

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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B E F O R E: SHEKAR KRISHNAN, CHAIRPERSON

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LINCOLN RESTLER
SANDRA UNG
MARJORIE VELAZQUEZ
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c

SUSAN M. DONOGHUE, New York City Parks
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MAYOWA ADEWUMI, 10th grade student

SHERRISE PALOMINO, Director of Advocacy
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HEATHER LUBOV, Executive Director for
City Parks Foundation

MARK FOCHT, Deputy Commissioner, Chief
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ALEX BUTLER, Director of Parks Inspection
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MATT DRURY, Director of Government
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CARTER STRICKLAND, New York City Director
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LYNN KELLY, Executive Director of New
York Restoration Projects

CARLOS CASTELL CROKE, Associate for New
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Conservation Voters (NYLCV)

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

ROSA CHANG, Co-founder Brooklyn Bridge
Manhattan

AARON SANDERS, Associate Director of
Advocacy and Policy at Natural Areas of
Conservancy

JONATHAN ROBINSON, Communication Director
for Marine Park Alliance

DAVID SALTONSTALL, Vice-President of
Government Relations and Policy for
Central Park Conservancy

JACKSON CHABOT, Director of Public Space
Advocacy at Open Plans

2 SGT. LEONARDO: At this time would the
3 Sergeants please turn on the recording?

4 SGT. BRADLEY: PC recording is up.

5 SGT. LEONARDO: Cloud is rolling. Back
6 to you Sergeant Bradley.

7 SGT. BRADLEY: Okay. Good morning. And
8 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing on
9 Parks and Recreation. At this time will all
10 panelists please turn on your videos for verification
11 purposes? To minimize disruption, place electronic
12 devices on silent or on vibrate mode. If you wish to
13 submit testimony you may do so at
14 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again that is
15 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your
16 cooperation. Chair you may begin.

17 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Thank you
18 so much Sergeant. Good morning everyone. Going
19 virtual I don't have a gavel, so I'm going to gavel
20 in with this stapler over here. (stapler pounding).
21 Good morning everyone and thank you so much for
22 joining our virtual hearing today before the
23 Council's Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name
24 is Shekar Krishnan. I am the Chair of the Committee
25 on the Parks and Recreation and the Council Member

2 for Jackson Heights and Elmhurst-Queens. I would
3 like to acknowledge my fellow Council Members who are
4 present today. We've been joined by Council Members
5 Marte, Ung, Narcisse, Dinowitz, Menin, Holden, Lee,
6 Velasquez, Moya. Council Members Carr and Council
7 Member Kagan. Thank you all for joining. And now
8 I'd like to begin with my opening statement. Good
9 morning and welcome to our virtual hearing on the
10 issue of how the COVID-19 pandemic highlights
11 inequity in the City's Park System. The benefits of
12 our parks are clear. They are critical for wellness,
13 has access to open space, has been shown to improve
14 physical health and help reduce anxiety, stress and
15 depression. They even provide numerous economic
16 benefits such as savings and healthcare costs,
17 savings and storm water treatment costs and increases
18 in tourism spending and property values. During the
19 height of the pandemic when lockdown protocols
20 started to close off New Yorkers to most aspects of
21 city life parks are one of the only resources that
22 could provide some sort of recreational
23 opportunities. As the weather warmed in the spring
24 and summer New Yorkers who were isolated indoors for
25 many months craved to use their parks, playgrounds

2 and athletic fields, courts, pools and beaches once
3 again. In fact it is well-known that park use
4 increased tremendously during the pandemic. At no
5 recent points in our City's history was the need to
6 treat parks as crucial infrastructure highlighted
7 more clearly than during the pandemic. I've always,
8 as I've always said the issue of parks equity in our
9 City is a matter a public health. Is a matter of
10 racial and economic justice. COVID-19 exposed
11 serious flaws like how we provide open space and
12 green space to all New Yorkers as a City. A brief
13 history lesson for a minute. For most of the 20th
14 century the City properly funded its green spaces
15 helping to make it the nation's premiere park system.
16 In fact, during the 1960s, the City devoted a healthy
17 1.5 percent of its budget to the parks department.
18 That's 60 years ago the Parks Department budget was
19 1.5 percent and today we are fighting as a City to
20 get our parks budget to 1 percent. Eventually, the
21 financial crisis of the 1970s forced large cutbacks
22 and by the late 1980s, the Parks Budget has fallen to
23 just 0.86 percent of the City's budget. The result
24 was that many parks turned into places that New
25 Yorkers avoided due to poor budgets and maintenance.

