

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND  
RECREATION

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November 19, 2021  
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HELD AT: Remote Hearing, Virtual Room 1

B E F O R E: Peter A. Koo  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Peter A. Koo  
Joseph C. Borelli  
Justin L. Brannan  
Selvena N. Brooks-Powers  
Darma V. Diaz  
Eric Dinowitz  
James F. Gennaro  
Mark Gjonaj  
Robert F. Holden  
Stephen T. Levin  
Francisco P. Moya  
Kevin C. Riley  
Carlina Rivera  
Eric A. Ulrich  
Jimmy Van Bramer  
Fernando Cabrera

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

Gabrielle Fialkoff  
Commissioner  
New York City Department of Parks and  
Recreation

Liam Kavanaugh  
First Deputy Commissioner  
New York City Department of Parks and  
Recreation

David Cerron  
Assistant Commissioner for Planning and  
Development  
New York City Department of Parks and  
Recreation

Alex Butler  
Director of Parks Inspection Program  
New York City Department of Parks and  
Recreation

Matt Drury  
Director of Government Relations  
New York City Department of Parks and  
Recreation

Joe Pulio

Daniel Clay

Adam Ganser

Carlos Castell Croke

Ted Enoch

Roxanne Delgado

@

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: PC recording good.

3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Cloud recording  
4 started.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Backup is rolling.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Good  
7 afternoon, everyone. Welcome to today's remote New  
8 York City Council hearing of the Committee on Parks  
9 and Recreation. At this time would all panelists  
10 please turn on your video. To minimize disruption,  
11 please place electronic devices to vibrate or silent.

12 If you wish to submit testimony you may do so at  
13 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that's  
14 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your  
15 cooperation. Chair Koo, we are ready to begin.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you for joining  
17 our virtual hearing today before the council's  
18 Committee on Parks and Recreation. I would like to  
19 acknowledge my fellow council members who present.  
20 Council Members Darma Diaz, Kevin Riley, and Council  
21 Member Mark Gjonaj. Good afternoon. I am Peter Koo,  
22 chair of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. And  
23 I would like to welcome all of you to this hearing,  
24 which will examine the Parks Department's inspection  
25 and maintenance practices for our city's parks and

1 playgrounds. Over the course of the last few decades  
2 the city gradually [inaudible] through the Parks  
3 system as the share of the Parks funding in the  
4 city's budget fell from a high of 1.5% in the 1960s  
5 to 0.86% in the mid '80s to 0.5% of the budget by  
6 2013. Recent years have seen a slight reversal of  
7 the trend. However, while the recent Parks budget  
8 was the largest ever in terms of the dollar amount  
9 and about 620 million dollars. It's still only the,  
10 it still only represents 0.6% of the entire expense  
11 budget. The historical trend is clear. We have not  
12 funded our parks sufficiently. This hearing will  
13 examine the various tools at the disposal of DPR and  
14 the city to determine how resources should be  
15 allocated to all our parks. One such tool is the  
16 Parks Inspection Program, or PIP. Through PIP  
17 approximately 6000 inspections take place annually,  
18 where various landscape, structural, and cleanliness  
19 features are examined to determine whether they are  
20 [inaudible] and accessible or unacceptable condition.  
21 Recent years saw a trend of overall conditions  
22 [inaudible] features [inaudible] accessible ratings  
23 in the high 90s percentage-wise. However, the most  
24 recent data indicates a slight drop since 2019, which  
25

1  
2 I would like to examine a bit, as well as whether the  
3 PIP program is sufficient to indicate what the needs  
4 of the process [inaudible] from a resource point of  
5 view. The council and administration have also  
6 worked together to find new programs to renovate the  
7 parks, such as the Community Parks Initiative, CPI,  
8 and the Parks Initiative and Parks Without Borders  
9 Initiative. [inaudible] program that target the,  
10 that target needed renovation in needed parks and  
11 their surrounding areas. I am pleased that the  
12 administration recently announced a 425 million  
13 dollar [inaudible] for CPI. But I would like to  
14 increase the resources of all of these programs.  
15 They have all been, they have all been met with  
16 accolades from the city officials and members of the  
17 public, as they have definitely resulted in bringing  
18 creative approaches to running parks and increasing  
19 equity. However, while, while spending of capital  
20 dollars is of course critical, we must not forget the  
21 renovated parks once the ribbon is cut and all the  
22 fanfare is gone. That is why consistent and  
23 sufficient expense funding is required so that they  
24 are properly maintained long after the initial  
25 renovations are complete. For example, in my

1 district John Brown Playground was a CPI project that  
2 received a 30 million dollar renovation. This  
3 playground is connected to the elementary school  
4 closest to downtown Flushing and heavily used by the  
5 community. Though millions were spent to upgrade  
6 this playground, not enough was provided towards  
7 maintenance while apparently as this park has seen  
8 numerous issues with garbage and poor landscaping.  
9 I'm sure that this is not the only example, so let's  
10 not lose sight of the fact that one-time capital  
11 funding is simply not enough. Finally, we will  
12 examine whether there is enough transparency coming  
13 from DPR relating to maintenance practices.  
14 Specifically, Local Law 98 of 2015 required that DPR  
15 submit an annual report on the resources we allocate  
16 for maintenance on the park by park basis and impose  
17 updated information regarding the status of its  
18 funded capital projects. Again, the question is just  
19 like the case of [inaudible] does this report provide  
20 city policymakers with enough information to  
21 determine how best to allocate necessary resources to  
22 our parks? I look forward to discussing these issues  
23 at today's hearing and examining what other  
24 possibilities are out there improving resources for  
25

1  
2 our parks. Thank you. We are also joined by Council  
3 Member Brooks-Powers, Council Member Brannan, Council  
4 Member Van Bramer, Council Member Rivera, and Council  
5 Member Borelli. I will now turn it over to our  
6 moderator, committee counsel Kris Sartori, to go over  
7 some procedural items.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair Koo.  
9 I'm Kris Sartori, senior counsel to the Committee on  
10 Parks and Recreation and I'll be moderating this  
11 hearing. Before we begin I'd like to remind everyone  
12 that you will be on mute until you are called on to  
13 testify, at which point you will be unmuted by the  
14 host. During the hearing I'll be calling on  
15 panelists to testify. Please listen for your name to  
16 be called, as I will periodically be announcing who  
17 the following panelists will be. We will first be  
18 hearing testimony from the administration, followed  
19 by testimony from members of the public. During the  
20 hearing if council members would like to a question  
21 of the administration or a specific panelist please  
22 use the Zoom hand raise function and I will call on  
23 you in order. We will be limiting council member  
24 questions to five minutes, which includes the time it  
25 takes to answer those questions. For members of the

1 public, we will be limiting the speaking time to  
2 three minutes in order to accommodate all who wish to  
3 speak today. Once you are called on to testify  
4 please begin by stating your name and the  
5 organization you represent, if any. We will now call  
6 on representatives of the administration to testify.  
7 Appearing today for the Department of Parks and  
8 Recreation will be Commissioner Gabrielle Fialkoff,  
9 First Deputy Commissioner Liam Kavanaugh, Assistant  
10 Commissioner for Planning and Development David  
11 Cerron, Director of the Parks Inspection Program,  
12 Alex Butler, and Director of Government Relations  
13 Matt Drury. At this time I will administration the  
14 affirmation to each representative of the  
15 administration. I will call on you each individually  
16 for a response, so at this time please raise your  
17 right hands. Thank you. Do you affirm to tell the  
18 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth  
19 before this committee and to respond honestly to  
20 council member questions? Commissioner Fialkoff?

22 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: I do.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. First  
24 Deputy Commissioner Kavanaugh?

25 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

10

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Assistant  
3 Commissioner Cerron?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER CERRON: Yes.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Director  
6 Butler?

7 DIRECTOR BUTLER: I do.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. And  
9 Director Drury?

10 DIRECTOR DRURY: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. At this  
12 time I would like to invite Commissioner Fialkoff to  
13 present her testimony.

14 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you, I'm  
15 just trying to turn my video on. There we are,  
16 great.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

18 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you. Good  
19 afternoon, Chair Koo, members of the Parks Committee,  
20 and other members of the council. I am Gabrielle  
21 Fialkoff, the commissioner for New York City Parks.  
22 I am pleased to be appearing at my first New York  
23 City Council hearing as Parks commissioner, joined  
24 today by our First Deputy Commissioner, Liam  
25 Kavanaugh, as well as David Cerron, our assistant

1 commissioner for planning and development, Alex  
2 Butler, director of the Parks inspection program, and  
3 Matt Drury, our director for government relations.  
4 Having served previously in this administration as  
5 senior advisor to the mayor and as the founding  
6 director of the Office of Strategic Partnerships I  
7 was fortunate to work with Parks on the Building  
8 Healthy Communities Initiative, which brought the New  
9 York City Soccer Initiative to fruition, launched the  
10 Farms at NYCHA, the first urban farms on public  
11 housing property in the nation, and focused on  
12 activating open spaces across high-need communities.  
13 In addition, the office launched initiatives to  
14 reduce inequality and create opportunities for youth,  
15 such as Computer Science for All and the Center for  
16 Youth Employment, among other efforts. I returned to  
17 city government in 2020 for six months to lead COVID  
18 pandemic relief efforts, and now I am truly honored  
19 to serve New York City once again as Parks  
20 commissioner. My career has been devoted to leading  
21 organizations and forging and strengthening  
22 partnerships in both the public and private sectors,  
23 and I am looking forward to working closely with the  
24 council regarding the issues being discussed today.  
25

1  
2 As this year end focuses on the allocation of  
3 resources for the maintenance and improvement of  
4 Parks, I would like to start today by highlighting an  
5 incredible success of this administration - the  
6 Community Parks Initiative, or CPI. This capital  
7 initiative epitomizes the data-driven approach  
8 dedicated to equity and fairness that has served as  
9 the guiding principle for New York City Parks under  
10 this administration. CPI is our agency's signature  
11 equity program, targeting investment towards  
12 neighborhood parks that have been underappreciated  
13 and disregarded for far too long. Through the  
14 initial incarnation of CPI the city has invested 318  
15 million dollars to completely reimagine, redesign,  
16 and rebuild 67 CPI parks that had seen little to no  
17 investment over decades. I'm pleased to report that  
18 62 of the 67 parks have been reopened to the public  
19 with two additional sites nearing completion and the  
20 remaining few projects well underway. On October 26  
21 Mayor de Blasio and myself were thrilled to announce  
22 an extension and expansion of CPI, an investment of  
23 425.5 million dollars in new administrative funding  
24 which will rebuild an additional 100 parks across the  
25 city, 10 park renovations each year over a period of

1 10 years. This additional funding will bring the  
2 grand total of CPI sites to 167 and close to 750  
3 million dollars in capital investment, incredible  
4 proof of this administration's commitment to the  
5 green spaces in our city and the New Yorkers who use  
6 them. The first 10 sites for this new expansion of  
7 CPI representing parks in all five boroughs will  
8 focus on neighborhoods that suffered terribly through  
9 COVID as we seek to help support and sustain local  
10 communities through this difficult recovery. As is  
11 our common practice, we will work directly with  
12 community residents to hear how their local park  
13 should be reimaged and redesigned to best meet  
14 their needs, with modern accessible play equipment,  
15 more trees to provide valuable shade, park features  
16 and amenities for all ages, and increased greenery to  
17 help absorb rainwater. We'll build upon that  
18 community connection through the continued efforts of  
19 Partnerships for Parks, our joint community  
20 engagement program administered with the City Parks  
21 Foundation, which allows us to cultivate new  
22 community partners and support existing partners, to  
23 support the communities that gather in our  
24 reconstructed parks. As many of you know, our  
25

