parks for NYC, Intro. 1425, will require
23 Parks Department to report the information and let us
24 know where the resources are and what is available.
25 Parks are our New Yorkers back yard. Our children

and our seniors fill these parks on beautiful days. These spaces deserve financial investment and a thoughtful commitment from staff who can help bring the community together in positive, safe and a healthy way.

By the end, I want to thank all, everyone being here, especially our activists and also, I want to thank my co-sponsor Chair Krishnan and especially thanks for our DC 37 and the Local 983 who are supporting my bill Safe Parks for NYC. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Council Member. Now, I'll turn it over to our Committee Counsel to swear in our witnesses from the Parks Department today.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. Would the representatives of the Parks Department please raise your right hand if you are able? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this Committee today and to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

PANEL: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. Back to you Chair.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much and you now begin with your opening statement.

MARK FOCHT: Thank you and good afternoon, Chair Krishnan, Members of the Parks Committee and other Council Members. My name is Mark Focht, and I am pleased so serve as the Acting First Deputy Commissioner for New York City Parks. Joining me today are various members of the agency leadership, including Assistant Commissioner for Urban Park Service Asha Harris, Chief of Citywide Legislative Affairs Matt Drury, Director of the Parks Inspection Program Alex Butler and Director of the Urban Park Rangers Bonnie McQuire.

We are pleased to be here before you today to discuss the maintenance of parks public restrooms and drinking fountains. The parks and open space under our care are enjoyed by New Yorkers across the city daily and our dedicated staff work tirelessly to keep them clean and in the best possible conditions, including amenities such as restroom and drinking fountains.

As the Chair mentioned, New York City Parks maintains over 3,400 exterior drinking fountains, making us far and away the largest provider of clean,

safe, free drinking water for New Yorkers. Our dedicated staff works extremely hard to keep them in good working repair. We display the locations of drinking fountains on a map posted on our agency website along with information about other amenities to help New Yorkers stay cool in the summer.

We incorporate new and replacement drinking fountains into the design of capital projects, making sure they are located to best serve park visitors, whether it's kids on a playground on a hot day or a jogger taking a break.

Since our drinking fountains experience heavy use, they do occasionally go out of service, but our talented parks trade staff make repairs as quickly as possible. To illustrate this, we reviewed the availability of working drinking fountains in a typical summer week, the busiest time for parks. We randomly chose the second weekend of August in 2025 as peak temperatures rose to the low 90's, only three percent of our 3,400 drinking fountains required work, meaning that 97 percent of drinking fountains were fully operational. It is also worth noting that over 20 percent of those fountains were repaired

within seven days and an additional 50 percent were repaired within a month.

As cold weather is approaching each year, our staff undertakes a massive effort to turn off and drain or what is called winterize all outdoor drinking fountains, so the pipes can survive the freezing temperatures.

When warm weather returns, we reverse the process, we turn on or reactivate all drinking fountains so thirsty New Yorkers can find relief. Speaking of relief, we fully recognize and appreciate the access to well-maintained public restrooms is absolutely necessary. New York City is proud to be the largest provider of public restrooms in New York City by far, as we operate as the Chair said, over 700 restroom buildings, the locations of which are displayed on the agency's website. These buildings host more than 1,400 individual restrooms, most of which typically offer multiple stalls and fixtures.

We are pleased to share that over the last four years; parks have completed construction on 25 new public restroom buildings and 22 renovations of public restroom buildings. Additionally, we have 45 new projects and 41 renovations, actively working

their way through the capital project. This is a total of 131 new or renovated public restroom buildings. We also have dozens of more restrooms in the planning and discussion phase. Restroom access is vital to New Yorkers and we're delivering. Using innovative initiatives and partnerships to build these vital public resources, more efficiently and quickly.

For example, we are advancing several restroom projects using prefabricated modular units, which can be constructed more quickly. Earlier this year, we piloted five prefabricated units, which are single occupancy restrooms that can be used year around and are built at a fraction of the standard cost. Nearly all of our public restrooms are open seven days a week, 365 days a year and are available for anyone to use for free. Keeping them clean and safe is our top priority. Even on holidays, like this coming thanksgiving, staff will work to ensure that restrooms are clean, stocked and well-maintained.

As a general practice, parks restrooms are cleaned by staff at numerous points throughout the day and if damage is observed, our expert trades may prepare us. Turning again to that second week in

August of 2025, is a useful snapshot of our peak season, we assess the conditions of our park restrooms during that week, just as we did for drinking fountains. Setting aside restrooms undergoing or awaiting capital projects, out of our portfolio 700 public restroom buildings, only 29 or four percent were found to be temporarily closed for repairs or otherwise in need of repair.

Sadly, I will note that 7 of those 29 closures were due to vandalism, which is unfortunately becoming an increasingly common reason for closures. And if you will oblige me, I will depart from my prepared testimony here to give you some updated data. This past weekend alone, Saturday and Sunday, we have 14 public restrooms that were closed. 10 of those 14 were closed due to vandalism or illegal drug use. This spanned all five boroughs. I'll just give you some examples. In Queens, we had all the windows broken out on a men's restroom from kids throwing rocks at it. Two incidences of illegal drug use, as I mentioned. In Staten Island, an entire men's room was vandalized with all the partitions being ripped off the wall. In the Bronx, we had a restroom that all the plumbing was striped out of both the men's

and women's side. Brooklyn vandalism to a door.

Those are just some examples, but again, in this past weekend, 14 public restrooms were closed, which again is only one percent of our 1,400 restrooms and 10 of those were related to vandalism and illegal drug use.

So again, to recap during the second week in August of 2025, a hot summer week and the busiest time of year for our parks, only three percent of our fountains and four percent of our public restroom buildings were temporarily closed or in need of repair.

As we all know Parks restrooms are intensively used and some sites can be challenging to maintain. The condition of any restroom can vary throughout the day, depending on the ebb and flow of park uses, staffing patterns and other factors.

The reality is that a public restroom can go from clean to unacceptable in moments, especially given that these facilities are subject to inappropriate usage and as we just discussed vandalism. Despite these challenges, we're extremely proud that the inspections led by our Parks Inspection program reflect over 90 percent acceptable ratings from both

litter and amenities at our public restrooms citywide.

The rigorous parks data - excuse me, the rigorous data driven Parks Inspection Program, otherwise known as PIP, is independently administered by our operations and management planning division. The condition of parks and parks futures including drinking fountains and restrooms is subject to over 6,000 detailed inspections throughout the year. The results of these inspections, alongside 311 reports and staff observations, are shared with management to inform decisions about resource allocation.

In line with the agencies long standing commitment to transparency, historic PIP data for individual parks are available on our public website, in addition to citywide and borough performance data. Detailed line-item inspection data, including information about individual public restrooms inspection is also available on the NYC Open Data Portal.

In addition to the agencies Park Inspection program, our park supervisors also conduct regular inspections on parks and amenities they oversee.

Further, the consistent presence of Parks maintenance

staff allows us to identify and address problematic conditions and concern in a timely manner.

Turning to the topic of the legislation being discussed today, Introduction 1425 would require the creation of a report on staffing levels of our Parks Enforcement Patrol Officers and Urban Park Rangers. The safety of our patrons parks and public facilities is our highest priority. Our staff works hard to enforce public rules and make sure park visitors are safe and comfortable. This is primarily the per view of our agencies Parks Enforcement Patrol, also known as PEP, whose enforcement efforts generally focus on quality-of-life offenses and deterring patrons from violating parks rules through education. They are impaired to issue summonses for violations of parks property, including those related to street trees and have the authority to make arrests, when necessary, as they are designated as New York State Peace Officers and NYC Special Patrolmen. Though they do not carry firearms, our PEP officers are equipped with ballistic vests, batons, handcuffs and pepper spray, as they patrol by bike, horseback, car and on foot. To amplify our ongoing effort to recruit and hire new PEP officers, I am pleased to share the

agency just launched a new marketing campaign, including printed materials and subway ads based on the theme, protecting parks, protecting people, building trust. We would welcome the Council's partnership in helping us get the word out to New Yorkers about these great job opportunities and would be happy to share these materials electronically. For your offices to pass onto constituents through social media and district newsletters.

Alongside our PEP team, our agency also fills a Corp of urban park rangers, who like their parks enforcement patrol counterparts are also designated as special patrolman and New York State Peace Officers and are trained at the agencies Urban Park Service Academy. Though rangers typically focus on education, helping to lead a larger variety of environmental programs and outdoor recreation programs for the public, rangers also serve a valuable enforcement presence, performing patrol and responding to animal conditions, particularly in our urban areas.

As the New York City Police Department carries out their mission to protect the public and ensure the safety of New Yorkers across the city, including

within parks, NYC Parks works in close partnership with NYPD to strengthen and streamline enforcement efforts. Our local park managers and borough commissioners are in constant contact with NYPD leadership, though their staffing is relatively modest compared to the number of NYPD officers, our efforts are primarily focused on enforcing park rules. Our PEP officers and rangers play a substantial role in responding to emergencies within parks and other properties under the jurisdiction of parks.

These have ranged from saving accident victims from burning vehicles, to providing crowd control during weather events, such as wildfires or administering first aid to park visitors in medical need.

Throughout the diligent work for our PEP officers and rangers, as well as incredible supportive NYPD and other partners, the park experience would be greatly diminished. Everyday we work to ensure that park rule and regulations are being upheld and that a helping hand can be provided to partners in need.

Regarding the specifics of the legislation itself, we have been able to discuss with the

Councils primary sponsor, we do have some concerns about the current version as it was initially introduced, and we look forward to working with Council to address these concerns and work together to achieve our shared goals. Thank you for allowing us to testify before you today and for your continued advocacy and support of our city parks. We will now be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much for your testimony and again, we appreciate all the hard work that you all do for our parks every single day. I've got some questions but I'm going to ask some now then turn over to my colleagues to ask some questions as well.