2 A few statistics to re-emphasize as I mentioned
3 before Parks spending was about 1 percent of the City
4 budget in 1960, 0.86 percent in 1986, 0.65 percent in
5 1991, 0.52 percent in 2000. Currently the
6 Department's preliminary budget for Fiscal Year 2023
7 is \$557.1 million and represents less than 1 percent
8 of the entire City budget. This is approximately
9 \$62.8 million less than the fiscal year '22 adopted
10 budget of \$619.9 million. In other words, we have
11 seen over the years a serious decrease and dis-
12 investment by our City government in our parks and
13 that has continued. This has resulted in
14 conservancies being formed to supplement public funds
15 with privately raised money for parks. With this
16 influx of private funds of many large and well-known
17 parks so a big turnaround in their status. And once
18 again became attractive recreational sites for City
19 residents and visitors to the City. However, there
20 are other parks in our City that have not received
21 the same amount of investment from our city
22 government raising the question of as these private
23 and public partnerships begin to grow in our city,
24 was this to augment the City's budget and investment
25 in our parks or was this to replace the City's public

2 spending of our parks because those parks that don't
3 have a conservancy, that cannot rely on private and
4 public partnerships have also seen serious inequity
5 in their investments. A somewhat recent example of
6 this imbalance was in 2012 when some of the largest
7 parks in our City received millions of dollars
8 between \$20 and \$100 million while in contrast
9 Flushing Meadows Corona Park in my home borough of
10 Queens, a park surrounded by immigrant communities.
11 Some of the most diverse communities on the planet,
12 attracted only \$5,000 that same year of 2012 in its
13 entire duration. While reliance on private funding
14 and conservancies increased public funding remained
15 stagnant for many years. Even today, public funding
16 consistently averages much less than 1 percent of the
17 whole City's budget. Even as I mentioned before the
18 cuts of the current preliminary budget, in Fiscal
19 Year 2022 when the budget was a bit bigger at \$620
20 million it only represented 0.6 percent of the entire
21 city's expense budget. The historical trend is
22 clear, we have not funded our parks sufficiently.
23 The equity problem is clear. We have not invested in
24 all of the parks in our City especially those in
25 community of color. It is concerning to see that

2 Mayor Adams' proposed Fiscal '23 expense budget for
3 parks totals only \$557.1 million. That still
4 represents only a little more than half of 1 percent
5 of the entire proposed city budget of \$98.5 billion.
6 Considering that we are rebounding since Fiscal Year
7 2022 with the Parks Budget, now is not the time to be
8 cutting back on investments in our green spaces. The
9 long-term results of all of this is that we have seen
10 a green disparity in how parks in certain
11 neighborhoods have greater access to private funding
12 and other resources do much better than smaller
13 neighborhood parks in lower income neighborhoods that
14 can only rely on public funding. While the Council
15 and administration in recent years have recognized
16 and sought to correct this disparity with the
17 implementation of the Community Parks Initiative and
18 Anchor Parks Initiative as well as the desire, faded
19 desire to increase the parks budget, COVID has
20 highlighted how far we still have to go, how the
21 access to parks and open space is still not equitable
22 across the City. We can see this also in the
23 maintenance services of our parks. There have been
24 numerous maintenance deficiency that affected City
25 parks for decades. A 2018 report by the City for

2 Urban Future entitled A New Leaf Revitalizing New
3 York City's Aging Parks Infrastructure found how our
4 park system is aging rapidly. The average city park
5 is approximately 77 years old with roughly 40 percent
6 of city pools having been built before 1950 with half
7 of the Parks Department's Recreation Centers
8 similarly built before that time. The department's
9 Waterfront Facilities, from piers to balk-heads,
10 marinas and docks are on average 80 years old. The
11 report further highlighted that the average city
12 parks has not has not any major investments since
13 1997. On top of that, through these budgets we have
14 seen that as public funding for parks has decreased
15 other agencies budget have increased. From Fiscal
16 year 2014 to FY 2019 the department's staffing levels
17 in the Parks Department grew at a rate of less than
18 that of other city agencies from 7,302 to 7,460. For
19 example, while the parks' department staff grew by
20 only 2 percent, the Department of Corrections grew by
21 17 percent. While we are fighting to get green
22 spaces in our poor communities of color, the same
23 ones that are suffering most acutely for the absolute
24 prices at Riker's Island. We have seen our Parks
25 Department grew barely in its staff while the