1 earlier CPI projects have truly been transformative,  
2 revitalizing and resurrecting public spaces that had  
3 been lost to years of bureaucratic neglect, and we  
4 look forward to continuing this incredible effort and  
5 delivering even more results for New Yorkers. This  
6 commitment to equity also shapes our daily  
7 maintenance efforts as we are dedicated to keeping  
8 all of our parks and playgrounds in the best  
9 condition possible. Over the course of this  
10 administration we are proud to have consistently  
11 exceeded our performance indicators, targets, in the  
12 Mayor's Management Report, or MMR, for overall park  
13 condition and overall park cleanliness, even in the  
14 face of tremendous operational and budgetary  
15 challenges stemming from the COVID pandemic. To make  
16 that a reality, our staff uses a variety of tools and  
17 approaches to ensure that all of our properties are  
18 getting the resources they need in a fair and  
19 equitable manner. Firstly, I have to recognize the  
20 incredible hard work of our dedicated Parks staff who  
21 are responsible for the maintenance of our green  
22 spaces. There are a wide variety of maintenance  
23 staff roles, including full-time year-round staff,  
24 seasonal staff, as well as positions filled through  
25

1  
2 our Parks Opportunity Program, administered in  
3 coordination with our fellow city agency, the Human  
4 Resources Administration. This year these efforts  
5 were bolstered by the incredible addition of 3200 new  
6 Parks maintenance employees serving as part of the  
7 administration's City Clean-up Corps, made possible  
8 through the federal government's direct COVID  
9 recovery aid and support to localities and cities,  
10 including New York. Some of our maintenance staff  
11 serve on fixed post crews, who primarily maintain a  
12 given park or playground, along with its comfort  
13 station and other amenities. Others work as part of  
14 mobile crews, cleaning parks and playgrounds along a  
15 preassigned route, traveling from site to site as a  
16 team. On a daily basis our park workers are able to  
17 observe conditions in the spaces they care for,  
18 address issues as they arrive, and report serious  
19 conditions, concerns, and conditions to their  
20 supervisors. Above and beyond this consistent  
21 presence of Parks maintenance staff in our parks, we  
22 actively monitor and inspect the condition of our  
23 parks in several ways, including regular park  
24 inspections conducted by our park supervisors. In  
25 addition to these layers of careful monitoring the

1 agency also administers the Park Inspection Program,  
2 or PIP, which is independently administered by our  
3 Operations and Management Planning Division, or OMP.  
4 PIP is a detailed objective quality assurance program  
5 which is conducted independently from the agency's  
6 maintenance and operations staff. For close to four  
7 decades PIP has helped to ensure that our parks are  
8 well maintained and welcoming for New Yorkers and  
9 visitors alike. Created in 1984, PIP initially  
10 focused on small parks and playgrounds, but has  
11 expanded and evolved over the years, growing to  
12 become comprehensive and flexible enough to apply to  
13 all varieties of Parks properties, from small sitting  
14 areas to our largest wooded areas. Even as the  
15 capacity of the inspection program has grown over  
16 time, it has remained consistent in measuring the  
17 safety and cleanliness of the parks that we maintain  
18 on the public's behalf. Our citywide overall  
19 condition ratings reached a low of 39% in fiscal year  
20 1995, but has since risen close to 50 percentage  
21 points since then. Similarly, our cleanliness  
22 ratings have increased from a low of 70% in fiscal  
23 year 1992 to our recent cleanliness ratings  
24 consistently over 90%. The Parks inspection program  
25

1 has measured and reported these gains while serving  
2 as an important management tool for achieving  
3 improved park conditions. Our trained inspectors  
4 from OMP's inspection team use portable computers and  
5 digital cameras to perform 6000 PIP inspections  
6 throughout each year based on very specific  
7 standards, given each inspected park an acceptable A  
8 or unacceptable U rating for overall condition and  
9 cleanliness. Individual acceptable or unacceptable  
10 ratings are given to as many as 16 separate types of  
11 park features, which fall under three broad  
12 categories - cleanliness, structural features, such  
13 as benches or fencing, and landscape features, such  
14 as lawns and athletic fields. At the beginning of  
15 each inspection round sites are randomly selected  
16 from a database of ratable park properties, a  
17 universe that includes more than 1500 playgrounds and  
18 small parks, over 600 large parks or large park  
19 zones, and over 1000 green streets. This inspection  
20 cycle ensures that most parks and playgrounds receive  
21 thorough PIP inspections two or three times a year,  
22 all in addition to the monthly inspections and daily  
23 monitoring they receive from our maintenance and  
24 operations staff. Upon arriving to the site, our PIP  
25

1 inspectors assess the entirety of the property owned  
2 or maintained by Parks, including the surrounding  
3 sidewalk, to report on the cleanliness and safety of  
4 park property. The inspection serves as a snapshot  
5 of the park, as experienced by the public at that  
6 moment, regardless of standard cleaning schedules or  
7 other pending work. Park cleanliness and features,  
8 such as play equipment, lawns, trees, benches,  
9 athletic fields, and comfort stations are evaluated  
10 and assigned ratings based on clearly defined and  
11 rigorous Parks inspection program standards.  
12 Inspectors take photographs and, when necessary,  
13 measurements to document their findings. Hazardous  
14 conditions, such as sharp protruding bolts on benches  
15 or trip hazards, are noted as immediate action items  
16 and reported directly to M&O staff to be addressed.  
17 There are four inspection seasons each year - spring,  
18 summer, fall and winter. Each season consists of six  
19 inspection rounds and each inspection round includes  
20 approximately 250 inspections that take place over a  
21 roughly two-week period. At the conclusion of each  
22 round the citywide inspections results for  
23 cleanliness and overall condition are reviewed and  
24 discussed at regular schedule meetings, where I am  
25

1 joined by deputy commissioners, borough  
2 commissioners, and other senior management. The  
3 results of these inspections bring focus to concerns  
4 that require corrective action so that the sites with  
5 persistent maintenance concerns can receive targeted  
6 attention and challenging problems can be tackled  
7 head on. The PIP results also provide an important  
8 performance review that helps inform our decisions  
9 about resource allocations alongside 311 reports and  
10 staff observations. In line with our agency's  
11 standing commitment to transparency, historic PIP  
12 inspection details for individual parks are available  
13 on the Parks public website, in addition to city and  
14 borough performance data. More detailed line item  
15 inspection data is also available on the New York  
16 City Open Data Portal. Lastly, our PIP inspection  
17 results serve as the source data that helps inform  
18 our key maintenance indicators in Parks section of  
19 the Mayor's Management Report, which is updated  
20 biannually and available online. As you heard today,  
21 a data-driven approach to fairness and equity informs  
22 and shapes every aspect of our strategic and  
23 operational decision-making. The condition and  
24 cleanliness of our parks is a top priority of this  
25

1 agency, and we have worked to make sure those resets,  
2 resources, are distributed in a strategic and  
3 thoughtful manner. Of course, we are constantly  
4 looking for opportunities to improve our practices  
5 and protocols and look forward to working with the  
6 council as we continue to care for our city's park  
7 system to benefit all New Yorkers. I would like to  
8 thank the council for giving us the opportunity to  
9 discuss this topic today. After our panel convenes  
10 our staff will continue to watch the public's  
11 testimony via the council's live stream. But first  
12 my colleagues and I will be happy to answer any  
13 questions you may have. Thank you so much.

14  
15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you,  
16 Commissioner, and I will now turn it to Chair Koo for  
17 any questions.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you,  
19 Commissioner. Before I, ah, I ask questions I would  
20 like to acknowledge other council members who joined  
21 this hearing. We are joined by Council Member  
22 Gennaro, Cabrera, Council Member Holden, Council  
23 Member Dinowitz, and Council Member Levin.  
24 Commissioner and assistant commissioners, ah, deputy  
25 commissioners, thank you for joining this testimony.

1 You gave a very detailed and informative testimony.

2 So I have a few questions. Ah, my first question is  
3 what is the current total budget allocation for park  
4 maintenance citywide?  
5

6 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you,  
7 Council Member. I appreciate the question. As I  
8 mentioned in detail, we, ah, our budget is informed  
9 by our data-driven approach. We do our two to three  
10 times per year PIP inspections, 6000 in all in a  
11 year. Park supervisors inspect each park, each park  
12 monthly, and it is based upon those reports that we  
13 allocate resources. And we do so in a way that we  
14 understand each park, um, gets different usage,  
15 different types of intensity and visits to our parks,  
16 each one different. So we, we need to be nimble and  
17 flexible, ah, as well as apply our data-driven  
18 approach to this process. And I'm happy to have  
19 First Deputy Commissioner as well...

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: What is the allocation?

21 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: First Deputy,  
22 would you like to give some more context?

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes,  
24 good afternoon, Council Member Koo. Um,  
25 approximately 70% of our budget is allocated towards

1 maintenance activities, ah, which would, which would  
2 translate into about 400 to 410 million dollars of  
3 our total budget.  
4

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. Thank you. So  
6 what is the current staffing head count for  
7 maintenance workers based on the fiscal year 2022  
8 budget?

9 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: At our, thank  
10 you, Council Member. At our peak the Parks  
11 Department has roughly 10,000 members of staff,  
12 including seasonal staff, full-time staff, our POP  
13 members, and City Clean-Up Corps, and roughly 50% is  
14 dedicated to maintenance and operation, but I, for  
15 this year and current I'll, I'll ask Commissioner  
16 Kavanagh to, to weigh in.

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,  
18 yes. Given the nature, thank you, Commissioner  
19 Fialkoff. Ah, given the nature of, ah, of our  
20 operations and they're highly seasonal, as you, as  
21 you are well aware, our staffing fluctuates  
22 dramatically over the course of the year. We have  
23 approximately 2000 full-time staff in the maintenance  
24 operations divisions of the agency that includes the  
25 borough operations and some of our central

1 operations, which support facilities and programs  
2 throughout the entire city. Ah, that is  
3 supplemented, ah, by the Park Opportunity Program,  
4 ah, which varies, of course, over the course of the  
5 year. At the moment we have approximately a  
6 thousand, ah, Park Opportunity employees working for  
7 us. Ah, during the season, ah, you know, we hire  
8 seasonals in, in several different categories. Um,  
9 we hire approximately two to three thousand people  
10 for the maintenance and operations division, roughly  
11 1200 to 1500 lifeguards. We hire 500 to 800 in the,  
12 ah, security division of the agency to support the  
13 PEP, ah, operations and Rangers as well. And at the  
14 moment we are very lucky to enjoy approximately 2000  
15 or so employees that were hired through the city's,  
16 ah, Clean-Up Corps program. It was the, ah, program  
17 funded by the, ah, federal stimulus, ah, ah, program  
18 that was passed, ah, back in the winter. It has, you  
19 know, served the city well across many agencies, but  
20 we in the Parks Department have benefitted  
21 tremendously from it. At our peak we had 3200 staff  
22 hired through that program. Um, through attrition  
23 and people moving on to, ah, back to school and, ah,  
24 to other opportunities we're down to about 2000, but  
25

1  
2 it's really been a tremendous, ah, boost for our  
3 operations this year.