So, I just want to first you know in a more Lamons way, kind of get a sense of what the issues are the work that Parks Department is doing for our bathrooms and water fountains. So, if I'm correct, there are I think in the testimony too, 3,400 water fountains that the Parks Department maintains and about 700 bathrooms, right?

MARK FOCHT: Correct, we have 3,400 new drinking fountains, 700 bathrooms buildings, which have 1,400 bathrooms in them.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I see.

MARK FOCHT: So, we count those buildings and the public restrooms. We use the 1,400 number because that's the number of actual public restrooms we have to maintain.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Right, okay, so 1,400 restrooms, 700 water fountains. Uhm, and I think what you talked about too before was that during the peak of summer, only about three percent of the water fountains were not working?

MARK FOCHT: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And what was the statistic for bathrooms? How many - you know I would suppose summer big time. How many were not working and how many were working then?

MARK FOCHT: So, four percent, so 27 out of the 1,400 bathrooms were either had a fixture in it or the entire room was closed. So, often times when a fixture like a urinal is not working, the rest of the bathroom will still be open.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Uh huh.

MARK FOCHT: But during that intense second week in August, 27 bathrooms of the 1,400 which is about

three percent, had either a damaged fixture or were fully closed.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it, okay. So, how are you all tracking when you find out bathrooms are not working and water fountains are not working? Are those 311 calls that are coming in and that's how you know or how - what is that three percent or four percent that you're talking about?

MARK FOCHT: Sure, thank you Council Member. The figure is largely from our own staff because our staff is in these public facilities, specifically bathrooms, a minimum of three times a day. We unlock them in the morning, we're cleaning them at least once a day, often times multiple times a day and then we're closing them. And as I noted in my testimony, conditions can change in a moments notice. So, a staff member can go in, it's perfectly clean, it's fine, maybe they cleaned it up a little bit. They walk out, they go to do some other work in the park, and they come back in to find the public restroom has a mess in it.

So, uhm they then report in through our central communications, what's called pages. Uhm, and that's how we track it. So, for example, that's how I was

able to tell you that 14 public restrooms were closed or damaged or in fact, this weekend I just went through all the pages from Saturday and Sunday and saw how many were -

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And I have no doubt as I mentioned before that you all are doing the best job you can with the resources, limited resources you have and so are the parks workers too. One thing I wonder about is and I think that number is obviously affected by what complaints are being filtered off. And so, what the parks workers see at a given time right is what you'll report on your end? Because anecdotally and I suspect other colleagues will say the same thing too, we always here from - there are many more New Yorkers using the Parks, then parks workers, right?

MARK FOCHT: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And so, anecdotally we hear, I myself hear uhm the water fountain is not working or parks you know bathroom is not being opened when they should be open. And so, one, you know I think it's just the fact that the number is higher than what you all seen and I - part of maybe that just you all are seeing what workers are

reporting, which you know they will do as best that they can but I wonder if there's a way to involve all New Yorkers some way in filtering up our reports when parks bathrooms are not open when they should be or they're not working. So, you all are capturing more of that information because I think two things are happening. One, I have a sense the number is actually higher than the reporting number coming in. And two, there's also a perception issue of what the parks bathrooms are. There are some real issues there too and so, I wonder if there's a way or a thought to or a comprehensive way to capture that data or even concerns for New Yorkers who are using the parks at any given time.

MIKE FOCHT: Sure, well, thank you for the question or the statement. I will say that uhm, the primary source is our own staff because again, we're in the buildings. We are constantly responding to 311 concerns from elected officials. So, there are many routes into to already report through our website, through digital media, through our social media presence.

So, we respond to things as soon as we hear about them. Again, I will emphasize that the nature of

keeping a public restroom clean changes in a moment. So, again we can go in and clean it. Someone can report it; it's soiled or dirty. Our staff goes back and cleans it and practically closes out that request before it even gets up through a page. Particularly for our facilities where we have what are called fixed post staff or the staff is - and you know our systems well. Where that staff is assigned to that place, particularly let's take a small playground that has one of our smaller swimming pools and during the summer. We have fixed post staff there and they are constantly rotating through that public restroom in addition to maintaining the playground and you know like trash and things.

So, there are multiple ways we get the information. Whenever we get the information, we respond to it immediately and if it's cleanliness, it's cleaned up right then and there. Obviously, if it's vandalism or it requires a plumber to come out, then it takes longer.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Right, right, and I have no doubt that you all are responding as best as you can. I just - the information is only as good as what the inputs that you are getting in right?

MIKE FOCHT: Right, of course.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And so, the parks workers, maybe the 311 that come in too, those are all good sources. Uhm, but I do wonder if there are ways and we should talk more about it too, if we can expand the amount of inputs that you're getting, so that you know sometimes people don't call 311 when they should because understandably, they're not sure if it will go anywhere and that's always an issue with 311. But you know I do wonder if there was and I always think about it in the context of you know when I was a housing lawyer for tenants before. You know when we go to court, sometimes what we hear is you know well, there's no 311 complaint or there's no HPD violation. That doesn't mean the violation isn't there. I mean it wasn't actually recorded but there could still be violations and issues and the pictures from my former clients and tenants who show that.

So, I do and there's that little bit of a gap between you know what's happening in real time and what actually gets reported but I'd love to talk to you all a little bit more about are there ways to expand perhaps the legislation otherwise the inputs

that you all are getting, so you can kind of more accurately in real time track this information.

Uhm, now when it comes to the inspections themselves and when you have a failed inspection for a bathroom or a water fountain, what are the most common factors that are a result in those kinds of inspections? What are you all seeing on the ground or hearing about?

MARK FOCHT: Yeah, thank you. Uhm, we're very proud of our PIP Inspection program. The Parks Inspection Program. I'm going to turn it over to Director Alex Butler to respond to that question.

ALEX BUTLER: Thank you, Council Member. Are you asking about restrooms and drinking fountains?

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yes.

ALEX BUTLER: So, for restrooms -

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: If you don't mind speaking into the mic a little bit more so we can hear you.

ALEX BUTLER: For restrooms we have a four-feature inspection program and we're looking at the presence of litter, graffiti, and also a structural condition and amenities, which are with soap, toilet paper and a working hand dryer. And there is a sort of a various calculus by which different missing

things or damaged things can affect both a feature and the entire buildings rating.

The most common causes of an inspection failure for a restroom would be a missing amenity. It's a very strict standard, so there's missing liquid soap or missing toilet paper in either of the rooms, it's a failure for that amenities feature, immediate and if there's a total of four missing amenities across the two rooms let's say one room is missing toilet paper and liquid soap. Another one, malfunctioning hand dryer and missing liquid soap, that would be a failure for the building. Just for amenities alone.

Other causes would be some combination of missing amenities, maybe one missing amenity and moderate litter in one room. That would also sort of affect the calculus of the ratings and result in a building failure. And then a third way that is common for our restrooms to fail and again, not many of them are failing and I'm happy to say that as Commissioner Focht pointed out, they tend to be in the 90 percent passing for amenities and for cleanliness but would be inadequate lighting. So, if an inspector goes into a restroom and finds one of the lightbulbs is out, that could be a safety issue and that's

considered a priority one and that would impact ratings immediately.

For drinking fountains, we're looking at first of all, is there water at all? We're looking at, is it constantly running? Is there high pressure or low pressure and is the bubbler damaged in some other way? The bubbler is the button that you press or is the drain clogged?

And in those situations, most common again, most of our drinking fountains are in great shape. Most common would be no water service and again, that could be due to larger issues in the park with the water service, not just that one drinking fountain or the drain clogged. You know kids are putting things like sand or water pollutants and stuff like that. So, those are the most common things we find with drinking fountains.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And uh just going back to the point before about 311 complaints coming into. Is it a common occurrence to get 311 complaints about bathrooms or water fountain functionality. Do you have any numbers on how many people with complaints within a year or for a month on those issues and

provide or any data on the average time it takes for Parks to respond to those concerns?

MARK FOCHT: We don't have specific - we can get you specific - we can get you specific data on 311. We know that for all 311 complaints that come into parks, 70 to 80 percent of all 311 issues are related to trees, so it is as you know we've had this conversation right. So, it is only 20 to 30 percent are related to all other aspects of parks and so, relation uh drinking fountains and restrooms will be a small subset of that.

As far as our responsiveness, again if it's a cleanliness issue, it's addressed immediately. So, because again, it will be cleaned up either as soon as we learn about it or when we come to close the restroom because we're not closing a dirty restroom and every one of our 1,400 restrooms is locked up at night.

So, before they're locked up, they're checked and inspected and make sure the toilet paper is there and they're clean if they need to be before they're locked up. So, cleanliness issues will be addressed within the same day, within hours. Again, structural issues could take days to upwards of one month if we

1 have to order parts. You know again, I read you some
2 of the vandalism from this weekend. The one restroom
3 in Staten Island, that had all of the stalls ripped
4 off. You know we're going to have to order new stall
5 dividers and new doors. I don't yet know that only
6 happened yesterday. I don't know how long it's going
7 to take to replace those. So, it's very difficult to
8 put an amount of time on the structural repairs.
9

10 But again, in that typical week in August that we
11 looked at 20 percent of the structural work was done
12 within 7 days and the remaining of that 50 percent
13 was completed within a month.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay, okay, now the
15 Council's investigation into that last year found
16 that 24 percent of restrooms lacked baby changing
17 stations. 30 percent of men's restrooms lack baby
18 changing stations compared to 17 percent of women's
19 restrooms. I, myself, my kids were in the diaper
20 changing phase experienced that very well.