2 Department of Correction staff has grown
3 significantly. We have seen the way in which the
4 lack of park space has been exacerbated by the COVID-
5 19 pandemic while we face a report in the federal
6 courts calling for a federal receiver for Riker's
7 Island. If that doesn't show you the disparity
8 between how we prioritize resources for communities
9 of color I don't know what else does. While it has
10 been clearly documented that in many low income
11 neighborhoods and communities of color where cases
12 and death rates from COVID-19 were disproportionately
13 high residents lacked access to quality green space.
14 In fact, more than 1.1 million New Yorkers did not
15 have access to a park within a 10 minute walk of home
16 when playgrounds, fields and courts were closed. To
17 put this in perspective, the average size of park
18 land in this City is only 6.4 acres in low-income
19 neighborhoods compared with 14 acres in wealthier
20 neighborhoods. Further, the average park size is 7.8
21 acres in predominately black neighborhoods compared
22 with 29.8 acres in predominately white neighborhoods.
23 Generally, parks that serve low income neighborhoods
24 serve more people per acre than those in high income
25 areas. Now I know this well for Jackson Heights and

2 Elmhurst Queens where we rank 50 out of 51 when it
3 comes to green space per capita in all of New York
4 City's Council Districts. Neighborhoods like my own
5 highlight this disparity dramatically. During the
6 height of the pandemic Jackson Heights had a COVID
7 case rate of 4,706 per 100,000 people which was the
8 5th worst in the city and we averaged 2.28 square,
9 2.28 square feet of open space per capita which was
10 the fourth worst. Elmhurst had a case rate of 3,977
11 per 100,000 people which was the 15th worst in the
12 City and average 1.7 square feet of open space per
13 capita, square foot, 1.7 square foot open space per
14 capita, not even pleural which was the worst in the
15 whole City. I think, I know we can and must do
16 better than this. I hope to explore many of the
17 great ideas out there that seek to improve equity
18 including vastly increasing the parks budget. We
19 need 1 percent of \$1 billion for the parks. That is
20 now a, it's only a historic increase because of how
21 much our parks department has been disinvested in
22 over the years when it comes to public funding. By
23 all means, by all measures it is actually restoring
24 or trying to restore what we historically at one
25 point had in our parks budget. We must expand the

2 Community Parks Initiative. Ensure that money raised
3 through Parks Concession goes back directly to parks
4 and encourage the target of donations to benefit a
5 broad range of parks. Finally, I'd like to note that
6 we will also consider a piece of legislation that I
7 have sponsored today. Intro number 173 would require
8 the parks department to issue a semi-annual report
9 identifying parks and playgrounds that have routinely
10 failed inspections and submit a plan to the Council
11 how the issues at such parks and playgrounds will be
12 corrected. Regarding data from the Park Inspection
13 Program or PIP recent years saw a trend of overall
14 condition in cutting this features average acceptable
15 ratings in the high 80s and low 90s percentage wise.
16 However, the most recent data indicates a slight drop
17 since 2019 which I would like to examine a bit as
18 well as whether the current PIP program is sufficient
19 to indicate what the needs of the Park Systems are
20 resource wise. I think this bill could help us go a
21 long way in knowing the areas of our park systems
22 that are in need of greater resources. Of ensuring a
23 timeline accountability mechanism so those parks are
24 repaired and fixed in a timely manner and allow us a
25 mechanism for directing resources to the areas with

2 the greatest need. I hope we can use this hearing to
3 reimagine how we can make a better and more equitable
4 park system a reality for all New Yorkers in the
5 short and long-term future. As we come out of his
6 pandemic we can do no less. Thank you. Now as we
7 begin I would like to remind everyone that going
8 forward with this hearing and the ones going forward
9 as well we'd like to always start as a committee with
10 hearing the testimony from three members of the
11 public before the Parks Department. Myself having
12 testified as a Civil Rights Lawyer for many years and
13 from the City Council's Committees I always felt it
14 was important that those of our public are heard
15 first especially by any City Administration and
16 Agency representatives so that our communities the
17 voices of our communities are truly heard instead of
18 being made to wait until much later in the hearing
19 when perhaps members from the agency aren't present
20 or Commissioners aren't present. So, that will be a
21 new policy that we set going forward from this
22 hearing and from there and I want to thank
23 Commissioner Donoghue for also agreeing to listen to
24 our members of the public first as part of our first
25 panel. I will now turn it over to our moderator,

2 Committee Counsel Chris Sartoree to go over some
3 procedural items.

4 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
5 you Chair Krishnan and good morning. I'm Chris
6 Sartoree Senior Counsel to the Parks and Recreation
7 and I will be moderating this hearing. Before we
8 begin I would like to remind everyone that you will
9 be on mute until you are called on to testify at
10 which point you will be unmuted by the host. During
11 the hearing, I will be calling on various panels to
12 testify so please listen for your name to be called
13 as I will periodically be announcing who the upcoming
14 panelists will be. At this hearing as the Chair
15 mentioned we will be first hearing testimony from
16 members of the public followed by testimony from
17 members of the Parks Department. During the hearing
18 if Council Members would like to ask a question of
19 the administration or a specific panelist, please use
20 the Zoom Raise Hand function and I will call on you
21 in order. We will be limiting Council Member
22 questions to five minutes including the time that it
23 takes to answer such questions. For members of the
24 public, we will be limiting speaking time to three
25 minutes in order to accommodate all who wish to speak