4           CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Um, so what  
5 is the role that the Parks Inspection Program, PIP,  
6 plays in determining what types of maintenance is  
7 needed at a particular park? So how are inspection  
8 staff allocated throughout the system?

9           COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you. The  
10 PIP inspections are a snapshot in time and they are  
11 an evidence-based and data-driven approach to looking  
12 at all our parks in an equitable manner. Um, each  
13 and every park uses the same standards of, um, to  
14 inspect the different categories, as I mentioned in  
15 my testimony, and every park, we do 6000 PIP  
16 inspections a year, every of those parks are visited  
17 two to three times a year, and so the same lens is  
18 applied to every park so that we can compare those  
19 standards in a rigorous manner, and so that we can  
20 look over time how those parks are faring, that  
21 historical looks very important in the allocation of  
22 resources. Um, I think for a detailed look at, um,  
23 perhaps how those teams are made up with our  
24 inspectors, we have nine PIP inspectors, I'm gonna

2 let Director Butler, who oversees the PIP program,  
3 give a deeper look into how the teams function.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK, sure.

5 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Director Butler?

6 DIRECTOR BUTLER: Yes, I'm here.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Him the question, yeah.

8 DIRECTOR BUTLER: OK. Ah, thank you,  
9 Commissioner.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, ah, Inspector, what  
11 is the, what is the typical routine for an inspector?

12 DIRECTOR BUTLER: I'm sorry, the, the  
13 role of inspector?

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, what's the  
15 typical routine...

16 DIRECTOR BUTLER: Routine.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: ... for an inspector,  
18 yeah.

19 DIRECTOR BUTLER: Great question, thank  
20 you. So we have a team of nine full-time, ah, well-  
21 trained inspectors that cover the entire city. Ah,  
22 inspections is all that they do and, um, we're based  
23 here out of the arsenal, the headquarters of, ah, of  
24 the Parks Department. We operate on a two-week  
25 inspection round and for every one of those two weeks

1 we perform 250 inspections, or 500 inspections a  
2 money, which if you multiply by 12 you get your 6000  
3 for the entire year. Um, in terms of the 250, ah,  
4 those represent a fair proportion by the inventory in  
5 each borough and by the breakdown of park sizes in  
6 each borough, so, ah, but these are inspections that  
7 are unannounced. They're randomly generated. Ah,  
8 inspectors in a typical day, if they're doing small  
9 sites, playgrounds, neighborhood parks, we'll do  
10 something like six to eight sites in one day. If  
11 we're doing larger parks, especially like our large  
12 wooded zones, ah, for example the green belt, ah,  
13 which are more time consuming, then they do two to  
14 three, ah, sites in one day. Ah, in terms of how the  
15 actual inspections are conducted it will be break  
16 down a park into as many as 17 different features.  
17 There's, ah, cleanliness items that they're looking  
18 for that we hope to find none of, like litter and  
19 glass and graffiti. Ah, then we're looking at  
20 structural items, paved surface for the paths, safety  
21 surface, play equipment, fences, benches, and then  
22 landscaping things, like lawns, foot areas, athletic  
23 fields, trees, things like that. Ah, we have  
24 detailed standards for acceptability for every one of  
25

1  
2 those features, ah, and the line items that we  
3 capture fall into two categories. There's hazards,  
4 things that require immediate attention. It could be  
5 a protruding splinter on a bench or safety surface  
6 that has moved out of place, or it could be a  
7 condition. A condition is not necessarily hazardous,  
8 but is still, ah, something that needs attention. So  
9 it could be, ah, some bare lawn. It could be litter.  
10 It could be a rusted fence, things like that. Ah, so  
11 they're capturing all that, ah, and they're checking  
12 every single part of the park. They are taking  
13 pictures. They are taking measurements where  
14 necessary. Ah, you know, the, the burden of proof is  
15 on us to really sort of prove that a site deserves  
16 those ratings, so we take that very seriously. Ah,  
17 and then, you know, at the end of the two-week round  
18 all this stuff is carefully reviewed and then within  
19 two days of the end of the round it's disseminated to  
20 the entire agency.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. So, um, the  
22 commissioner just mentioned 6000 parks are inspected  
23 a year. How many parks are there overall and, ah,  
24 how long would it take to inspect all the parks in  
25 the system?

1  
2                   COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Well, I, I  
3 believe that there are 3200 zones, ah, that Parks and  
4 subzones that we inspect as part of the PIP program,  
5 each getting two to three visits a year. Um, but I'm  
6 gonna let Director Butler, maybe you want to expand  
7 upon that a bit?

8                   DIRECTOR BUTLER: Sure, absolutely. Ah,  
9 so in terms of the time that it takes to perform an  
10 inspection, that it absolutely depends on the size of  
11 the park. Ah, we have tiny green streets and sitting  
12 areas that may be no more than a 10-minute inspection  
13 to cover the entire thing to document what was there.  
14 Ah, playgrounds could take as much as 30 minutes,  
15 maybe 45 minutes for an extra-large playground. And  
16 then we have large wooded zones, such as the Green  
17 Belt in Staten Island. The inspector might be out  
18 there an hour and a half, two hours, walking the  
19 entire zone. So, ah, as the Commissioner pointed  
20 out, ah, since we do 6000 inspections a year and we  
21 have about 3200 individual parcels of property that  
22 need inspecting, ah, it does take us a, a half a year  
23 to cover everything, and it takes a full year to do  
24 two to three inspections. Um, we, we ensure that  
25 playgrounds and large parks, ah, come up no less than

1  
2 two times a year for inspection, ah, and we wait, ah,  
3 smaller, like green streets and things like that that  
4 have fewer amenities for the public, ah, as only one,  
5 maybe two times a year.

6 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, so all the parks  
7 are inspected at a minimum of two times a year,  
8 right? They include the playgrounds.

9 DIRECTOR BUTLER: For playgrounds,  
10 absolutely.

11 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: As part of the  
12 PIP program, and I, I will say, and we can elaborate  
13 on this, that our park supervisors inspect all the  
14 parks monthly. So our parks receive at least 12  
15 visits a year from park supervisors. If there's a  
16 playground they receive an extra visit in the fall  
17 and spring. So there's a minimum of 14 with the two  
18 minimum, two PIP visits a year, 14 inspections a year  
19 for our parks and 16 for those with playgrounds.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Huh. So does, does  
21 every park get inspected at least twice a year, every  
22 one?

23 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Correct.

24 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Oh, OK.  
25

2 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Commissioner  
3 Kavanagh, do you want to expand on that at all?

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: No,  
5 Commissioner, I think you captured it.

6 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: OK.

7 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,  
8 there's two, two inspections a year minimum through  
9 the Parks Inspection Program, 12 inspections a year  
10 for every park by our park supervisors using the same  
11 methodology. It does not factor into the ratings  
12 report, however, but the same methodology and the  
13 same approach. And then our playgrounds are  
14 inspected an additional two times a year, separate  
15 and apart from the monthly and the PIP inspection.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. So, ah, the mayor  
17 recently announced the expansion of Community Parks  
18 Initiative, CPI. What process is being used by CPI  
19 by the department to determine what parks are  
20 qualified to be covered by the initiative?

21 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you for  
22 that question, Chair Koo. We are, of course,  
23 thrilled, um, with the expansion of the Community  
24 Parks Initiative to cover 100 more parks and  
25 playgrounds, um, over the next 10 years. So we did

1 name the first 10 parks, ah, for the first year of  
2 the new roll-out of the initiative, and these parks,  
3 like the next 90, these parks to start will focus on  
4 our neighborhoods hardest hit by COVID. Um, these  
5 are neighborhoods hardest hit as defined by the, um,  
6 [inaudible] tree neighborhoods, the Task Force on  
7 Racial Inclusion and Equity, and, ah, these first 10  
8 parks, of course, cover all five boroughs and are  
9 also overlaid with our original CPI criteria, that is  
10 our densest neighborhoods, our growing neighborhoods,  
11 and those that suffer from high rates of poverty, as  
12 well as neighborhood parks that have received less  
13 than \$250,000 of capital investment over the last 20  
14 years. So we take that original criteria, we overlay  
15 the hardest hit COVID neighborhoods, and that was the  
16 criteria used on the first 10 we announced for this  
17 year so we could get going on them. And then the  
18 next 90 will come with a similar criteria and also  
19 input from our borough commissioners and borough  
20 staff, and community, and members like yourself.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. So, ah, I would  
23 like to recommend a playground in my district. Even  
24 though I allocate money, ah, for renovations, it's  
25 the Blang, ah, pink one near the Blang House. Now

1  
2 it's NYCHA, ah, community and the pink one is right  
3 in downtown Flushing and it's always dirty because of  
4 [inaudible] homeless people are using the playground.  
5 So I would like to like maybe you prioritize and set  
6 this pink one as one of the, ah, CPI projects.

7 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: We would be very  
8 happy to discuss that with you.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, thank you.

10 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So my next question is  
12 what is the status of the Parks Without Borders and  
13 Anchor Parks Initiative? Is there hope we can expand  
14 these projects with more funding similarly, ah, on  
15 how CPI was recently expanded?

16 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you. Um, I  
17 am pleased to report that the Anchor Parks  
18 Initiative, which allocated 150 million dollars to  
19 one big park in each borough, 30 million dollars for  
20 the identified parks in each borough. I have this in  
21 front of me, I can read them. St. Mary's Park, Betsy  
22 Head Park, High Bridge Park, Astoria Park, and Fresh  
23 Kills Park. I'm very pleased to announce or to let  
24 you know that St. Mary's Park is just about complete.  
25 I was happy to cut the ribbon on the new Gil Scott-

1 Heron amphitheater there a few weeks ago. Betsy Head  
2 is completed. High Bridge is completed. Astoria  
3 Park is completed. And Fresh Kills Park we knew  
4 would have a long timeline, ah, due to getting sign-  
5 off from our regulatory agencies and partners. Um,  
6 [inaudible] design has anticipated completion in  
7 2022. And, ah, Parks Without Borders, ah, which was  
8 40 million dollars for eight showcase projects, seven  
9 of which are already complete. And I'll turn to  
10 Commissioner Cerron, if you have a few more details  
11 you'd like to add.