21 In 2023, the Council passed Local Law 56, which
22 in part required that by December 31, 2027, all park
23 bathrooms have a diaper changing station installed.
24 How is the Parks Department complying with this law
25

and are you on track to meet its requirements by 2027?

MARK FOCHT: Yeah, thank you very much for the question. I'm very proud to report, we have completed the installation of over 600 baby changing tables, which is every place that they could fit. So, we have met the obligations of the legislation three years ahead of the December 2027 deadline.

The legislation did carve out two exceptions. One was if there's no physical wall space, because some of our small restrooms, there's literally no wall space to put a baby changing table because you have a sink, you have a hand dryer, you have a window, you have a heater. So, that was carved out of legislation. Then also as you may recall, any places that are subject to repeat vandalism, we are not obligated to keep putting a changing table back in that space, only to have it vandalized again. But we have - we purchased over 700, so about 100 extra. We installed 600 and we completed the mandate of the legislation three years ahead of the timeline.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: That's good to hear. Now, let's go back to looking at the barriers to improving the parks bathrooms and water fountains. Putting a

side funding, which I know is the big issue moving over or for all of us, what are you know given the results of the surveys that we've done as mentioned before. Council Member Brewer did as well and the parks in her district too. What are the main barriers causing these issues outside of funding. What are areas or ways that the city could be helpful in supporting you all as an agency to help with this issue. How is that a funding of course?

MARK FOCHT: Thank you. I think two issues that immediately come to mind. One is the age of our infrastructure. As we've talked about, many of our public restrooms date back to Robert Moses era. The 20 by 20 small public restrooms we have, vary in age and infrastructure. But as I did note in my testimony, we're building or renovating 131 new public restrooms, so we're renovating a lot of those. That happens you know older infrastructure clogs easier, breaks more frequently, results in even more closures.

So, certainly we see a much higher level of closures at our older public restrooms than at our newer ones. Our newer ones are hardly ever closed for structural issues for clogs. The other issue and

I'm sorry to have to keep mentioning it but it is the vandalism. We have seen a significant increase in vandalism in our public restrooms ever since the pandemic. So, for the last four to five years. And again, 10 of the 14 closures this weekend were related to vandalism, and there's really nothing we can do about that. You know sites that are staffed, may tend to have less vandalism in them. But again, also I mentioned intravenous drug use. As it gets warmer, more intravenous drug users tend to go into our public restrooms to use drugs and then they often flush their needles down the toilet and that clogs up the piping. We recently went into a public restroom in a certain borough where the toilet wasn't flushing and our plumbers had to disconnect the toilet and found over 100 syringes flushed down the toilet.

So, you know those are two of the things that we encounter. Certainly, the vandalism and the intravenous drug use we encounter on almost a daily basis in our public restrooms. The age of our infrastructure, we are really addressing through a fairly robust capital budget and 131 new or renovated restrooms.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Uhm, you know that actually is my next question, which was you know what because of the aging infrastructure, I think that's right. What kind of capital investments have you all planned to make? There's another tension though, which is that capital found it to be very, very, expensive.

I know that the Portland Lou pilot, you know at some degree I supposed they helped address that, but they can also be expensive to if I remember correctly.

So, what are the capital investments that are being made and how do you resolve that tension between the expense and the duration of those capital projects with the fact that they're also needed as well?

MARK FOCHT: Yeah, no thank you very much for the question. I think uhm, going back several years ago when we've had these conversations and these hearings, it's been all about the bricks and mortar building and in costing x-millions of dollars and taking x-amount of time.

So, we've expanded our concept of what a public restroom is in basically four different ways. We

1 still have our standard bricks and mortar public
2 restroom, which is a contractor going out, unionized
3 contractors going out and building a new building.
4 So, there's a number of those that are online. We
5 also then are going to prefab modular units. These
6 are public restrooms that look just like our bricks
7 and mortar one but are built in a factory and then
8 trucked on to site and craned into place.

9
10 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Those are the Port Lou?

11 MARK FOCHT: No, no, no, these are full public
12 restrooms. You couldn't tell the difference between
13 one built in site and one in built in factory and we
14 opened our first one at Luis Lopez Playground in
15 Staten Island and we have another one, two, three,
16 about five of them in process right now. So, these
17 are prefab in a factory.

18 Then we get to our single occupants prefabricated
19 what we call the Lou; we're not using the port ones
20 but-

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I was wondering about that
22 as I said it. It's our own thing. It's a trend
23 here.

24 MARK FOCHT: We just call it the Lou. Uhm, so
25 yes, so that's a pilot program, one in each borough.

1 They've been open. They have been functioning now
2 since the spring. Been very successful, people
3 really like them. It is a pilot program because we
4 want to go through one entire 12-month season to see
5 how they work in the winter. In the spring, you know
6 get through every season before we decide to expand
7 it. It was very successful. Again, they're prefab
8 you got to bring in the plumbing but then you just
9 anchor it.
10

11 We're also looking at trailers, so this would be
12 bringing in public restroom trailers. Very nice,
13 very high in trailers that are brought in and then
14 kind of encased in architecture, so they look more
15 like a building. They don't look like a trailer and
16 we're testing the first one of those at Gateway
17 Estates in Brooklyn. So, there's at least four
18 different ways we're looking at it and then the final
19 way is composting toilets. There's a lot of
20 challenges with that because you have to have certain
21 permit abilities in the soil, but we do have
22 composting toilets both in Prospect Park and Fresh
23 Kills. So, we have a broad range now through our
24 architectural, through our capital division that's
25

looking at how to get more public restrooms built quickly and for the best cost we can get.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yeah, okay and just a couple more questions before I turn it over to my colleagues for their questions.

One is you know going back to our workforce. We know that the Parks Department workforce is almost ended. They need more support resources and we, the city, owe them a huge debt of gratitude and I frequently speak about that because I think that deserve even more recognition and attention always. How many park staffers are focused on parks maintenance and how many park properties have fixed post crews? I know we talked about that before and how do you decide which parks get that and how to increase the number of parks that have those fixed posts and staffing?

MARK FOCHT: Sure, thank you for the question. So, uhm during off peak season, which we're in now during the winter months, we have about 2,900 maintenance staff or MNO staff. And then during peak season, that goes to about 4,800. So, it's not quite double but it's almost double by adding seasonal staff.

During the off season, we don't have seasonal staff, so during the off season, our staff is made up of full-time staff and our workforce development or the parks opportunity program staff. In the summer, then we add seasonals. So, we about double. So again, 2,900 to about 4,800 from peak - from off peak to peak and then of course back to off peak.

How we decide where there are fixed posts, you first need a building to fix post staff because when staff shows up at a site, you need to give them a place to hang up their coat, to seek shelter during a thunderstorm. So, our sites that do not have buildings in them cannot be fixed posts because there's literally no place for the staff to report to.

So, if there is a building in a park, we consider fix posting it. In the off season, such as now, we fix posts about 20 percent of our sites. During the peak season, we can fix posts about 50 percent of our sites because we had that seasonal staff. Almost all of our seasonal staff go to fix posting sites are augmenting those sites that are not fixed post during the winter.

So, again the key to fix posting is making sure there's a building where people can report to, right?

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, then if only about 50 percent have them, how do you track the problems that the other 50 percent that don't have fixed posts? How do you make sure that you are getting the information on those parks that don't have any fixed posts?

MARK FOCHT: Thank you for that. So, there are several ways. One is the daily visits by our mobile crews. So, if a site is not maintained by a fixed post staff, it's maintained by a mobile crew. So, a staff will report to their muster location in the morning. They'll get their assignment. It's all on an app we call Daily Tasks and it tracks them from site to site. So, they'll drive from site to site and clean that site. So, again it's a moment in time but it is a moment in time every day that they're on that site and cleaning that site and reporting any issues above what they can do. So, if it's a structural issue that report into the trades. We then also have our PIP inspection data. We also have every month our parks supervisors inspect every one of their sites, so that's 12 additional inspections

on top of the PIP inspections. Our 1,100 playgrounds are inspected twice a year, very detailed by certified playground instructors that look at every nut, every bolt to make sure everything is safe. That means every playground is inspected 14 times a year on top of the PIP inspections. And then we have the 311 data, the x - the twitter feeds, the social media, everything that comes in through electeds and community members and community boards and community board managers. So, it is a broad array that we get information but again, it's principally our staff being at every site every day.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. I'm going to go with my colleague now for some questions. We'll start with Council Member Zhuang.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Thank you and I want to thank everyone here to testify and I know it's not an easy job. And for the vandalism, you said that we're not able to do anything. Is a PEP officer able to help with this issue?

MARK FOCHT: Thank you, Council Member. Uhm, it's probably a bit premature to say there's nothing we can about it. Of course, our PEP officers serve such as critical role for the agency and public

safety, but I will turn it over to the Assistant Commissioner for Urban Park Service Asha Harris.

ASHA HARRIS: Hi, good afternoon. Thank you, Council Member. We do work closely with our operations team in regard to where the vandalism is happening. We do have our central communications team, so we get those pages that Commissioner Focht mentioned and we do look to increase patrols as a deterrent or to address those conditions as we see them. So, it is something that our teams work closely together to work to address and then we also work closely with the NYPD, if we think that there's something else going on that's crime related, we do work with our counterparts at NYPD as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Thank you but I actually see it myself; we have a group of young kids riding like dirt bikes, really dirt bikes in my parks and then we called PEP officer coming if one left. I think if there are more PEP officers there then it probably will be less better than which area, which borough and which - any particular parks have more vandalism than the other area?

