



**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committee on Finance jointly with the Committee on Parks & Recreation
Oversight: Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget
May 13, 2022**

Testimony By: Susan Donoghue, Commissioner

Good afternoon, City Council Finance Committee Chair Brannan, City Council Parks Committee Chair Krishnan and members of the Council Finance and Parks Committees. I am Sue Donoghue, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, and I am joined here today by a number of our senior staff. Thank you for inviting us to discuss the Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget for NYC Parks.

I'd like to begin by outlining some key facts and figures that help illustrate the scale and diversity of what we do at NYC Parks. We are the steward of over 30,000 acres – 14 percent of New York City's land mass – including 10,000 acres of natural areas. We oversee nearly 4,500 individual properties, ranging from parks and playgrounds to community gardens and natural forests.

Spring marks the beginning of “prime season” for our parks, when temperatures begin to warm up and our city's green and open spaces truly come alive, giving New Yorkers opportunities to lead happier, healthier lives. In the six weeks since I testified at the Park Committee's Preliminary Budget Hearing, we've been busy, delivering for New Yorkers and preparing for our peak season. We're hosting community design input meetings for upcoming park reconstructions, including two of the newest Community Parks Initiative projects at Detective Omar Edwards Park in Harlem and Chief Dennis L. Devlin Park in the Bronx. We're holding ribbon-cutting ceremonies at parks like Waring Playground in the Bronx, where we completed a \$3.6 million dollar renovation four months ahead of schedule, and Idlewild Park in southeast Queens, where we opened the brand-new \$8.1 million-dollar Environmental Center. We celebrated the 40th Anniversary of our Parks Enforcement Patrol, which is continuing to grow and add new officers dedicated to making sure that all New Yorkers can enjoy our parks safely. We're offering incredible family-friendly programming at park events like Jackie Robinson Day in Harlem and our beloved “Street Games” event, which returned after a two-year hiatus to celebrate the classic outdoor games played for generations in the streets and parks of New York City. And on Arbor Day in late April, we held workshops, tree plantings, and fun nature-themed activities to make sure that New Yorkers understand that parks and trees are the lungs of the city, and it's important to preserve, restore, and care for them.

This spirit of care and commitment to parks and open space is reflected in the Mayor's Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2023, which demonstrates New York City's continued commitment to building a more equitable park system, under the leadership of Mayor Adams and thanks to a strong partnership with the City Council. The Mayor's Executive Budget provides NYC Parks with an operating budget of \$601.4 million dollars, a \$44 million-dollar increase from the Preliminary Expense budget. The Executive FY23 10-Year Capital Plan includes a total budget of \$7.7 billion dollars, including \$488 million in new Mayoral funding for approved new capital needs.

It is our Agency's mission to not simply maintain our city's parks and green spaces, but to truly care for them and keep them in a consistent state of good repair. The FY23 Executive Budget is a historic “down payment” on the Mayor's commitment to parks, and a greener and more equitable future for our park system, bringing us to a staffing level where we can deliver cleaner, greener and safer parks for New Yorkers in every neighborhood across the city.



NYC Parks

This budget provides over \$40 million dollars for 719 new baseline staff positions, an incredible investment in our agency workforce that will help transition more staff from seasonal partial-year positions into year-round, trained careers with Parks – great green jobs with exciting opportunities for professional development and long-term career advancement. The budget will significantly expand our year-round Maintenance and Operations staff caring for parks, complemented by the seasonal staffers that join our agency team during our busiest months, and includes funding for new state-of-the-art trash cans and expanded rodent abatement tools. The additional funding will also allow us to expand our roster of full-time specialized tradespersons – carpenters, ironworkers and masons that will help clear backlogged work orders and perform in-house preventative maintenance at our comfort stations and other facilities. The staff lines will also include increased Recreation Center staff, to allow more of our centers to expand hours – opening earlier and closing later, seven days a week- as well as provide additional staff to support programming and maintenance at centers throughout the city. Kids will have fun and healthy recreational alternatives later in the evening, and adults will have better access to fitness before or after work. Lastly, I'm pleased to add that this budget will allow us to baseline an increase for 80 new year-round Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) officers, who preserve and protect our parks and public facilities, and act as vital community liaisons for parkgoers.

In addition to these operational and staff budget increases, the FY23 Executive Budget provides over \$488 million dollars in new capital funding for the redesign and reconstruction of our open spaces and park amenities. This includes \$47.6 million dollars for greenway improvements in central Queens and along Brooklyn's southwest shoreline. These projects were identified by "Destination: Greenways!," a planning study conducted in partnership between NYC Parks and the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT), to fill gaps in existing greenway routes, with a focus on connecting communities to New York City's greater park system. Greenways are critical components of our city's park system, and thanks to Mayor Adams, we are improving outer-borough access and making the greenway experience safer and more inviting for all New Yorkers. This capital budget also includes \$186 million dollars in new "State Of Good Repair" funding, doubling our recurring investment for fundamental capital work, and giving the agency more flexibility to address serious problems with heavily used infrastructure like pools, pavement, sidewalks, synthetic turf fields and building roofs and exteriors. And lastly, the budget includes an additional capital investment of \$136 million dollars for street tree planting, the highest funding level for tree planting in over five years. This investment will allow the agency to plant 80,000 trees on city streets over the next 4 years and making sure that every New Yorker can enjoy the shade, beauty, and improved air quality that trees provide.

At our previous Council hearing, I noted that this year is the 200th anniversary of the birth of Frederick Law Olmsted, who essentially created the modern discipline of landscape architecture that blended function and beauty. Olmsted changed the way that people think about our parks and open spaces, and created green sanctuaries that had a profound impact on the cityscape. I'll close by offering an open invitation to come visit our agency headquarters at the Arsenal, as we are currently hosting a photo and art exhibit inspired by Olmsted's influence, featuring a selection of 10 new and reimagined parks that incorporate his design principles, including former industrial sites, waterfront parks, plazas, and neighborhood playgrounds. We are proud to live up to Olmsted's incredible legacy. Even as our city parks have changed and evolved over these two centuries, our agency's commitment remains the same – delivering incredible park experiences that all New Yorkers need and deserve.

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today and for your dedication to providing great parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers. We look forward to continue working with the Mayor and the City Council to create a bright, green future with a more equitable and innovative park system. Now, my senior staff and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.