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER CERRON: Yes,  
14 thank you, Commissioner, and thank you, Council  
15 Member, for the question. I think the Commissioner  
16 really captured, ah, those details on, on Parks  
17 Without Borders and, and Anchor Parks. Ah, but I  
18 think, you know, one important, ah, detail to, to add  
19 with regard to Parks Without Borders is we saw a lot  
20 of, a lot of positive response from the community  
21 because of the engagement, ah, and we saw really  
22 dramatic transformative differences, ah, in those  
23 parks that we were able to touch through the program  
24 and, and, and the mayor gave us 50 million dollars  
25 for that program, which we're very grateful for. Ah,

1  
2 and now what we've done is on any park projects that  
3 touch the entryways, the sidewalks, adjacent spaces,  
4 ah, for those projects we incorporate the Parks  
5 Without Borders design principles now into that. So  
6 that's part of our, of our standard, ah, way of doing  
7 business, ah, in designing future, future parks and,  
8 and projects.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. So,  
10 Commissioner, ah, going back to the question I asked  
11 you before, in my district Blang Playground is  
12 heavily used and it's also a hot spot for homeless  
13 people. Ah, this park is constantly dirty and in  
14 need of constant maintenance. Ah, when Parks can  
15 they go out multiple times [inaudible] to clean it.  
16 But we also had to partner with our local business  
17 improvement district to provide cleaning service, and  
18 litter basket changes. Ah, they pick up many, many,  
19 ah, bags of garbage every day from the, ah, from the  
20 BID. Um, but that's still not enough. So what is  
21 the solution to this situation and others like it?

22 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you, Chair  
23 Koo. I, I would like to work with you on that park  
24 and, and I'd like to recommend that we have a  
25

1 discussion after this with our borough commissioner  
2 and the team Commissioner Dockett...

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK.

5 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: ...to address  
6 that. That would, be happy to do that, and  
7 [inaudible]

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: And also, yeah, thank  
9 you. So also [inaudible] how does Parks utilize  
10 public-private partnership, ah, to meet maintenance  
11 needs. In this case we had the Flushing BID helping  
12 us to pick up the garbage. But what about in other  
13 parks, and maybe they don't have a BID, ah, so how,  
14 how do you use, utilize public-private partnership?

15 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you. We do  
16 work with our Partnership for Parks, of course,  
17 [inaudible] partner with the City Parks Foundation,  
18 and of course the role of conservancies play an  
19 important role in maintaining our parks. We, at the  
20 launch of CPI, the first tranche, 1.0 as we call it  
21 here, we partnered with our conservancy partners, um,  
22 to map out a plan how they could also help all the  
23 CPI parks in terms of design, um, and other, um, ways  
24 that they could train the community, lend their  
25 expertise, and their services. And that's been a

1  
2 tremendously successful effort, and we will continue  
3 those conversations for the next tranche of CPI and  
4 work with our partners, ah, the conservancies and of  
5 course all of our community partners. I will say  
6 that a great benefit, ah, or an outcome of CPI has  
7 been the engagement of our community partners, the  
8 Partnership for Parks efforts. Um, from that there  
9 have been many friends groups that have been formed  
10 around the revamped CPI parks. 85% of our first 67  
11 CPI parks have now community groups attached to it,  
12 and we have seen the maintenance scores, the overall  
13 cleanliness and conditions of the CPI parks improve  
14 dramatically, ah, because of the community  
15 engagement, the friends group, these public-private  
16 partnerships, and I think a real source of pride for  
17 the communities and, and the neighborhood stewarding  
18 these new, newly renovated parks, as well as the more  
19 formal groups with our Partnership for Parks and City  
20 Parks Foundation partners.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you,  
22 Commissioner. So we're also joined by Council Member  
23 Ulrich and Council Member Moya. Ah, Commissioner, in  
24 my district years ago we had a couple of complaints  
25 overgrowth, which made parks or playground

1  
2 inaccessible. The CSAs, the general city Parks  
3 workers are not able to handle the horticultural  
4 aspects. So, ah, gardeners were needed. However, at  
5 the same time gardeners are often taken away from  
6 their specialized work to do things like park  
7 cleanup. So how does Parks fix horticultural  
8 [inaudible] and are gardeners are in fact being  
9 pulled away from regular gardening duties to fill in  
10 other roles that may not be gardening related?

11 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you. As I  
12 mentioned in my testimony we do strive to treat every  
13 park equitably and apply our data-driven approach,  
14 um, to each park and, and the allocation of resources  
15 and staff. But I will let the real expert, um, in  
16 this area, ah, address this. Commissioner Kavanagh,  
17 please.

18 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:  
19 Thank you, Commissioner and, and Council Member. We  
20 absolutely value the work of our gardeners. We try  
21 to support them in many different ways. Ah, we're  
22 right in the middle of a skills assessment to, ah,  
23 ah, to see, you know, what support our gardeners feel  
24 they need to be more effective in their work  
25 throughout the city. And our gardeners do tremendous

1 work. Ah, every money when we review our operations,  
2 ah, metrics, ah, we also review what we call the  
3 Gardener of the Month, ah, where we look at the great  
4 work that our gardeners do throughout the city, ah,  
5 and it's really impressive, ah, to see. I see it  
6 when I drive around the city, but, ah, those Gardener  
7 of the Month presentations are really outstanding.  
8 Ah, yes, occasionally everyone who works in the field  
9 for the Parks Department may be asked to do something  
10 like litter removal or, or assist at a special event  
11 and things like that. It does happen with the  
12 gardeners. I don't think it deters them or detracts  
13 from the, the great work that they do. Ah, if you're  
14 aware of a specific situation where that is  
15 occurring, ah, repeatedly or in a, an extremely, you  
16 know, regularly amount of time, you know, please let  
17 us know and we'll, we'll definitely look into it.  
18 Ah, you know, I have to say that thanks to the  
19 support of the council through the Play Fair  
20 Initiative, ah, you know, we have dramatically  
21 increased the number of gardeners working throughout  
22 park system and we really work to support them and,  
23 and the great work that they do.

1                   CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. So, ah, I  
2  
3 have one more question, then I'll turn it over to  
4 other members. So regarding the new federal  
5 infrastructure bill and new state money is Parks  
6 intending to obtain these funds. If so, what has the  
7 department identified in terms what this additional  
8 money will, ah, will fund?

9                   COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: We, we have been  
10 talking to our partners in administration, ah, and,  
11 and OMB about projects that we feel, infrastructure  
12 projects, that we feel would be suitable for, um,  
13 this federal funding, yes, and I could ask  
14 Commissioner Cerron, who is our head of planning, to  
15 maybe weigh in a little more on those projects.

16                   ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER CERRON: Yes, ah,  
17 Chair Koo. Ah, thank you for the question, and thank  
18 you, Commissioner. Um, as the Commissioner said,  
19 we're, we're certainly interested, ah, and, you know,  
20 parks play a vital role in, in the city's  
21 infrastructure. Ah, so, you know, road projects,  
22 bridge projects, greenway projects, um, projects to  
23 connect disconnected communities, ah, EV projects,  
24 they're all, ah, a variety of the, of the subjects  
25 that we're looking into. It's very early in this

1  
2 stage, so we're still, you know, ah, collecting  
3 information, but we're, we're also actively working  
4 on this and we're happy to discuss it, ah, further  
5 with you.

6 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. So, ah, I've  
7 finished my questions. Um, now I want to turn it  
8 over to, um, our, um, moderator, Kris.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yeah, thank you,  
10 chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Can you see whether the  
12 other members have questions?

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, yes, Chair.  
14 Thank you, Chair Koo. Ah, at this time we will turn  
15 it over to questions from other council members, um,  
16 and I would ask if you have a question please use the  
17 Zoom raise hand function. Ah, we will limit council  
18 member questions to five minutes. The Sergeant at  
19 Arms will keep a timer to let you know when your time  
20 is up. Ah, you should begin once I have called on  
21 you and the sergeant has announced that, ah, you can  
22 begin your questions. At this point we have  
23 questions from Council Member Holden, followed by  
24 Council Member Brooks-Powers.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you. Thank  
3 you, Commissioner, and welcome. Um, nice to see you  
4 and, ah, hope to see you in person soon.

5 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Ah, I, I have,  
7 um, a few questions on, um, sort of the timeliness of  
8 Parks' responses, ah, to my office and, and just to  
9 the public in general. Um, you know, at the, um, I  
10 think it was the September 27 hearing we had in Parks  
11 that I spoke to First Deputy Commissioner Liam  
12 Kavanaugh about trees, and that's my favorite  
13 subject. Um, and I put money into trees, I put  
14 capital money, I put, ah, ah, a lot of, um, resources  
15 in, you know, tree pits and so forth and, um,  
16 Commissioner Kavanaugh said he was gonna contact me,  
17 um, in September to come out to my district to survey  
18 the trees and take a tour. I'm still waiting. Ah,  
19 and here we are, you know, entering the holiday  
20 season and I have problems, you name it, I have  
21 problems with trees, problems with trees planted, ah,  
22 the lack thereof, problems with stump removal, ah,  
23 problems with sidewalks being fixed. I know that's  
24 multiple, you know, agency responses. But then I  
25 also have a problem with capital projects that

1  
2 constantly get stalled, delayed, and no reporting, no  
3 updates, and my park, my track is closed in Juniper  
4 Valley Park for God knows how long now because of a  
5 crushed, ah, apparently a crushed, they discovered a  
6 crushed, ah, drainage that, you know, some, some, um,  
7 project or some part of the project that was, ah,  
8 flawed or it wasn't anticipated. So there's got, I'm  
9 getting to a bigger picture here. There's got to be  
10 a better response. There's got to be a more, an  
11 attitude that let's, let's move these projects along,  
12 whether it's trees being planted, whether it's stumps  
13 being removed, whether it's, um, projects that are  
14 delayed. The, every project that I've dealt with in  
15 my district has been delayed. Any capital project  
16 has been delayed. Ah, and it's, it's getting to the  
17 point where I'm not putting money into, into capital  
18 projects unless this problem is fixed. We, we seem  
19 to have, ah, ridiculously high prices. Every council  
20 member knows about the prices of Parks projects,  
21 which is they're way out of whack. And I hope the  
22 new council tries to address that. But it's, there's  
23 no excuse for somebody not getting back to us. Um,  
24 for instance, I took a tree tour with, um, Parks  
25 personnel, ah, October 13. I asked a number of

1 questions, when can I start getting trees planted,  
2 how many trees can I get planted in my district, ah,  
3 prior areas, and that was October 13. Multiple  
4 emails to Parks were unanswered. Just not answered,  
5 no, three or four emails, nothing, nobody gets back  
6 to us. I met about, um, I'm, I'm putting in tree  
7 pits with, ah, iron gates, iron railings, to replace  
8 ones that were poorly designed 10 years ago, and I'm  
9 not, I'm not getting any answers. So it, it just  
10 seems to be, and, you know, and I got along well with  
11 Queens Parks. I, I think, I, I know a lot of the,  
12 ah, personnel and one of course is Joanna Magrandi,  
13 who's leaving after 38 years, irreplaceable. I've  
14 known her for that long. I knew her when she came  
15 in, um, and it's, it's just, but, but it's just that  
16 nothing ever changes in Parks. It just seems to be  
17 the agency that we have big problems with, and it's  
18 so vital now. I know I'm going out of focus, it's  
19 weird, but that's my camera. Um, but kind of that's  
20 how I feel. Ah, a little, a little kind of, I've,  
21 I've dedicated most of my life to Parks and I'm just  
22 not getting the answers. I'm not getting answers on  
23 capital projects, like I said, trees or anything  
24 else. And all I want is answers. You know, if I  
25

1  
2 have access, even my own, my own house. Um, I have a  
3 tree in front of my house that died five years ago.  
4 I finally got it cut two years ago, right, cut down.  
5 The stump is still there. I put in for a tree. No  
6 tree. And, and then, you know, that's what my  
7 constituents are experiencing. So if you could  
8 somehow guide us through those, those problems, the  
9 trees especially, that, you know, that we're gonna  
10 get some answers to. And maybe Commissioner Kavanagh  
11 can explain it, if he, if you can.