ASHA HARRIS: Can you repeat the question? I'm sorry, you started with two parts, I just want to make sure I understand.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: So, is any particular area - like say in which borough has more vandalism than the other borough or which area, neighborhood, different neighborhood.

ASHA HARRIS: I wouldn't necessarily say it's neighborhood specific. There are times where we will see it in one playground, in one park, so it varies. Part of our job is to see where we have trends and see what's happening and then again deploy our staff to address it based on what's coming in. So, whether it's through 311 data, whether it's through employee observation, we were actually seeing it, right? It really depends on what we're seeing and that would determine how we address it.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: So, for right now, about the vandalism, which - who in Parks Department handle with this issue?

MATT DRURY: Council Member to clarify, do you mean sort of like repairing and like cleaning afterwards?

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Cleaning up. Cleaning up.

MATT DRURY: Yeah, so that would - so the cleaning and responding to the like correcting the vandalism so to speak, which can be you know graffiti or it can be you know something that's damaged. That's generally handled by our maintenance and operations team in terms of like the actual repair and the Commissioner can correct me if I'm wrong. I'm not aware that there's any large disparity by borough in where we're seeing those instances. I think that happens, you know it's an unfortunate occurrence, but I think it does happen around the city, and I don't believe that there's any disparity by borough that I'm aware of.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Is it right not enough PEP Officers in each borough?

MATT DRURY: Okay, so PEP enforcement, right? And so -

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sorry, one second.

MATT DRURY: I'm sorry.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: It's only a text. Keeping us on our toes.

MATT DRURY: Sorry, so turning to enforcement, which is an excellent question. Generally speaking, and the Commissioner can talk more about this that our deployment is equal by borough generally speaking with Staten Island, a little bit less because there's lower population there, but the remaining four boroughs have essentially roughly equivalent contingent for each of the other boroughs.

COUNCIL MEMEBR ZHUANG: Does every borough have the same number of parks or same square footage of parks?

MATT DRURY: No, they don't nor do they have the same population. So, there's a variety of different factors that come into that. Nor do those boroughs see the same intensity of its parks being used like for example. So, there's a variety of different factors that come into play beyond you know just number of parks or the type of what those you know properties look like. There are a variety of factors, and the Commissioner can speak more to this about how they make their deployment decisions. If you want to jump in Asha.

ASHA HARRIS: So, uhm as mentioned there is a variety, right? So, it really depends again on

what's coming in, what complaints we're getting. If there is a moped issue, a vending issue, depending on what the quality-of-life concern is that would determine how our teams are deployed and where they're needed at a particular time and deployments change on a regular basis.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you very much.
Council Member Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. You're all great but Ms. Harris was really great at Columbus Circle. I just want you to know, you're all okay but she's really spectacular.

Uhm, I've spent hours with the water fountains. We have a bill that over the next ten years, we have to come up with 50 more. How many plumbers are assigned in the Borough of Manhattan? I know the answer, so I want to hear what you have to say.

MARK FOCHT: I was going to thank you for the Council Member.

CHAIRPERSON BREWER: No, no, no, no, I don't want all that.

MARK FOCHT: I don't know the answer off the top of my head, but we will get you that number.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: About two.

MARK FOCHT: Actually, I think it's -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, I need an answer - if you can get the answer before the end of the hearing, that would be helpful. That's the problem. You have too few plumbers because with all due respect to you three percent or only the ones broken, when I just did a study in Riverside Park, just in Riverside Park, 26 percent of the water fountains don't work at all.

In Central Park, 77 percent drain poorly or not at all and in playground, many in school yards, they're not all yours, one in five, 20 percent are out of order and then 17 fountains are closed due to construction, 15 fountains listed on the city websites were actually inside the Parks Department offices and therefore inaccessible and 17 listed in city data were not there at all. So, there's a problem with your listing. There's a problem I have to say with your statistics. I personally, if it's a little tiny little dribble, that doesn't work. You got to have something that you can get your water bottle and you're able to drink. You have a water fountain problem, and I think part of it is the lack of plumbers.

1 In Sol Bloom, it's brand new. That's one of your
2 playgrounds. You push the button; you push the
3 button. It doesn't happen. You call Parks, they
4 come and fix it, it doesn't work, they come back, it
5 doesn't work. Parents say it doesn't work at all and
6 it's new. You really have a water fountain issue,
7 and I think people want the water fountains to work.
8 So, I'm just wondering, also how much do they cost
9 water fountains? I know the answer to that too.

11 MATT DRURY: Yeah, we, we, see I apologize. We
12 testified to this at the previous hearing or maybe
13 you've updated the number through other sources. I
14 apologize, I can't recall the number off hand, except
15 to note that it's pretty rare that a water fountain
16 installation happens sort of in and by itself. Like
17 it's normally part of a larger capital project. So,
18 it can be a little difficult to sort of extract
19 accurately across.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, we put in for PB,
21 participants or rebudgeting if people want them and
22 uhm, we thought you know \$375,000 for three. Yet, it
23 only covers two. Okay, divide 375 in half and that's
24 what you - that's too much. That's a lot. So, and
25 that's not part of a capital project, I understand

that. So, what is kind of your overall strategy of water fountains? Because I do think your three percent is a little off.

MATT DRURY: Well, in terms of their condition and care, obviously we're happy to take a closer look at the study reference to uh that you conducted.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I said it to you a long time ago Matt.

MATT DRURY: Okay we'll re-look at it.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, alright.

MATT DRURY: But uh but in terms of making sure that they're either new or replaced, that is sort of - we consider that an ongoing effort where any opportunity, like let's say a playground has the opportunity. We get the funding inline. We always make sure that the water fountains we take look at our capital designers, make a look at you know, do additional locations make sense? What should those water fountains look like? You know bottle filler you know versus you know others you know sometimes there's -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We were told we can't get bottle filler. We cannot get them in the amazingly expensive water fountain. We can only get the water,

apparently it will be enough of an opportunity that the bottle will be able to be filled by the regular.

MATT DRURY: Well, I mean, not to - well, two things. A, I'm sure that a bottle filling capacity makes a water fountain installation more expensive. That's probably true, it's added functionality.

I've also successfully been able to fill bottles at a normal water fountain as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Exactly.

MATT DRURY: You know so we hear you loud and clear. The capital projects in New York City are certainly very expensive.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, so are you going to - are you thinking about my 50 new water fountains over the next ten years?

MATT DRURY: Yes, thinking about it. It's going quite well. I think we are on track, very well on track. We'll be happy to keep you posted with that success as we move along.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, bathrooms; so, we did a study there too. It didn't come out to well. That was done by the fabulous oversight and investigations team. They went to all five boroughs, and you know two thirds, 68 of 102 were closed or had

health and safety issues and that report was issued August of 2024, and I think you have a copy of it. So, my question, three questions, first of all, it would seem to me that I mean you have your new ideas and that's great. In Manhattan, I don't know about Brooklyn but there are a lot of I would say you know restored - have to be restored because there's a part of landmark parks, so you're not going to get a Lou or Portland or whatever the hell that things is called. Uhm, so my suggestion would be to instead of doing one by one by one, they're going from \$5 million to \$13 million per bathroom. Those are the estimates I have, \$5 million to \$13 million so my suggestion would be to take a look at all of your must be restored. Again, it may not be in every park and try to do them in some kind of a massive master plan, because then you could perhaps, I don't know save money on the work. Is that being considered? Because right now, the septic situation is a mess. I can't even think of what it costs when it's landmarked. I understand it needs special attention, but what is the way - there are 12 such in Fort Washington and Riverside Park alone. All of which need massive work, all landmarks or at least historic

districts. So, what are we doing about those and anybody else that's in that situation.

MATT DRURY: Yeah, I think I would characterize the agency does its best to take - we do have a good sense of I think our restrooms as inventory class for lack of a better term and as funding becomes available, we certainly do our best to target you know the areas that are most - in most dire need and that's informed by our PIP inspections. That's informed by you know staff observation, just you know 311 requests. A variety of data points that come into us. And further, we are actually exploring some really interesting opportunities through the design build initiative involving sort of the bundling of projects. So, that's I think one - we're hoping that's going to be one avenue to see some efficiencies on the cost side.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Does that go for all? Could you look at that as a master plan for all of them that are in this situation?

MATT DRURY: I think right now, we're going to gauge the success of the design build effort. You know as a pretty nice templet, a pilot of you will

and I think there's a lot of optimism about that approach.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, I mean a lot of the design build, it's not a new concept. I mean DDC's been using it - blah, blah, blah.

MATT DRURY: Sure, I mean the city was only granted authority to do it whatever it was like two years ago or so, so I mean we're sort of in early stages here but we're you know we're very excited.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Hillside Park is doing it. Hours of operations. I know you mentioned they're open all the time but if you're playing in the baseball in the evening, it's not open and yet that's when the kids need to go to the bathroom.

So, I'm just saying your hours of operation, I get complaints all the time are not necessarily because you don't have the staffing. They're not necessarily the same time as when people are in that are. Is that something that can be addressed?

MARK FOCHT: Yeah, thank you for the comment. I would like to address it because I think it's a missed perception. Uhm, our bathrooms are open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. during the winter months, then when we get to April, they're open to 5:00. Excuse

me, when we get to March, they're open to 5:00. We follow daylight.

So, March they're open to 5:00. April they're open to 6:00, May they're open to 7:00. Then when we get to Memorial Day, Labor Day, they're open to 7:00 unless we have a second shift staff there, then they're open to 9:00 p.m... Now, you have a bathroom that's open 13 hours a day from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m....

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: If you have staff.

MARK FOCHT: If it has second shift staff but we just got additional funding, thank you to the Mayor and Council for funding 100 additional sites for second shift. So, now we're at 200 sites and 121 parks. And then as we start to lose daylight, so you're going from 9:00 or 7:00.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What happens if the lights are on in the park?