12 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Well, I, I will  
13 start off by saying, um...

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Right under the  
16 wire. You can go, no, you can go.

17 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Ah, OK. Um, I,  
18 you know, we, we strive to be responsive always, um,  
19 to you, our council members, to all New Yorkers, um,  
20 at all times. I think you've addressed a few, a few  
21 topics. Um, on the capital process we have made  
22 strides in this administration. It may not feel that  
23 way, ah, but we have worked hard, um, on the  
24 processes that are under our, um, largely under, ah,  
25 Parks jurisdiction. We have made strides

1 particularly in the design timeline to shave off, ah,  
2 significant amount of time. In, in the processes  
3 we've changed we have seen an improvement of six to  
4 seven months in that timeframe, um, and have cut that  
5 out of the process. We of course feel that more  
6 needs to be done and particularly from the city's  
7 processes around procurement of construction  
8 contractors. That is an area we, you know, we  
9 encourage the city to make progress on. Um, so, ah,  
10 we are taking steps, ah, as far as the capital  
11 process goes of what is under, largely under our  
12 control. Um, for trees and, um, your other concerns  
13 I certainly want to allow Commissioner Kavanagh a  
14 chance to respond, ah, to, to your comments and, you  
15 know, trees are vital infrastructure. Um, we feel  
16 that way, ah, key to climate change and, and making  
17 the city livable. So, Commissioner Kavanagh, please.

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:

20 thank you, Commissioner Fialkoff. And, Council  
21 Member, I apologize for not following through on our  
22 conversation at the September hearing. Ah, I will,  
23 my, I will contact your office immediately after this  
24 hearing and schedule a date at the earliest

1  
2 convenience to review all of the tree work that is  
3 happening in your district.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: OK. Just, just  
5 an observation, though. Um, ah, and again, this goes  
6 over all, all projects. But, Commissioner, we give,  
7 and, and this is, um, this is not a surprise, but we  
8 give way too much time for contractors to complete a  
9 job. I would say 90% of the jobs that I've witnessed  
10 in my lifetime, and I'm going back 30 years now of  
11 working with Parks, maybe, maybe even almost closer  
12 to 40. Every project, probably 90% of the time the  
13 contractor is not even present on the site. And I  
14 think you guys know it. That, that, we're, we have  
15 our parks offline because somebody is not scheduling  
16 something or, or we're just giving way too many, way  
17 too much time for these contractors. And I think  
18 every council member will agree with, with me, um,  
19 who's, ah, who's seen this. So much so that I would  
20 love to go design build or I would like to go for the  
21 Trust for Public Land. I would like to open up the  
22 process where we get some competition and obviously  
23 to me I've given upon Parks managing projects in, in  
24 a timely fashion. So we have to revamp it, I hope in  
25 the next council we will. We haven't done it in this

1 council. We haven't done it in any council. But,  
2 and the fact that we shave off time on projects, yes.  
3 Um, but not enough time, where a, a park is sitting  
4 there and I can take you to my running track. I can  
5 take you to my sprinkler system that took a year to  
6 do and then it still didn't work, ah, and it's still  
7 down. I could take you to so many Parks projects  
8 that went south very quickly. So there's a pattern  
9 here. We need to correct it. But we need a  
10 comprehensive plan, not just yes we're working on it.  
11 So I'll leave it at that.

13 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: OK.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HOLT: Hopefully this  
15 time Commissioner Kavanagh will reach out, or  
16 somebody will reach out. Thank you. Thank you,  
17 Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Council  
20 Member. Our next, ah, council member with questions  
21 is Council Member Brooks-Powers.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Hi and  
24 good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, Chair Koo and  
25 the Parks committee staff for, um, pulling together

1  
2 today's hearing. And also thanks to the Parks  
3 Department for providing testimony. Um, as you may  
4 know I cover the southeast Queens and Rockaway  
5 communities. We, ah, have a very unique district,  
6 one that is, um, a inland part of the district and  
7 another part that's a coastal community. Um,  
8 unfortunately many of our outdoor spaces are sites of  
9 chronic illegal dumping and our parks are no  
10 exception. Um, my constituents are often reporting  
11 issues like unmown grass, um, delayed repairs for  
12 soccer and football fields, um, that the city is slow  
13 to respond to issues, just broadly speaker. And over  
14 the summer specifically I heard a report that the  
15 Parks Department only had, um, three trucks  
16 addressing park conditions and none were fully  
17 functional and a part of my district. In that light  
18 I just wanted to, um, be able to understand a couple  
19 of things. So Parks cleaning schedule, parks  
20 cleanings are scheduled based on location and usage  
21 of each park. How does the department measure usage?  
22 Is it based on the number of visitors? Does the  
23 department consider other factors, like park size or  
24 volume of complaints or history of past inspections?  
25 How does the department allocate resources to ensure

1 that park conditions across the city are addressed  
2 equitably? Um, what is the average response time for  
3 cleaning issues, so in terms of like litter,  
4 graffiti, dumping? Um, what's the average response  
5 time for a structural issue, um, such as damaged play  
6 equipment, pavement, benches, um, and how do those,  
7 um, times vary between districts and what will  
8 determine the variation of that? I will say also  
9 that I have an amazing work relationship with, um,  
10 the folks, ah, with parks from the Queensboro  
11 Commissioner Dockett to Justin and Eric who, um,  
12 cover my mainland versus my peninsula district. Um,  
13 I just really want to be able to advocate to make  
14 sure that they are having all the resources that they  
15 need, um, in order to be as responsive as possible to  
16 my constituents. Um, and I know this is like a  
17 common, um, theme in other districts across the city,  
18 so understanding what metrics Parks looks at and how  
19 they respond, um, would be helpful, not only in my  
20 district, but I believe across the city, so, um, I  
21 look forward to engaging with you and your responses.

22  
23 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you,  
24 Council Member. I appreciate that. Um, and  
25 appreciate the kind words about the Queens

2 [inaudible] staff and Commissioner Dockett, and they  
3 do do an excellent job. So, ah, appreciate that...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And Liam  
5 as well. I've been working with [inaudible]

6 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Oh, Liam  
7 [inaudible]...

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS:  
9 [inaudible] and that [laughs].

10 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: It's, it's a  
11 really great team. So we thank you. Um, and we are  
12 happy to work with you individually, um, and we, we  
13 should after this to address specific concerns and,  
14 and specific parks. But, so, I look forward to that.  
15 But I will turn it over to Commissioner Kavanagh, um,  
16 to really dig into those metrics for you. Thank you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you.

18 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:

19 Thank you, Commissioner, and good afternoon, Council  
20 Member. Ah, it is a very sort of complex, ah,  
21 balance of, of, of inputs that we use to determine  
22 our maintenance, ah, of any individual park or  
23 playground or site that we're responsible for, for.  
24 Ah, first off, to start with, you know, we do have an  
25 objective standard that we try to apply to all the

1 facilities that we operate. Ah, it is the standard  
2 that's applied during the park inspection program.  
3 Ah, we look at the same features consistently across  
4 the entire city. Ah, we have objective standards  
5 that we strive to achieve, ah, in every one of those  
6 parks and playgrounds or other facilities, ah, that  
7 we manage. Ah, we consider, um, a lot of different  
8 inputs to decide what the level of maintenance we  
9 think is appropriate, ah, for any given site. It  
10 includes the park inspection program results. It  
11 includes feedback from elected officials, community  
12 boards, and individuals, 311 complaints, ah, the  
13 information that our park supervisors, ah, generate  
14 during their inspections, ah, and, you know, our own  
15 assessment of how a park or facility...

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: ...is  
19 viewed by the public. Ah, all of those things are,  
20 are sort of, ah, brought together and we assign what  
21 we think what we call is a service level agreement  
22 for every park to determine the number of visits  
23 that, ah, we believe is necessary for that particular  
24 park, playground, or other facility, ah, to, that  
25 should receive on a weekly basis, ah, to meet the

1 standards that we've established, again citywide.  
2  
3 Ah, we track fairly rigorously our ability to meet  
4 the service levels that we, that we, ah, assign for  
5 any given park, ah, and that is sort of the basis,  
6 ah, of our maintenance approach. We make  
7 adjustments, of course, based on conditions that  
8 we're seeing, ah, on, ah, on the results from the  
9 park inspection program, again from the feedback that  
10 we receive from a variety of sources, including the  
11 elected officials. Ah, ah, and yes, you know, we  
12 have been experiencing an unusually high amount of  
13 illegal dumping its year, ah, and that is something  
14 that, ah, ah, you know, impacts our, our maintenance  
15 regimen in, in many different ways. You know, we're  
16 geared to, to maintain, clean, operate the parks, ah,  
17 as they, as, as they're used traditionally and that  
18 does generate sometimes litter, ah, graffiti, things  
19 like that, waste. Ah, I mean, illegal dumping, ah,  
20 can be, ah, you know, large quantities that require  
21 equipment that our normal maintenance crews don't  
22 have access to and that can certainly, ah, if impact  
23 the amount of time it takes us to address a condition  
24 like that, and similarly, ah, responses to conditions  
25 that are either brought the our attention, ah, again

1 through elected officials, community boards, the  
2 public, or through the park inspection program, ah,  
3 can vary greatly based on the, the type of, ah, of,  
4 of condition that's being brought to our attention.  
5 Ah, things like cleanliness, ah, can be resolved  
6 typically in less than a day, in most cases. Ah,  
7 things like graffiti can be resolved, unless it's on  
8 a sensitive structure or, are, or stonework. Ah, we  
9 try to remove within 24 hours. Um, repairs that can  
10 be done on a local level can happen very quickly,  
11 within a day or two. More sophisticated repairs that  
12 require, ah, skilled trades or, ah, materials and  
13 equipment that are not available, ah, within our, ah,  
14 district operations can take longer. And then  
15 weather does impact our ability to make some of the  
16 repairs and improvements that are necessary. Things  
17 like asphalt and concrete, ah, can only be done, ah,  
18 when the temperature is at a certain level, ah, and  
19 other times of the year it's not possible to, ah, you  
20 know, to do effective repairs of, of, of materials  
21 like that. Ah, so there are many different factors  
22 that go into both, um, our plan for maintenance, our  
23 execution, ah, of that. You cited, ah, vehicles.  
24 Ah, yes, occasionally our vehicles are out of service  
25

1 and, ah, ah, we are, they're not available for use.

2 But I, I do have to say, ah, we have one of the best  
3 fleet repair, ah, divisions in the city and  
4 consistently have, ah, among the highest, ah, in-  
5 service ratings for our vehicles.  
6

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Sorry,  
8 Commissioner...