MARK FOCHT: I'm sorry, what?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The lights, you know lights. If the lights are on in the park, they're going to be open late. I'm just saying. It's not just dusk and night, people play at night.

MARK FOCHT: I know.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm trying to find - I'm trying to give you what people care about. You know I understand your concerns.

MARK FOCHT: We also hear it, absolutely. We have staff that work up to and to shifts 13 to 14 hours a day in two shifts to keep our sites clean and safe and open then and to close them online approximately with daylight hours.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

MARK FOCHT: And so, we wind down in the fall back to 4:00 p.m. by December.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, so I guess my suggestion would be again using algorithm, looking at the permit office. What is available permit-wise. Who has again, throw in the lights and see if you can make sure; that is a constant issue and my guess is people are just peeing in the park, because there's no place else to go.

MARK FOCHT: Well, I will say, we keep public restrooms open when we know there is a permitted athletic activity at a field. So, if a little league has pulled a permit or any group has pulled a permit and that field is supported by a public restroom, that public restroom is left open no later than 10:00

p.m. because we're not going to have staff out after 10:00 p.m....

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Listen, I don't - I get a different sense, so that might be true. If I'm wrong, I will let you know but I will also bring to your attention that the little leagues often do not have a place to pee.

Alright, my uhm, I guess my last question is, when you know like are you going to give us - you'll have x-number of plumbers? Are you confident that you have enough? Do you think that this is an issue? Is that something that you're looking at? We obviously want you to get more money. You know we definitely want you to get more money, and we will hopefully work on that. That one percent is no joke. We need it but is the plumber something that's hard to hire? Obviously private sectors make more money. I know exactly in my house how much I pay that damn plumber. So, I know that they're expensive and they probably make less money at Parks but again, there's some advantages. I think you need more plumbers. What are you doing about that?

MARK FOCHT: So, uhm we do substantially increase a number of plumbers with our seasonal staff. So, we

hire extensively trades. Let me go back to answer your first question. We generally do not have difficulty hiring skill trades. While you are true, the salaries are less than what they would get in the private sector. Obviously, a pension, health care, all the other benefits are very different than what they would get in the private sector.

We generally do not have an issue hiring trades and particularly plumbers and electricians we have really no issue hiring. Other trades are little bit more difficult. So, I think we are fine with the number of plumbers we have during the off season and during the peak season, they're augmented multiple times over by seasonal plumbers.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'll leave it go except to say the water fountains aren't working in many cases. The bathrooms aren't working in many cases. The bathrooms aren't working in many cases. Septic tanks are a problem, and you definitely need more help. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Council Member Brewer. I - a couple I want things I want to follow up on too. So, you know I do think that putting aside the funding limitation that are very

1 real and obviously are part of the problem. There
2 does seem to be an information gap, and I highlighted
3 it before and I think Council Member Brewer before in
4 her questions highlighted that too. The discrepancy
5 between what you all are seeing in terms of the
6 broken water fountains and bathrooms versus what for
7 example, Council Member Brewer through her own report
8 in her own district alone has shown and I know for a
9 fact in my district in Flushing Meadows Corona Park,
10 these issues come to us as well of you know,
11 facilities not working but it may not be reported to
12 parks or they're reported to us and we pass it on but
13 there is such a large discrepancy. So how do you
14 explain that difference to say for example between
15 Council Member Brewers report in her district, with
16 parks would have conservancies I might add too. So,
17 especially if you don't have conservancies as well,
18 it's a problem and difficulty for the conservancies
19 too and you can imagine parks without conservancies.
20 I know and I can imagine how much larger that is
21 going to be for me as well.

22 So, I'm just - where do you think that comes from
23 and there is an information gap, I think that's
24 really the problem.
25

MARK FOCHT: No, thank you for the question and to be clear, we don't refute any of the findings from the Council Members report. We did go out and look at all the fountains, and you know again, it's a point and time. Everything is a different situation, so the number of the fountains your staff found that weren't working. At the time we got to your report and went out, they were working because there had been a work order into repair that one or one of the ones that were clogged, you know the sand had been cleared out or the infamous balloons that kids fill with water and clogs up the thing.

We looked into a bunch of them where there was low water pressure and that happened to be the day they were inspected. DEP was doing some work in that immediate neighborhood and the entire site had low water pressure. We went to all of the ones in Riverside Park. The issue in Riverside Park, Council Members you know very well, is the age and infrastructure. It doesn't really have like the number of fountains, drinking fountains your staff found in Riverside Park that weren't working. It's not really the drinking fountains not working, it's the pipe that's coming to the drinking fountain was

1 installed in 1938 or something like that and it needs
2 massive replacement of the infrastructure underground
3 in Riverside Park. A lot of which is above the
4 amtrack tunnel, which makes it even more complicated.
5 So, again Council Member, we don't refute any of
6 these findings. We go out and we look at everything
7 that we get, whether that's from a report, such as
8 the Councilwoman's report or wherever we get it and
9 then we make the repairs, so I understand at any
10 moment and time, there could be a perceived
11 information difference, but I really don't think
12 there is. We address everything we know about. We
13 know about things from multiple sources and if
14 there's other ways that we could know faster, better
15 or more complete, I think that was how this
16 conversation started and we'd be very open to that.
17 Because we want these things to work. We want these
18 things to support park users and in fact, we have
19 amazing skill trades that can repair it. We have a
20 decent capital budget now that can make long term
21 repairs but again, we need to know about it, and we
22 need the staff to do it.

23
24 MATT DRURY: If I can, sorry just quickly. I
25 just want to interject and point to that Parks

inspection program because I think it's a really important overlay here and sort of a testament to the agencies. There's a degree to what you need to sort of step back and make sure that you're taking these systemic looks right and just to point to PIP, it's independently you know run and operated you know sort of you know very data driven, sort of what you might call like a statistic you know taking true statistical samples that we can really rely on that data. I just want to interject here because having worked for elected officials offices, it is not uncommon that we would get you know 20, 25 emails or phone calls all about the same condition. So, and I'm not saying those are obviously accurate, of course but it also built this sort of narrative sometimes in our heads that when we out there and actually explored that property or that - it was like a tipped over garbage can. Like, and I'm not diminishing you know obviously the importance of that input, but it can create in the opposite direction a little bit of an echo chamber. So, our goal and our mission is to kind of cut through that and make sure we're looking at you know sort of the facts and the data, so I just want to sort of to throw that.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: You know I think that the workers were there and I'm talking in my own district too with the issues that come to me. I've been fortunate with excellent workers at Travis Park that respond right away but my concern is about you know it's not making it's way to our Commissions office. If it doesn't have the staff, how do we you know make sure that that park, those amenities are or the facilities are getting the inspections and maintenance that they need to? And you know there could be some equity challenges there as well, right. Those parks that may not have either the officers, they don't have the parks groups that can help amplify those concerns but they're used and often times it does break down across you know neighborhoods depending on where you live, you know that quality of the restrooms but you know we should have a conversation about ways that we can increase information getting to you all too.

Uh, I do want to also before Council Member Zhuang's questions. Council Member Holden had a question as well and you know virtually because we don't have a quorum, he can't ask directly so I'm going to ask them for him and his question is, while

restrooms are closed during reconstruction, why not have portable toilets attached to the contracts? In Juniper Valley Park for example, the restrooms are under reconstruction, and they told him that they can't get it worked out and I know for a fact how used, heavily used Juniper Park is. I mean you all know it too. So, that seems like a you know now it happens to have a used park without bathroom access. It's like a big challenge, so I'm wondering what Council Member Holden was wondering, what efforts were made about that.

MARK FOCHT: Thank you. Holden, Chair, it's a great question. Uhm, I want to clarify, there's two ways to look at this with portable restrooms.

There are possibilities and there are times when we built in the capital budget a renovation of a building to being in a portable restroom trailer, which you're familiar with, which is the most equivalent to changing out a public restroom. That would assume that the capital project does not include replacement of the water and waste lines that serve the public restroom. So, in another words, if we don't have to replace all the lines from the

street, then we can tap into the existing systems by putting a trailer there.

If the project involves replacement of all the lines and you can't bring a trailer in because there's no way to hook up water and sewer to a trailer, then we could bring in a porta potties, porta johns. You know they're not often well received by the public. They're subject to a very high level of abuse, including being tipped over and things like that, set a fire and they're also not capitally eligible, so we can't build them in to the capital budget for that project the way we can build in a trailer.

So, we can look at doing it more, but it becomes a little bit more complicated because if we don't have the utilities it has to be porta potties, which is expense funded and a significant cost over let's say a year, a year and a half to build a building. A significant cost in having the company come in and service them, empty them, clean them, restock them daily ideally during the peak season. So, that's not an insubstantial cost.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, then what happens in a situation like with Juniper Valley Park for example.

Did they go without a bathroom during the renovation or?

MARK FOCHT: We generally direct them to the nearest bathroom in that same park. Uhm, so we generally put up signage that indicate where the nearest bathroom is in that park and if it's like a small playground that the bathroom is the only bathroom in that playground, then we try and direct them to the nearest playground or nearest park, which in some cases maybe you know a block or two away because we have such density in these facilities.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Council Member Zhuang.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Thank you and also my question is, how many PEPS' officer we have in the city? How many in each borough? How wide of a gap there?

MATT DRURY: Sure, uhm so stepping back citywide, uhm the officers roughly about 300 around the city and the distribution is relatively even between the four boroughs. You know give or take with Staten Island contingent of being a little bit smaller, again because it will lower population there.

If I mischaracterized Commissioner Harris, please.