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,  
10 something that we focus on. We understand that the  
11 impact can be significant, ah, but we do focus on  
12 that as well among all the other factors that go into  
13 our maintenance and, ah, ah, plan, and our execution  
14 of that plan. And we'll be happy to go over in more  
15 detail for, you know, parks in your district that  
16 [inaudible] at your convenience.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: No,  
18 definitely, and I thank you for that. I will say,  
19 though, in terms of the vehicles we spent, I want to  
20 say, almost the entire summer without a functioning  
21 vehicle, where I felt like it could have been, um,  
22 handled in a way where we pull a vehicle from, ah,  
23 somewhere else that may have multiple vehicles as  
24 opposed to having no working vehicles in the  
25 district. And so as a result I did receive a

1  
2 significant amount of, um, complaints from the  
3 community in terms of upkeep of Brookville Park  
4 because of, um, the downed vehicles. And I think  
5 there was something, um, one of the, one of the  
6 vehicles was extremely old, as I understand it, so I  
7 think it was an engine problem, and the other  
8 vehicle, I don't remember off the top of my head what  
9 was wrong with it, but they require, it required a  
10 long period of time for them to get repaired. And so  
11 things like that I'd like to see, I guess the agency  
12 be a bit more nimble with the resources to make sure  
13 that we don't have communities doing without those  
14 type of resources. And the last thing I'll just say,  
15 and thank you, Chair Koo for the, um, time. I would  
16 just like to associate myself with a part of what  
17 Council Member Holden mentioned in terms of the  
18 timeline of, um, projects with the Parks Department  
19 and Commissioner Liam Kavanaugh we've met, um, in my  
20 district and talked about projects that the Parks,  
21 um, has in, um, the hopper for District 31 and just  
22 would like to see these projects, um, take place a  
23 lot sooner. Um, we, we find that in other parts of  
24 [inaudible] there are projects that are starting up  
25 afterwards and finishing before, um, some of the

1 projects in my district and, you know, we'd love to  
2 see you the Beach 59th playground happen sooner.  
3 The, the, um, capital projects along the bay area  
4 happen sooner. Um, so however we can work together  
5 to expedite those timelines I'd greatly, greatly  
6 appreciate that.  
7

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Ah, ah,  
10 we'll go back to Chair Koo, I think who has a few  
11 extra questions before moving on to public testimony.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, I have additional  
13 question, yeah. Thank you. Ah, Commissioner, ah,  
14 can I ask you, ah, ah, something about the  
15 [inaudible] special program. Does the [inaudible]  
16 special program include assessing landscaping? Ah,  
17 for example, whether the lawn is mowed or flower beds  
18 are intact and if the trees have been [inaudible] a  
19 third or wood chips around them. So does your  
20 program include those assessments?

21 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you,  
22 Council Member. Yes, it does, ah, include lawn  
23 features as one of the categories. But, ah, I will  
24 let Director Butler expand on that.  
25

1                                   DIRECTOR BUTLER: Thank you,  
2  
3 Commissioner. Thank you, Chair Koo, for that  
4 questions. Ah, you know, absolutely, landscape  
5 features are a part of the, ah, the PIP calculus, ah,  
6 in terms of what we inspect at a site. Ah, for trees  
7 we're looking at issues such as dangling or dead  
8 limbs, branches at eye level. Ah, we also note non-  
9 hazardous situations, a tree is leaning, there's a  
10 cavity, things like that, ah, and we've had training  
11 from Forestry to align with their way of looking at  
12 trees to make sure that the way we're capturing  
13 things is as useful as possible to them. Ah, we look  
14 at hort areas. Ah, we also recently met with our  
15 horticultural people to make sure that we're using  
16 the right terminology there. Ah, they refer to  
17 things as mixed borders and rain gardens and things  
18 like that. So they showed how things are supposed to  
19 look, including, you know, some of the newer designs,  
20 you know, some sort of more meadow-like areas and  
21 green infrastructure, so having a good understanding  
22 of what is and isn't good maintenance and, again,  
23 capturing things in a way that's most useful to them.  
24 But then lawns have always been a part of the PIP  
25 program. Ah, we have a standard, ah, 6 inches is the

1  
2 maximum height for most nonirrigated lawns, and we  
3 capture bareness as well, and all those things can  
4 result in a future failure or even in a site future,  
5 ah, if they're, if they're, ah, very bad in an  
6 inspection.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

8 DIRECTOR BUTLER: You're welcome.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So I have, actually I  
10 have a few more questions, um, before I turn it over  
11 to the public. Ah, thank you, Director. So,  
12 Commissioner, Local Law 98 of 2015 required that  
13 Parks report on maintenance resources allocated to  
14 [inaudible] properties. So the question is will this  
15 year's report be issued on time? The due date is  
16 usually, ah, December 1.

17 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you. Ah,  
18 Matt?

19 DIRECTOR DRURY: Yeah, hi. Ah, this is,  
20 this is Matt. My understanding is that our  
21 innovation and performance management team, which is  
22 normally the team that, ah, compiles all of that  
23 data, that is available from a variety of sources,  
24 ah, within it, has been working with the boroughs to  
25 kind of, ah, quality control and review that data.

1 But, but my understanding is it should be, ah,  
2 released and available on time as, as it has been for  
3 the last several years.

4  
5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. So did the most  
6 recent report highlight any areas of the city, ah,  
7 where park resources and, ah, where park resources  
8 and maintenance suffer the most. Did you highlight  
9 which areas that need special attention?

10 DIRECTOR DRURY: I, I would, I would  
11 venture to say that, you know, the report has been a  
12 useful exercise, you know, every year as, and, and  
13 but layered over, you know, all the other data that's  
14 available to being seen, including PIP inspection  
15 reports. Um, I'm, I'm not aware that it really  
16 identified any, you know, core, ah, neighborhoods in  
17 need that wouldn't have come to our attention through  
18 a variety of other, ah, avenues, PIP inspections, 311  
19 data, our, our staff, you know, analysis on the  
20 ground. Ah, I defer to Commissioner Kavanagh and  
21 others if they feel differently.

22 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:  
23 Council Member, the only thing I would add is that,  
24 ah, ah, calendar year 2020 and fiscal year 2021, ah,  
25 will always have an asterisk attached to them, ah,

1  
2 indicating that it was, that it happened during the  
3 heart of the pandemic. And Local Law 98, the report  
4 that we're generating, and as Matt said, yes, ah,  
5 we're, we're, we're reviewing it now and we will  
6 issue it on time, ah, reflects that. Ah, we see  
7 lower resources recorded, ah, you know, for all of  
8 our parks around the city simply because we did not  
9 have the seasonal staff that we normally hire, ah, at  
10 the start of fiscal year 2021 and that carried  
11 through most of the fiscal year. Ah, so it is a  
12 little bit of an anomaly. It does, it will, you  
13 know, represent, you know, the, the maintenance, ah,  
14 inputs of, of the agency, but it is a little bit  
15 different and it has to be viewed in that light, I'm  
16 afraid.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Well, thank you. So  
18 what are the most common challenges or biggest  
19 obstacles to keeping our parks and playgrounds  
20 maintained?

21 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Ah, I, I, I could  
22 start by saying [inaudible] than Commissioner  
23 Kavanagh, ah, for his thoughts. But, of course,  
24 usage varies widely, and our PIP inspections and our  
25 monthly inspections, even by park supervisors are

1 just that snapshot in time, and so often we'll hear  
2 reports that, you know, could be things have changed  
3 since we there, even a day or two ago. So usage  
4 varies widely. How the parks are used vary widely,  
5 um, and of course we, we are just monitoring that  
6 snapshot in time, which is incredibly helpful over a  
7 long-term view and to address problems immediately  
8 the PIP results are addressed immediately. Ah, but  
9 it is an ever-changing, um, ah, situation, ah, you  
10 know, could be day to day even. But, ah, more  
11 operationally I'll let, ah, Commissioner Kavanagh  
12 address that.  
13

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:

15 Thank you, Commissioner. Ah, Council Member, I, I  
16 would have to say that, ah, the biggest challenge in  
17 terms of maintaining parks at, at a high level, at  
18 the standard that we all want to see in our parks,  
19 ah, is misuse by a very small percentage of people  
20 who use the parks. Overwhelming, ah, the public  
21 treats parks with respect. Ah, they, they use them  
22 responsibly, ah, and, ah, and, you know, we  
23 appreciate that greatly. And many, many people,  
24 thousands of people throughout the city, ah, come out  
25 on a regular basis to help us maintain the parks and

1  
2 that is absolutely crucial, ah, to having the great  
3 park system that we all enjoy. Ah, however, there is  
4 a small minority that has a, has a outsized impact on  
5 the conditions of parks, unfortunately. Ah, Council  
6 Member, ah, ah, mentioned earlier that illegal  
7 dumping. That is again unfortunately a real problem.  
8 Ah, but we do see people who don't pick up after  
9 their dogs, ah, graffiti that was created in parks,  
10 ah, I can't tell you how many times we see people  
11 leaving food waste out in the open when there is a, a  
12 container, ah, within, you know, 10 or 15 feet, ah,  
13 and that's extremely frustrating for our staff who,  
14 ah, who try their best to keep, ah, parks, ah, clean,  
15 safe, presentable, ah, for the public. Ah, so it's  
16 really that small minority of people who misuse parks  
17 that has an outsized impact on what we experience in  
18 terms of our maintenance, ah, chores and, and, and  
19 responsibilities and sometimes what the public  
20 experiences.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Commissioner, are all  
22 parks cleaned every day, or is it once a week, or how  
23 is it determined?

24 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Well, every park,  
25 I was just, I was going to say, Commissioner Kavanagh

1 [inaudible] every park does have either a mobile crew  
2 assigned to it or a fixed post crew that are  
3 responsible for, um, that park or that area, ah, and  
4 they are there, um, on a regular schedule. But  
5 Commissioner Kavanagh, you can, um, please, shed,  
6 shed more light.  
7

8 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,  
9 yes, thank you, ah, Commissioner, and thank you,  
10 Council Member. As I mentioned earlier, ah, you  
11 know, we look at a lot of different inputs to decide  
12 the level of maintenance that any given park should  
13 receive, ah, ah, on a weekly basis. Ah, that  
14 includes the Parks Inspection Program, our  
15 understanding of the utilization, the, the, the rate  
16 of utilization, the type of utilization, inputs from,  
17 ah, from 311, elected officials, community boards,  
18 things like that. And we develop what we call a  
19 service level agreement for each park or facility  
20 that we maintain, and that is, ah, that, ah, is the  
21 number of visits we try to provide on a weekly basis  
22 so that that park meets our standards. There were  
23 three broad categories, ah, for those service level  
24 agreements, ah, A, B, and C. And A means that we try  
25 to visit the park five to seven times a week. A B is

1  
2 three to five times a week. And a C is one to three  
3 times a week. And Cs generally are green streets,  
4 ah, and, ah, smaller properties that don't have  
5 features and facilities like playgrounds or comfort  
6 stations or other things that attract people to stay  
7 for a long period of time. So that is our approach.  
8 We have a service level agreement for all of the  
9 sites that we maintain and our staff, ah, is deployed  
10 to deliver on that service level agreement on a  
11 weekly basis.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, so if a playground  
13 or park does not meet the, ah, PIP, the inspection,  
14 ah, criteria, ah, does PPR reallocate or increase  
15 maintenance resources?

16 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:  
17 Council Member, we don't reallocate based on one PIP  
18 inspection. It is, ah, a random inspection that  
19 happens twice a year. However, we aggregate those  
20 results to look for patterns either within a type of  
21 park, a district, or a sector. Ah, and if we see,  
22 you know, a pattern that is showing, ah, that we're  
23 not meeting standards, ah, in a district or a sector  
24 then we might make adjustments in the service level  
25 agreement or, ah, the approach to maintaining the

1 site. As Commissioner Fialkoff mentioned earlier,  
2 ah, we have what we call either fixed posts or mobile  
3 crews. It's the primary method through which we  
4 deliver maintenance and services. Ah, fixed posts  
5 require that we have a working comfort station to  
6 support the staff. Ah, but there are sometimes when  
7 we're able to fix posts more when we see, ah,  
8 persistent, ah, ah, problems with maintenance. Ah,  
9 and that might be one of the strategies that we take  
10 to address, ah, issues that are, that are unearthed  
11 through the PIP inspection process or through other  
12 means.  
13

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. So how much of the  
15 agency's maintenance and operations, ah, is done by  
16 seasonal or temporary staff?

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,  
18 well, the seasonal staff work, you know, just during  
19 a, a certain portion of the year. It's  
20 approximately, ah, four to five months. It varies,  
21 ah, given some of the programs that we, ah, operate.  
22 You know, for example, our beaches open, ah, on  
23 Memorial Day weekend, ah, so we begin ramping up the  
24 staffing for that, ah, for those places in April in  
25 preparation for the season. Our pools, which also,

1  
2 ah, ah, are a major part of our seasonal plan, they  
3 open at the end of June, ah, so we begin ramping up  
4 them, ah, in mid May and they go through the week  
5 after Labor Day, both of those, ah, programs. , ah,  
6 and then in terms of our parks and playground  
7 maintenance we do add seasonal staff to expand our  
8 operating day so that we can keep our comfort  
9 stations open later and deal with the, ah, increased  
10 usage that we see throughout the summer. So during  
11 that period of time from roughly the middle of April  
12 through the end of September I would estimate that  
13 about 50% of the maintenance that we deliver is done  
14 through our seasonal staff.

15 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, so what happens,  
16 ah, to these staff members when their time with the  
17 agency ends?

18 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,  
19 well, many of them are our seasonal staff who return  
20 to us year after year. Ah, they have other, in some  
21 cases, I'm not gonna say all cases, some cases that  
22 have other employment that they return to. Some of  
23 them are students, ah, many of them are students, in  
24 fact, particularly, ah, among our lifeguards and, and  
25 the staff who works, ah, at our facilities during the

1  
2 summer months and they return to school. Um, but  
3 there are a variety of things that they do throughout  
4 the rest of the year.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So what is the, what is  
6 the training process, ah, like for new seasonal hires  
7 or for temporary workers? Ah, how often does the,  
8 does the agency have to do these kind of training,  
9 redo this every year? When they come back next year  
10 they still receive the training?

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.  
12 We do try to train and, and orient our staff, ah, on  
13 an annual basis, and we do it in a variety of ways.  
14 For example, the Park Opportunity Program operates  
15 year round, ah, and we have new candidates who enroll  
16 in that program throughout the course of the year.  
17 So we're constantly training the new arrivals in the  
18 Park, ah, Opportunity Program, ah, throughout the  
19 course of the year. Ah, and then, um, for our  
20 seasonal maintenance staff, again, they come on, ah,  
21 at staggered times from April through, ah, through  
22 the start of the summer, ah, for different specific,  
23 ah, aspects of our operation. And yes, we do want to  
24 train them, even if they are experienced and have  
25 worked for us before, ah, just to be certain that

1  
2 they, ah, that they're, they're skills are refreshed,  
3 they understand our, our standards and goals, and the  
4 processes that we use, ah, to, ah, you know, to  
5 maintain parks and playgrounds. In some cases  
6 there's a requirement that they receive very specific  
7 training. For example, at our pools we hire staff to  
8 operate the filtration systems in those places and  
9 every year they have to be recertified and trained,  
10 ah, to make sure that they are current with the,  
11 whatever standards may have changed over the course  
12 of the year. There are very strict safety  
13 requirements for working in those environments and we  
14 want to make sure that those are emphasized and, ah,  
15 fully understood by our staff. So there's, and, you  
16 know, there is equipment, ah, you know, for example,  
17 tractors and things like that where you don't use,  
18 ah, when you're not working for the Parks Department  
19 and it really is important, ah, that we provide a  
20 refresher training, ah, to make sure that they're  
21 operating safely and effectively.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. So what  
23 happens if a park fails, ah, the inspection program  
24 every time? Ah, what happens to them?

1  
2                   FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,  
3 whenever a park fails an inspection we go through a  
4 process to review the results of the inspection and,  
5 ah, and look at what did our maintenance program  
6 Department of Aging, ah, in terms of that particular  
7 failure, ah, or, or any other issues in that park.  
8 So we look and see whether, ah, we met the service  
9 level agreement that we established for the park. If  
10 we did, we look to see whether the staff was fully  
11 aware of whether or not of the condition that caused,  
12 ah, the park to fail and the measures that they can  
13 take to address. And, you know, if there are  
14 instances where, ah, you know, we're, we're seeing  
15 repeated problems we may address the service level  
16 agreement, that is to increase the frequency of  
17 visits, ah, to address the condition that has  
18 occurred, or, ah, if it is something that is  
19 happening that, ah, shouldn't happen, again,  
20 something like illegal dumping, we will try to work  
21 with our park enforcement patrol, ah, to, ah, ah,  
22 enforce the rules around that. Ah, sometimes we're  
23 able to work with the Sanitation Department around  
24 illegal dumping. We've done some effective with that  
25 around that. Ah, and then just to publicize the

1 fact, ah, that, you know, these, these problems are  
2 occurring and let the community be aware so they can  
3 assist us, ah, in limiting, ah, you know, those  
4 occurrences. So there are a variety of things we do,  
5 but we do look very closely at, ah, at unacceptable  
6 conditions that are identified throughout PIP program  
7 and do our best to align our maintenance, ah, to  
8 address them as they occur.  
9

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So are there any parks  
11 that, ah, ah, fail the inspection program every year,  
12 or two or three years in a row? Are there any such  
13 parks?

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Ah,  
15 yes, there are. There are parks that have failed,  
16 ah, you know, several inspections.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, constantly, yeah,  
18 yeah. OK. So I won't ask you for names of them, but  
19 we can talk offline. Ah, ah, I'm going to turn it  
20 over to our moderator to see whether the public has  
21 questions, um, to ask us.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Ah, not questions, ah,  
24 to give testimony, public testimony, yeah.  
25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yes. Thank you, Chair,  
3 Chair Koo. We can move on to public testimony and  
4 thank you to Commissioner Fialkoff and the reps from  
5 the Parks Department for testifying. At this point  
6 we will move on to public testimony. I'd like to  
7 remind everyone that unlike our typical council  
8 hearings we'll be calling on individuals one by one  
9 to testify. As I mentioned earlier, each panelist  
10 will be given three minutes to speak, so please begin  
11 once the sergeant has started the timer and given you  
12 the cue to begin. Council members who have questions  
13 for a specific panelist should use the raise hand  
14 function in Zoom and I will call on you after the  
15 panelist has completed their testimony. For  
16 panelists, again, once your name is called a member  
17 of our staff will unmute you and the Sergeant will  
18 give you the cue to begin upon setting the time. So  
19 please wait for that announcement, ah, until you  
20 begin your testimony. At this point I'll call on  
21 reps from DC37 to testify. Joe Pulio, followed by  
22 Daniel Clay.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 JOE PULIO: OK, good afternoon. Ah,  
25 thank you, Chair Koo. Um, turn on my video. OK.

1  
2 OK, thank you, ah, Chair Koo. Ah, thank you, City  
3 Council members and, ah, welcome, Commissioner, ah,  
4 to, ah, to our, to our committee. Ah, I'd like to  
5 point out, ah, when it pertains to the gardeners, ah,  
6 them doing maintenance work, OK. We have, ah, city  
7 seasonal aides and we have city park workers that,  
8 ah, do this function and we think that they are  
9 better utilized doing gardening work as opposed to  
10 doing work that, ah, my members and 1505 members do.  
11 Ah, they get paid significantly more money to do  
12 these jobs and we feel that they should, ah, do the  
13 job that in which they were intended on, on doing.  
14 Um, ah, we've been fortunate this year due to the  
15 stimulus money that's been given to us, like you  
16 mentioned. Ah, we've gotten 3000 workers for '21 and  
17 I believe some of that money is still left over, good  
18 significant money, ah, that, that leaves with 2000  
19 for '21 and, ah, this is something that we don't know  
20 what's going to happen moving forward. Ah, this was,  
21 again, stimulus money and that we need this money to  
22 continue to keep the parks in the condition in which  
23 they, they are now. Um, we, ah, are asking that we  
24 hire, ah, more parks workers, um, ah, specifically  
25 CPWs and CSAs, ah, to, ah, to fulfill the

1 obligations, ah, to keep our parks clean. Also, too,  
2 ah, a lot of this, you know, when it comes to  
3 cleanliness in the parks, I know it was briefly  
4 mentioned, it's also due to our Parks enforcement.  
5 Um, you know, a lot of the prevention, ah, by them  
6 being at these parks to prevent people from, ah,  
7 littering our parks, ah, writing graffiti and causing  
8 other havocs inside the park. Um, you know, it  
9 should be noted that these individuals are needed as  
10 well and that their numbers, you know, have, ah, have  
11 declined and we'd like to see them, um, increase as  
12 well. OK, I know I have, ah, few time, ah, very  
13 little time left. Um, thank you again.