ASHA HARRIS: Thank you. So, we have a baseline of about 50 officers in all the boroughs with the exception of Staten Island, which has a baseline of 30. Our PEP officers are very dedicated and patrol our city parks within the assigned boroughs that they're working in. So, that's our basic number currently but we also receive funding for 100 additional lines, our one shot lines and we're very happy as the Commissioner mentioned, we have a marketing campaign out and we're very happy that we are not only launch it - we've launched that campaign but we also have already hired some of those officers, so we will be having more officers out in the field very soon.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Like when they can start in the field?

ASHA HARRIS: I actually have an academy class in currently. They're done with training on the 29th of this month. Our next class start on December 1st, and our following class has a tentative start date of January 12th. So, we're looking to have all the officers out by March of next year but again, they'll be coming out in stages as their training is completed.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: So, basically, we have 400 by March in New York City?

ASHA HARRIS: Correct. Uhm, I will though also mention that we do have a - we have to combat attrition, right? So, at any given time that number fluctuates but that would yes be the number, the 300 and also the 100 one shot.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Thank you and also, in the testimony, you guys mentioned that you have a concern about this legislation. What kind of concern?

MATT DRURY: Sure, thanks Council Member. As we were able to discuss directly, we were very grateful to have the conversation with you. We just thought there were some structural pieces related to some of the language in the way in which it was framed, drafted. You know we had a good exchange I think, and I believe we've shared some proposed edits and so, we hope that dialogue can continue. But we very much appreciate the spirit of the bill and making sure that we can report on staffing levels and things of that nature.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: And with 400 PEP officers in New York City, you think that's enough?

ASHA HARRIS: We can always do more with more.

AS mentioned, our team is very dedicated, and we are every day working to address the quality-of-life concerns in our parks. So, with that being said, if we had more, we can do more but we do a lot of great work with the number that we have and again, we're open to meeting with you separately and addressing all the concerns that you or any of the Council Members have in their district.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: That means 400 PEP officers at least I can see one PEP officer showing up in my park a week?

ASHA HARRIS: We do patrol your Council District as well as the other. I think what would be really beneficial is for us it seems like you have concerns in your district. I know about staff flow, but I think it would be helpful if we can meet and discuss the specific concerns to ensure that you're seeing the officers where you feel it's necessary.

But again, I think also with us moving, I can be for example in one park by let's say the basketball court. You might be at another part of the park. You may not necessarily see us because we are patrolling the entire property and not necessarily

1 looking at one location and that's part of what we do
2 right? Going to the playground area, stopping let's
3 see if it has a restroom by the restrooms and again,
4 we might be in a different part of the park that you
5 might be seeing concerns, so we want to make sure
6 that we're addressing it.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: I have colleagues - a lot
9 of colleagues that actually spoke to me, saying they
10 all have the same concerns. They never see PEP
11 officers and I do have people sit in the park from
12 morning to night and then they report to me, Susan,
13 this is happening, that's happening but it's very
14 rare to see any PEP officer in any one of our parks.
15 So, we would like to see more PEP officers. Thank
16 you.

17 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Council
18 Member Zhuang. Alright, thank you so much Council
19 Member Zhuang. So, is that accurate, I remember we
20 went through these numbers before at our budget
21 hearing. So, it's about 80 PEP officers per borough?

22 MATT DRURY: It's not distributed quite that way.
23 If you want to - sorry.

24 ASHA HARRIS: Yeah, so those are the again, the
25 baseline numbers. It's 50 for every borough with 30

1 for Staten Island. Again, we have uniformed ranks
2 that are on leave of absences, right? So, that would
3 be an additional number. We have people that we are
4 onboarding. So that would be an additional number.
5 Our backfill, so that's kind of where that number -

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it. I thought it was
7 50. That's kind of what I had in my head. I mean,
8 you know obviously you all have done all you can with
9 what you've got but it just - it seems shocking that
10 we only have 50 PEP officers per borough. It's
11 impossible to cover the whole borough and all its
12 parks. You know across the city with that level of
13 staffing so, you know I know they do all they can and
14 you all do to but it's a really staggering number.

15 MATT DRURY: Yeah, I mean we'll just mention it's
16 like a historical reference that when you know when
17 that was created in 1981, it was roughly 100 officers
18 and they were part time as I understand, that they
19 weren't even year around. So, I think that's you
20 know that the division obviously does incredible work
21 as you are our urban park rangers, and you know its
22 evolved over time and we are very proud of the impact
23 that they've had and the people that you know that
24 they are. So, you know beloved and provide real
25

value, but I think it's important to kind of put that in context, right? That this has always been about providing a thoughtful targeted enforcement presence. You know and where our parks are where we're really experiencing park rule violations or things of that nature. In fact, that's always been very thoughtful and frankly fairly finite. That's always been the case but we're proud and as the Commissioner said, we can always get more with more so there's that but we're very, very proud.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: That's where I think the reporting will help us to get a sense of it all. For urban park rangers, what's the breakdown per borough again?

MATT DRURY: Sure. I'll hand it over.

BONNIE MCGUIRE: Sure, hi thank you for asking that. Uhm, we have 88 staff citywide that includes -

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: 88.

BONNIE MCGUIRE: 88 total. That includes 38 fulltime baseline staff and additional 51 shot funded seasonal staff and we have 6 to 8 full time staff in each borough and an additional 10 in each borough, around 10 in each borough for our seasonal staff and that's 7 day a week coverage as well.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, that's about 16 park rangers in total per borough, about 8 of which are full time. Is that right?

BONNIE MCGUIRE: Roughly about 6 to 8 depending on the borough are full time, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Which again, just highlights there's a great need because it's clearly not enough for every borough and obviously you're doing all you can with what you have to for park rangers but 6 to 8 full time, plus 10 seasonal is woefully inadequate compared to all the parks and boroughs across the city and we'll keep pushing here in the Council to make sure that that number keeps going up. I know we in the Council are proud to fund the one-shot positions for the park rangers but to all the parks personnel, we're extraordinarily grateful and really respect all of the work that you all are doing to and hopefully we can get to a place where we have more because we need it.

Well, that concludes our questioning of you all from the panel from Parks. Thank you so much and appreciate your testimony today too and look forward to continuing to work together too. Thank you.
Thank you all.

PANEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Now, we're going to enter public testimony. Uhm, I've got to read something quickly before. I remind members of the public that this is a formal government proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As such, members of the public shall remain silent at all times. The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed from the witness table. Further, members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record. If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will have two minutes to speak on today's hearing topic, which is improving the maintenance of parks bathrooms and drinking fountains and Intro. Number 1425. If you have a written statement or additional written testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at Arms. You may also email written testimony within 72 hours of this

hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

Now, I will call up the first panel. Adam Ganser, Max Barton, and Michael Ring.

ADAM GANSER: Is this on? You can hear me? Hi, my name is Adam Ganser, I'm the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. Thank you, Chair Krishnan, for the opportunity to speak today. This hearing is focused on two basic surfaces that our Parks Department should deliver for New Yorkers, well maintained bathrooms and public safety in our safety in our city's parks. These two issues are representative of the lack of city investment across our park system, and the agencies struggle to meet our expectations.

Over the last four years, our city's leadership, both the Administration and at the City Council, has failed to prioritize city parks, failed to deliver the funding and staffing the agency needs to be successful.

Rather than focusing on that lost opportunity, I'd like to look to the future. Mayor elect Mamdani is firmly committed to dedicate one percent of the city budget for parks maintenance and operations.

This commitment to making New York affordable can start with Parks by investing in the care of our parks, recreation centers, pools, beaches, and public bathrooms, all free to the public, he can ensure that these spaces are equitably maintained, accessible and thriving. He can have an outsized impact on the quality of life for every New Yorker.

Similarly, the next speaker of the City Council has the opportunity to do what the City Council has not. Push the Administration to live up to its commitments to parks and commit itself - excuse me to reversing the decades long disinvestment in our green space.

And last, the Parks Department needs to become its own best advocate. The next Commissioner must speak up to the Council and the Administration, rather than defending itself as it has today, make clear to elected leadership and as important, to the public that it cannot meet its goals or our expectations without necessary funding and staffing. Visiting our parks is free. They are not a luxury. They are social spaces for our communities, and they are a physical reminder of the health or lack there of of our city and its residents. I can finish.

Visionary leadership at all levels of government can allow our parks system to deliver the quality-of-life New Yorkers crave but talk is cheap. Investment is needed. Our platform Parks 2030, provides the blueprint for that investment. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Next.

MAX BARTON: Thank you, Chair Krishnan, and to the rest of the Parks Committee here at the City Council. Max Barton, Labor is -

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Max, can you speak into the mic a bit more please?

MAX BARTON: Laborers Local 1010 over our 2,500 members that build New York City represent. I'm also a member of the Play Fair Coalition. I was last over here testifying September 29, 2025, joint Contracts and Parks Committee Hearing and I was listening to Council Member Erik Bottcher who shared one example of his sister who is dealing with in respect to cost of capital projects when it came these bathrooms that we're trying to maintain here. He brought up how much it would cost to renovate a restroom in De Witt Clinton Park. I'm sure you guys are aware of this one, eventually produced the number \$6 million dollars.

And I know there have been you know efforts to address these ballooning costs. We've talked about them today a little bit and I realize these efforts are still underway, but it should not be hard to fix the problem of maintaining these structures. If you build a \$6 million structure in New York City and a park, you should be prepared to maintain your investment, so that it lasts as long as humanly possible, squeeze every usable dollar out of that thing. Without maintaining these structures, you might as well be building these restrooms solely for the purpose of flushing the taxpayers dollars down the very same toilets that we just built. Uhm, it's pretty simple, investment in additional New York City Park staff would deliver immediate improvements. We need to use New York City tax dollars wisely. Let's create jobs for New Yorkers to maintain these investments that we've already made for them. The more you maintain, the less you have to reconstruct. That's pretty much it. I still got 20 seconds left, so uhm New York Parks, the Parks Department just said they can always do more with more and you said, they're not getting enough. It comes down to that. Play fair one percent. This is really obvious and

uhm, thank you for standing up for these issues. I know you guys are on our side and hopefully some of this testimony helps you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you both very much. Next, we have Merritt Birnbaum and Ann Lee.

MERRITT BIRNBAUM: Chair Krishnan and the members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing. I am Merritt Birnbaum, President and CEO of Riverside Park Conservancy. We partner with NYC Parks to steward six miles of parkland from 59th Street to 181st Street. Our park is currently home to 12 public bathrooms and 35 public drinking fountains that you heard about them from Gale Brewer earlier but only about ten percent of the facilities are at a standard that I think anyone in this room would actually want to use. The ten percent I refer to are really the ones that were built with new capital dollars as part of other parks projects as was also referenced. These are new playgrounds or our new field house and as this hearing has shown bathrooms and drinking fountains are the most basic pieces of our public infrastructure.

They're really the foundation of our health and safety and dignity as humans and in New York City

that infrastructure is failing because the city has asked parks to maintain them. A century old system without the staff or the capital to do it.

In Riverside, as we've heard time and again, families show up with toddlers and find the bathrooms locked in the middle of the afternoon because there's no parks worker to staff them. And when they're open, too many are barely functional. Last year, as the survey showed, classic playground, 8 out of the 9 urinals were out of service or a Dinosaur Playground had a broken sink and a missing toilet. These are not exotic problems and really just the most basic maintenance. But these routine fixes are not possible because there aren't enough plumbers. We don't have the boots on the ground. We need to restore and baseline parks workers and trades positions so that the bathrooms are reliably open, clean and safe.

And at the same time, we need a new capital play book, which the Council Member also raised. In our parks, particularly Riverside, many of our restroom buildings haven't seen a true overhaul since the 1940's. When NYC Park scopes out the renovations, we see the price tags in the multimillions per bathroom,

which is not sustainable. The city should launch a bundled, standardized, renovation program. Think capsule style fixtures, repetitive designs, and one contract to modernize multiple bathrooms at once, so that we can bring this Robert Moses era infrastructure into the 21st Century and do the same thing with drinking fountains. A systems level fix.

This would help us meet the 50 new park mountains by 2035. Fund the people. Lower the capital costs through smart standardization and treat the bathrooms and fountains like the core infrastructure they are. New Yorkers deserve parks where you can find a working toilet and a drink of water, every day in every neighborhood. Thank you.

ANNE LEE: Good afternoon. My name is Anne Lee and I'm speaking on behalf of the Fort Greene Park Conservancy. Thank you to the City Council Committee on Parks and Rec and Chair Krishnan for this hearing.

Fort Greene Park is heavily used throughout the year, and the current bathrooms can no longer keep up with seasonal demand. The parks bathrooms are old, difficult to maintain, and frequently require closure due to plumbing issues. In the past, the conservancy has only needed to provide porta potties for large

community events but in recent years, we've had to purchase multiple porta potties to supplement existing bathrooms just to meet demand for regular weekend use.

These challenges reflect a broader citywide issue that New York City has not provided adequate funding to repair aging restroom infrastructure or to support the staffing required to maintain these essential facilities. We strongly support the Play Fair Coalition's request to allocate more funding, to hire additional New York City Parks workers, responsible for the cleaning, maintenance and repair of parks facilities.

These facilities are vital to public health, safety, and accessibility but they're too often closed, unsanitary, unusable.

In summary, adequate staffing and resources are necessary to repair and maintain bathrooms and drinking fountains and in Fort Greene Park, and in all parks across the city. Proper investment is essential to keeping these facilities open, sanitary and safe for all who use and need them. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you both for your testimony. Merritt, I just have a question for Riverside Park Conservancy. How do you think that that discrepancy exists between what you know you all see on the ground and Council Members report, Council Member Brewers report and then what the overall statistics are for parks. Where do you think that comes from in your experience?

MERRITT BIRNBAUM: Well, I do think that one of the things that the Council Member highlighted and the that uhm, the Deputy Commissioner highlighted as well, uhm there's working - like and then there's barely working. And so, there's definitely degrees. We have a lot of drinking fountains for example, where you know a half inch of water comes out of them and they're not really usable by the majority of people that's why I say a lot of our bathrooms are clean and the staff really does - they'll pass inspection because they're clean and they're stocked with toilet paper but nobody wants to go in them. We do surveys and uh most recently I have people saying, you know they look like a prison. I would not want to set foot in them. I'm scared of the bathrooms in the park. Most people feel that the conditions of

the infrastructure are so disgusting. It's not about the cleanliness in the case and she said it can change on the ground from one minute to the next but when you're missing you know half of a bathroom or the toilet seat is gone. The bathroom might still pass inspection but it's not a place anyone wants to go inside or use.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. That's a very important point and I'm glad you highlighted that distinction. I think that is really at the heart of what's going on. So, thank you very much for your testimony.

Next up we'll have Ralph Baseline. Did I say that right? Good, yeah, alright. Maria Kessler, Jim Burke, and Afia Henriques.

RALPH BASELINE: Good afternoon. I'd like to thank everyone for having us. My name is Ralph Baseline, DC 37. I am also a Vice President for Local 983. We represent four-part titles, the associate park service workers, the urban park rangers, the park enforcement patrol officers and the city's seasonal aids. The one thing they all have in common is preserving free, free, recreational passive space in New York City. Not too many things are free

these days. They're charging for congestion pricing, garbage pails. The people of New York City need a place to go decompress. I can't tell you all go spend a day in a park. They're a graduation parties, there are communion parties, they are birthday parties. Folks that can't afford to have these parties anywhere else other than in a New York City park.

So, Council Member Shekar is always a strong advocate of us. We're here to promote, to challenge Mayoral Mamdani that part of his campaign was to help out the working-class folks of this city. DC 37 back him, I'm going to challenge him to not only give us the one percent of the Parks budget, give us two percent so we can keep up all these wonderful services and I'm just scratching across the surface here. But rec centers, those four titles we represent are involved in the maintenance and perseverance of the space where the folks go to do this.

So again, free, free, free benefits to City of New Yorkers that you're paying for that we need to beef up the budget and that's it. Thank you all very much for the time.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Council Member Zhuang.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Thank you Chair and also thank you Local - our local union members. I have two questions. The first question is how often you guys are assigned to one borough then sent to another borough because you told us - very often I get told there's not enough PEP officers in the summer.

RALPH BASELICE: Correct, there's definitely not enough PEP officers. I'm a PEP Sergeant by title for the last 20 years. The numbers the Commissioner touched upon were more or less accurate. I'd say it's more along the lines of 200, 250 citywide but you are permanently assigned to a borough. Once you're there, you're permanently assigned. You can be temporarily detailed out for 120 days. Let's say for example, if another borough, if you're in Queens and Brooklyn has a big event, they can temporarily detail people for the length of that event, whether it's 10 days, 20 days, 30 days. They cannot detail you contractually more than 120 days.

So, her numbers were pretty accurate, but I'd say it's leaning more towards 200, 250 and the 100 that you folks all helped us get. Joe Puleo lobbied for. She's correct, during the process I'm supposed to be

at the academy the first week of December because they have to hire those 100 park enforcement officers, urban park rangers, who have I sit behind me. They have to be hired by January 1st. So, those two classes, they're forcing them in. So, we should have an additional 100 by next year.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Ideally, how many PEP officer and park rangers using is enough?

RALPH BASELICE: Council Member, at least 100.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Another additional 100 more?

RALPH BASELICE: Per borough at least. You know when I first started there was one command. Now Queens, we have a Flushing Meadows command. We have a Rockaway Beach command. We have a Forest Park command in Brooklyn. We have Prospect Park. We have Coney Island. These are year around commands now. Well, those were never year around commands but again, there's folks at the beaches. God forbid you know someone drowns in the winter time, believe it or not people go swimming. We're the first line of defense and I'm just again scratching on the surface giving an example, but easily 100 per borough, 150 per borough.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: So, totaling in New York City, at least 500 at least?

RALPH BASELICE: Easily, absolutely, yup.

COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Okay, thank you.

RALPH BASELICE: Thank you all thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks Ralph and to clarify too I mean you're talking about at least 500 full time staff, right? That's the key issue here. It's not - we can't just keep a line on a seasonal workforce. I mean full time lines in that employment too, correct? And do you - I know there was some testimony from the Parks Department too about the historical context of you know PEP for example and Urban Park Rangers before. How it started out but it seems to me, even if the number started out small back in the 80's or when PEP was first created, the needs in our parks are only growing more and more every single day and even if it's a big jump up from what the historical reason was in the past, the fact of the matter is right now to keep up with all the needs in our parks to keep them clean, safe, to take care of our natural areas to. We've got to invest a lot more in our PEP and urban park rangers. Wouldn't you agree with that? Oh, into the mic.

RALPH BASELICE: They are constantly getting more property, whether it's being donated, where it's being given. So, you need folks to preserve and protect your investment and that's what the PEP officers do. They're Peace Officers. They write summonses and not to mention not to go off topic, all these vendors, these are big contracts. These vendors in Central Park. They pay a lot of money for these permits to the agency, to the city and they're constantly complaining to us because there's illegal vendors everywhere and park enforcement officers also can summons legal vendors and minimize the damage being done to people paying, I can't even imagine what from a permit to sell peanuts in Central Park. I can't imagine what that costs these days, but this is all revenue that needs to be protected. Other agencies have it. You know they protect their investment, so yes, absolutely thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your testimony. Now, next we'll have Maria Kessler.