14  
15 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next  
17 we'll hear from Daniel Clay, who will be followed by  
18 Adam Ganser and Carlos Castell Croke.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 DANIEL CLAY: Hi there, everybody. Ah,  
21 Daniel Clay here. I'm a gardener for Parks in  
22 Prospect Park and, um, ah, long-time gardener and,  
23 ah, new president of the, um, Local [inaudible]. And  
24 I, um, just wanted to, um, thank everybody. Ah, ah,  
25 I think I'm, I'm, I would say I'm the most thankful

1 person here, as, ah, as, ah, one of the members of  
2 the boots on the ground. Ah, I get taken care of  
3 these out-of-control old shrubs and, ah, growing  
4 number of invasive species, and as well as the  
5 garbage. That's the thing. It's, it's not uncommon,  
6 not uncommon at all for a gardener to spend his or  
7 her entire morning or even day cleaning and emptying  
8 garbage cans and, um, ah, [inaudible] addressed and,  
9 ah, hopefully, ah, it will be soon, um, especially  
10 with, um, ah, ah, what I've seen as a, as a growing  
11 interest in parks, growing appreciation for parks.  
12 Well, sometimes nothing much appreciation with all  
13 the garbage that's left behind. But at least a, a  
14 growing number of visitation to parks. OK, so thanks  
15 for your time. Thanks to the City Council. Thanks  
16 to the city administration. Thank you [inaudible]  
17 and New York Parks. I yield my time.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next  
21 speaker is Adam Ganser, followed by Carlos Castell  
22 Croke.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 ADAM GANSER: Hi, my name is Adam Ganser  
25 and I'm the executive director of New Yorkers for

1  
2 Parks. I would like to thank Chairman Koo and the  
3 committee for the opportunity to speak today on these  
4 important issues. I want to make clear from the  
5 start the biggest challenge to a successful Parks  
6 Department in New York City is funding. Ah, the  
7 Parks Department can't tell you that, but we can tell  
8 you that. New Yorkers for Parks has championed for  
9 more resources for parks for more than 100 years.  
10 COVID-19 in the last 18 months have placed parks and  
11 open spaces at the center of all of our lives and  
12 drawn the attention of policy makers, our City  
13 Council, and the incoming mayor, Eric Adams. The  
14 message is clear. Now is the time to fundamentally  
15 reboot the city's commitment to proactively resource  
16 our parks and our open spaces. The Community Parks  
17 Initiative has been a successful program targeting  
18 parks in New York City. They have not received  
19 investment in 25 years. The fact that we have any  
20 parks in New York City that haven't received an  
21 investment in 25 years, let alone the fact that we  
22 have hundreds that fall into that category, is  
23 reprehensible. The mayor's announcement to expand  
24 that program is another small step in the right  
25 direction. It is important to clarify that CPI is

1 not successful without the community engagement and  
2 outreach that is supported by Partnership for Parks  
3 and the dollars that support those programs. We want  
4 to note, however, that this is a tiny part of a much  
5 bigger shift required in the investment of our parks  
6 and open spaces. While the Parks Inspection Program  
7 captures a snapshot of the conditions of our parks,  
8 it does not capture the estimated 6 billion dollars  
9 in deferred maintenance to infrastructure in our  
10 parks. There are no resources or urgency to fund  
11 capital needs assessment, let alone financing to  
12 complete that actual work. It is all too easy to  
13 throw the Parks Department under the bus, but that  
14 completely misses the point and is totally  
15 inappropriate. The point being that our Parks  
16 Department has been functioning on a shoestring  
17 budget for decades at just 5% of the city budget,  
18 setting our park system into further disrepair. New  
19 Yorkers for Parks would like to use this moment to  
20 highlight that the incoming mayor, all leading  
21 candidates for council speaker, as well as dozens of  
22 city council members have agreed it is time for a  
23 fundamental change to this conversation and to  
24 increase the Parks budget to the needs that New  
25

1  
2 Yorkers have to 1% of the city budget. This  
3 investment will be transformative for New York's  
4 recovery, for the health of our citizens, for its  
5 climate resilience, and to make an equitable and  
6 healthy city. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Adam, thank  
8 you. I agree with you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Next is  
10 Carlos Castell Croke, who will be followed by Ted  
11 Enoch.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 CARLOS CASTELL CROKE: Ah, good  
14 afternoon. My name is Carlos Castell Croke and I'm  
15 the associate for New York City programs at the New  
16 York League of Conservation Voters. Um, parks are  
17 one of the city's most valuable environmental assets  
18 and we must be investing in them in order to fight  
19 climate change and protect public health. Parks  
20 provide numerous resiliency benefits, increasing  
21 cooling by reducing the urban heat island effect, and  
22 fighting flooding by capturing almost two billion  
23 gallons of storm water runoff. Parks also clean our  
24 air, absorbing pollutants and greenhouse gases that  
25 cause climate change. And lastly, parks provide safe

1  
2 open spaces for recreation, an aspect that was  
3 highlighted during the height of the pandemic. In  
4 order to ensure that parks can continue to provide  
5 these benefits we must be investing heavily in parks  
6 operations and maintenance. Parks too often are cut  
7 when money is tight in the city, as we saw in FY21.  
8 The direct impact of cuts like this are obvious.  
9 2020 was one of the dirtiest years Parks had on  
10 record. [inaudible] it is also critical that we are  
11 funding the Parks Department consistently. Constant  
12 changes in funding levels year in and year out make  
13 it very difficult to maintain workers and allocate  
14 resources. This is why we are excited that Mayor  
15 Elect Adams along with many New York City Council  
16 members are committed to allocating 1% of the city  
17 budget to Parks, an initiative that the Play Fair for  
18 Parks campaign has, sees as a top priority. Note  
19 that the full council will also uphold this  
20 commitment next year as the budget is negotiated and  
21 will ensure that this funding is baselined, that  
22 Parks get consistent funding every year. Lastly, I'd  
23 like to thank Chair Koo for his service, ah, as Parks  
24 Committee chair. Ah, he has been a formidable  
25

2 champion for green open space and we will miss his  
3 leadership in the council next year. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next  
6 speaker is Ted, ah, Ted Enoch, followed by Roxanne  
7 Delgado.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 TED ENOCH: Hello. I'm Ted Enoch,  
10 director of Catalyst, an intensive outreach effort  
11 led by City Parks Foundation and Partnership for  
12 Parks. I send regards and thanks from our executive  
13 director, Heda Luboff, who was unable to join today,  
14 but who wants to extend her sincere thanks on behalf  
15 of all of us at City Parks Foundation to Chairman Koo  
16 and the entire Parks Committee for your unwavering  
17 dedication to our city's parks and open spaces.  
18 Partnership for Parks, a joint program of City Parks  
19 Foundation and New York City Parks, helps turn  
20 community members and occasional volunteers into  
21 neighborhood leaders, building long-term investment  
22 in public spaces to the formation of friends groups  
23 that care for and activate parks. Parks are critical  
24 community resources that have become even more  
25 important throughout the pandemic and in our fight to

1 combat climate change. We're excited about the  
2 mayor's expansion of the Community Parks Initiative  
3 to upgrade 100 parks and neighborhoods with the  
4 greatest need. When CPI launched in 2014 Mayor de  
5 Blasio cited the City Parks Foundation Catalyst  
6 Program as the proven model through which New York  
7 City Parks would engage community stakeholders, such  
8 as friends of groups, and help them build their own  
9 capacity to use program and be advocates for their  
10 parks. New York City Parks received 1.1 million in  
11 operating support to hire additional Partnership for  
12 Parks outreach coordinators. Since then that  
13 outreach team has played a key role in engaging 71  
14 community partners and 67 CPI renovations, often  
15 recruiting and building grassroots support where no  
16 park group existed before. The team continued to  
17 support nearly 500 volunteer community groups across  
18 the five boroughs, which is the largest such network  
19 of grassroots groups dedicated to parks in the US.  
20 Adding 100 new park renovations is incredibly  
21 exciting, but to ensure that CPI parks are well used  
22 in the long term it will be critical to provide new  
23 funds to expand and support the partnership's  
24 outreach team, who are on the ground every day  
25

1  
2 organizing community members around both renovations,  
3 planning, and long-term care and use. We know that  
4 renovations are far more successful when the  
5 community not only provides input at the start, but  
6 is also invested in the ultimate success and care for  
7 the park once it has reopened. In this work, we see  
8 community members as our partners and the essential  
9 stakeholders in our effort to realize the potential  
10 of our parks and to bring these spaces to life.

11 Finally, as an organization's fundamental mission is  
12 to address inequity in our parks, we strongly believe  
13 the city's investment of 0.5% of the budget, 0.5, is  
14 insufficient to adequately maintain and improve these  
15 spaces. We join the Play Fair Coalition in asking  
16 the City Council to dedicate at least 1% of the  
17 city's budget to parks to advance a visionary and  
18 pragmatic approach to meeting their needs. Thank  
19 you, Chairman Koo, the Parks Committee members, and  
20 City Council for organizing today's hearing, and for  
21 your commitment to improving our city's parks and  
22 open spaces.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, thank you.

24

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. And our  
3 next speaker, who is our last registered panelist, is  
4 Roxanne Delgado.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 ROXANNE DELGADO: OK, thank you,  
7 Commission, for this, um, very informative hearing  
8 [inaudible] by the Parks Inspection Program. I would  
9 like to suggest a safety criteria in the inspection  
10 regarding since we have an uptick in crimes in our  
11 parks as well as incidents regarding e-scooters and,  
12 and mopeds. So it would be great if they consider,  
13 ah, safety criteria in their inspection program  
14 within inside parks. Um, Partnership for Parks is a  
15 great program, but it really doesn't work in the  
16 Bronx because the partnership is one-sided, where we  
17 have volunteers devoted their time and dedication and  
18 resources to maintain their parks, but the park  
19 agency itself doesn't respond and do its part by  
20 addressing overfilled trash cans and addressing  
21 illegal dumping, illegal barbecuing, ah, lack of tree  
22 care, so it kind of discourages, ah, or impairs that  
23 partnership for parks relationship. And I'm very  
24 saddened because when people get involved in caring  
25 for the parks they do it from, ah, their good, ah,

1  
2 genuine care for their green spaces. They're not  
3 doing it for anything else. They're not being paid  
4 to do this. Yet when we see our park agency not  
5 having the same devotion of care for our parks it  
6 kind of discourages people from becoming leaders,  
7 stewardship of green spaces. And I'd just like to  
8 say that mismanagement and lack of accountability is  
9 the main problem in the parks in the Bronx. And this  
10 has to be addressed because I have people who refuse  
11 to go to your hearing to advocate for more funding  
12 for parks and yes, they're extremely underfunded.  
13 There's no doubt about. But they say why should we  
14 do this because they just mismanage everything. And  
15 they don't address concerns, they ignore the  
16 community. And there's a lot of like, um, ah,  
17 bitterness towards the park agency, especially from  
18 volunteers who devoted their time and, and, and  
19 devotion for, ah, park spaces. So this has to be  
20 addressed in order to move forward and I think the  
21 mission statement of Parks should be changed. It  
22 should include environmental, ah, justice and climate  
23 change, because right now Parks is not about  
24 protecting the trees or protecting our green spaces.  
25 It's just like, oh, we're paid to maintain it and

1  
2 we'll do the minimum as possible. But we have to  
3 protect our green spaces. We have to protect our  
4 assets. Some of these assets will never be replaced  
5 and they're valuable resources for the community. So  
6 I'd like to thank the chair for his time. I'd like  
7 to thank this chair for all his devotion to this  
8 issues and holding this hearing. And have a happy  
9 holiday to you and your friends and your staff and  
10 your loved ones. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Roxanne.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

13 Ah, as I mentioned before, Roxanne Delgado was our  
14 last registered speaker. Um, if we have  
15 inadvertently missed anyone who is registered to  
16 testify and has not been called yet, please use the  
17 Zoom raise hand function now and you will be called  
18 on in the order that your has been raised. Seeing  
19 none, I will turn it back to Chair Koo to offer any  
20 closing remarks and adjourn the hearing.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, yeah. So I  
22 want to thank, ah, the Parks Commissioner Fialkoff  
23 and First Deputy Commissioner Kavanaugh, and  
24 Assistant Commissioner David Cerron, director of  
25 Parks Inspection Program, um, Mr. Butler, and Mr.

2 Drury, director of government relations. And also  
3 our Parks Committee, ah, Kris Sartori, our moderator,  
4 and our lawyer, and Patrick, Chima, and Monica. And  
5 also my chief of staff, Elaine Charl, and also I want  
6 to thank all the council members who came today and  
7 all the public for their participation. Thank you  
8 all. Ah, so this meeting is being adjourned. Thank  
9 you. [gavel]

10 UNIDENTIFIED: Ending live stream.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date December 9, 2021