MARIA KESSLER: Hi, uhm thank you for allowing me to testify today Chair of Parks Krishnan and other Council Members. I'm the Executive Director of Esplanade Friends. We represent three miles of the

East River Esplanade from 60th to 120th Streets.

Esplanade Friends joins in supporting increased New York City Parks funding to repair damaged restrooms, install restrooms in areas with no public access and maintain restrooms for an equitable city, ensuring public health, safety, and dignity.

Along this three-mile stretch of the Esplanade, there are actually no restrooms. We use adjacent restrooms. So, let me highlight the three specific restrooms that we use. The first one is 24th Sycamore's Park, which is at East 60th to East 61st Streets on York Avenue.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I'm sorry to interrupt. How far - can you also mention how far each of those adjacent restrooms are?

MARIA KESSLER: It's about two blocks. This is - this bathroom has regularly been closed for repair with porta potties as a replacement, but the porta potties have become the current standard. This specific location is the closest available public bathroom to Andrew Haswell Green Park, where the Esplanade Friends provides periodic public events and outings attended by hundreds of people of all ages who frequent the East River Esplanade.

The repaired bathrooms are needed to provide the safe environment. The second one is Stanely Isaacs Playground at East 95th to 97th Street along the FDR Drive. So, that's a less about a block, less than a block. Regular bathrooms at Stanley Isaacs Playground have been out of order frequently for long periods of time and most recent inspections by the New York City Parks more, as of July 25, 2025, rated this as unacceptable.

The last one, the last stretch 97th Street to 120th Street, there are actually no bathrooms currently adjacent to the East River Esplanade in East Harlem. Nor are there any plans to install any. This stretch of the Esplanade is home to frequent fishing, biking, walking, and outings with no place to go when nature calls, perhaps the good people of East Harlem don't need bathrooms along the Esplanade.

The East River Esplanade is a place for fresh air and a vital part of the Manhattan Greenway. These bathrooms are needed to sustain every day - to sustain us every day and events with our community as well as every day for groups with developmental disabilities, certain persons with medical

challenges, parents and guardians of children. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your testimony. Then Jim Burke followed by Afia Henriques.

JIM BURKE: My name is Jim Burke. I'm the Cofounder of 34th Avenue Open Streets Coalition. It's 26 blocks of open space that Shekar Krishnan is well aware of.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I know it a little bit.

JIM BURKE: And we have a ton of volunteers that help us provide services all along that stretch and we normally do it right in the middle and at the end because it's adjacent to two public parks, hoping that those bathrooms will be available to us. Often, uh you wouldn't want your worst enemy to go in on them sometimes and that's why there's a big disconnect between what's technically working or not working.

Now, granted in the morning, if you get there in the morning and they're open on time, they are clean, but they are not maintained and this is throughout the city. I'm just speaking to my most frequent experience because we have a lot of seniors that need

to use the bathrooms. Imagine, they're out there in the cold, in the winter, distributing clothing, distributing food, help people learn English and there's no clean bathrooms available and it's really unconscionable. The same with in the summer, you know it's 90 degrees and the water fountain may technically turn on. For instance, the Northern Playground, but you're not going to put your mouth on that, right?

So, by technically working and actually working at two different things, and I'm urging the parks to look at it differently, maybe come up under some other metrics. We have performers that come and do shows on our street for cultural performances. We usually have to ask a building super if we could use their basement bathroom. It's too embarrassing to send them to one of our local bathrooms because it's late in the day and it might not be usable.

And just one last thing, uh what do you mean the bathrooms close earlier in the winter? Some people have to go to the bathroom after 4:00 p.m., could we acknowledge that that's an issue? And it's all about dignity, right? These are outdoor workers, these are our vendors, these are people who deliver our food.

1 All of these people work on our buildings. They need
2 outdoor - it's really a human right, a dignity and
3 this is a really, really important topic, hence the
4 reason I've been out here for hours and wanting to
5 testify. Thank you very much for listening.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your
8 testimony, Jim very well said. Afia Henriques.

9 AFIA HENRIQUES: Hi, thank you for having me and
10 for holding this meeting and I just want to piggyback
11 off of what Jim said. I am actually one of those
12 outdoor workers. I am a licensed site seeing guide
13 and I'm here on behalf of my little project I'm doing
14 called, Taste of Waste NYC. I have a social media
15 page where I try to inform people about waste but
16 this hits close to home for me because just last
17 week, I had a group of elderly people. They needed
18 to use the bathroom. There was only one available at
19 Starbucks. The line was long. I took them to a
20 Parks Department bathroom in Battery Park. It was
21 closed. It's still closed now. Uhm, it's been
22 closed for weeks. I don't know why. I took them to
23 Castle Clinton. Castle Clinton was being cleaned so
24 we had to go deep into the park to another bathroom,
25 and I don't know if you've seen Battery Park but it's

under construction now for climate resiliency but this was a very long walk for elderly people, and we were already on a walking tour.

So, I spend a lot of time outside and New York has always had a waste problem. I became aware of it in 2020 when I learned about combined sewer overflows. I live near Jamaica Bay. I got really obsessed with the bay because we had so much free time and I grew up in the shadow of a landfill and we are actually in the shadow of a lost lake called the Collect that people polluted until the point that it had to be filled in and here in New York, we're always sweeping waste under the rug when it comes to the land and also when it comes to people.

I mean, in America, we call it the restroom, but we all know, we don't go there to rest. We don't even want to say what we do there right? It's too embarrassing. So, uhm maybe the - I don't know about the water fountains, but I have had you know the experience of going and trying to get water and it was extremely warm on a hot day. So, uhm thank you for having me. I don't want to take up too much time, but I just want to close out with a land acknowledgement because we are uhm in a place where

there used to be a lake that nourished people that was polluted beyond recognition. We occupy the traditional territory of the Canarsie and Munsee Lenape; now called New York City.

We acknowledge these indigenous custodians of the place in which we live, work and play, while colonization has largely extirpated these peoples. We recognize their continuing connection to the land, water and community and we pay respect to elders past, present and emerging. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your testimony. I appreciate this panel very much. Thank you.

Now we've got two more on Zoom. First up is Jennifer Seda.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

JENNIFER SEDA: Thank you so much for letting me testify today. My name is Jennifer Seda, and I am a volunteer program assistant at the Bronx River Alliance. We hold hundreds of events and volunteer stewardship days in parks along the Bronx River, engaging over 5,000 community members yearly in our work and we've seen that the lack of clean, working public bathrooms and drinking fountains make whole

sections of parkland inaccessible and even dangerous for our community members and our volunteers. We've heard from numerous families that they avoid the Olinville Playground and Shoelace Park because of the bathrooms are often closed more than they are open. We've also seen first hand that out of service bathrooms lead to dirtier parks and limited hours of public restrooms in Starlite Park lead to parks itself being used as bathrooms, which is an additional safety hazard for community members and a huge maintenance burden on under resourced park staff. These unacceptable conditions are an environmental justice.

So, we are asking New York City to please increase New York City Parks funding to repair these damaged restrooms and drinking fountains and hiring additional staff to maintain facilities and extend open hours. These facilities are critical infrastructure of accessible and equitable ensuring public health, safety, and dignity. Thank you so much for letting me testify today. That is all. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your testimony and next we have Christopher Leon Johnson.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah, uhm, yeah hello Mr. Shekar Krishnan. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson. I am here to say that look, the problem with the parks is that look, there's a lot of homeless people in the park. There's a lot of vapors in the park and the Parks Department cannot control what those people and those guys and gals do, especially when a City Council and an income Mayor Administration where they're going to defend the homeless to the court. I just saw the Transition Committee and that Committee, that Transition Committee is so woke. They expect this to be changing with the next Mayor for even if you give one percent to the parks, it's not going to change. They completely added Dana Rashlan to the Committee for what was it? Public safety, which is a joke for the Transition Committee, where she is completely responsible for the increase in crimes in Grounds Ville.

You mean to tell me that you expect these people in the Transition Committee to really, really fix the parks in the next Mayoral Administration Shekar? Come on man, you got to be real man. It's not going to happen next year and the next Administration, but

what we need to start happening now is that they need to pass Intro. 1332, protect the deliveristas. But like I said before, which will help them with the parks when they use the parks, so they don't fired form using the bathroom when they need to use the bathroom from these dirty apps.

Like I said Mr. Chair look, that Transition Committee with the parks is a joke and that is like 2026 will be a big disaster I'm ever going to see because this whole Transition Committee is -

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Mr. Johnson, sorry to interrupt. If you can focus more on the issue about the parks bathrooms, I'd appreciate that.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: It's all kind of on topic. I'm just saying like one percent for the parks, I support the one percent of the parks but unless you, as the Chair Mr. Shekar really check this Transition team for next year, you could give 1 percent, 25 percent or 0.01 percent to the parks, you are going to still have the same problems in the Mamdani Administration.

So, that's just going to happen. Like I say, I support New York uh NYP with their initial 1 percent for the parks and one percent for the parks -

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired. Thank you for your testimony.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah, that's all I got to say. You got to check that transition man. Thank you, man.

CHAIPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you very much Mr. Johnson, appreciate it. Alright, now I think that concludes all our testimony, both live and in person. Uh, both live and virtual. We appreciate you all coming out today. In closing, you know I would just say it is crucial that we have the investments that we need in our parks. You know at a very basic level to make sure that the basic essential facilities we have are working in our parks and I want to thank everyone who came out to testify today. Thank you to the Parks Department for uhm, working with us and as we highlight these issues, and we'll continue to work on it as the New York City Council. Thank you all so much. This hearing is now closed. [GAVEL]

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 December 19, 2025