2 today. As the Chair mentioned earlier, we will be
3 hearing testimony from three members of the public.
4 For these panelists and all panelists, once your name
5 is called a member of our staff will unmute you and
6 the Sergeant at Arms will give you the go ahead to
7 begin upon setting the timer so please wait for the
8 Sergeant to announce that you may begin before
9 starting your testimony. I will now call on the
10 various panelists as we will first be hearing
11 testimony from Mayowa Adewumi who is a high school
12 student followed by Sherrice Palomino from New
13 Yorkers for Parks followed by Heather Lubov of the
14 City Parks Foundation. And I will now call on Mayowa
15 to please come forward to testify. Thank you.

16 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

17 MAYOWA ADEWUMI: Good morning. My name
18 is Mayowa Adewumi and I'm a 10th grader at Midwood
19 High School. I participate in the Quality of Life
20 Innovation Program which fosters a civic engagement
21 and social innovation among high school students.
22 Thank you to the Parks Committee of the City Council
23 for the opportunity to speak about our City's Park
24 system and how it impacts young people. I live in
25 Canarsie Brooklyn and am grateful to reside near

2 great spaces like Canarsie Park and Shirley Chisum
3 State Park. While these large spaces are very nice
4 and modern I notice that the same doesn't hold true
5 for many of the parks and playgrounds directly around
6 me. These smaller, more local spaces are often not
7 as nice and because of that are not desirable for use
8 by the community. I see this every day coming home
9 from school at Centers playground where much of the
10 equipment is rusted and rainwater sits for days on
11 the ground under the swings. New York City's Park
12 System has been under and inequitably funded for 40
13 years. By keeping everyone home for so long the
14 COVID 19 pandemic has made it increasingly clear just
15 how important parks are for public health and safety.
16 Previous COVID related budget cuts as well as the
17 Mayor's proposed preliminary budget would result in
18 thousands of lost Park jobs and ultimately threaten
19 the condition of our Parks. The Mayor can start to
20 fix these problems by delivery on his promise to
21 dedicate 1 percent of the City's Budget to parks.
22 The City Council has the power to push them to
23 deliver on this promise and the Parks Committee
24 should do that. Considering all that's gone on in
25 the world and in the City, New Yorkers need a well-

2 funded park system that is safe, clean and equitable.
3 Young people in communities of color deserve a better
4 more equitable park system. This is why New Yorkers
5 for Parks, The Play Fair Coalition and student
6 leaders like myself are asking for an increase in the
7 Park's Budget to 1 percent of the City Budget. Thank
8 you.

9 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
10 you very much and I will turn it to Chair Krishnan
11 who has a question or comment.

12 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: I just
13 wanted to say thank you so much Mayowa for your
14 testimony, for coming in front of us today and to
15 really highlight the issues through your advocacy of
16 how important parks equity is in our City too. So,
17 thank you so much. Keep up the great work too. And
18 looking forward to our work together to keep fighting
19 for parks equity in our City.

20 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
21 you very much. Our next speaker is Sherrise Palomino
22 followed by Heather Lubov.

23 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

24 SHERRISE PALOMINO: Good afternoon. My
25 name is Sherrise Palomino and I am the Director of

2 Advocacy and Programs at New Yorkers for Parks. We
3 are the founding member of the Play Fair Coalition
4 which includes over 400 organizations across the five
5 boroughs. Thank you to the Parks Committee for the
6 opportunity to speak about Parks equity. I also want
7 to thank Chair Krishnan for his leadership on this
8 important issue. COVID has highlighted the critical
9 needs of our park system including spotlighting
10 inequities in access, infrastructure, and
11 maintenance. The City's decade long divestment in
12 parks continues to exacerbate these tragic inequities
13 in our Park system. The City Council and the Mayor
14 can fix it by making 1 percent of the City Budget
15 making the investment of 1 percent of the City Budget
16 into parks. Many parks and playgrounds need urgent
17 investments in maintenance and upkeep. Parks like
18 Oracle Playground in Fort Greene lacks basic
19 functioning equipment for kids of all ages and
20 abilities. In newly designed parks have work out
21 equipment for the Community but many like Marcus
22 Garvey Parks still do not. Parks like Joyce Kilmer
23 Park in the Bronx and Rufus King Park in Jamaica
24 constantly have litter problems. With a well-funded
25 parks department our Parks and playgrounds can be

2 properly maintained. Too many parks advocates and
3 community leaders invest their time volunteering to
4 do jobs that the New York City Parks Department has
5 not been able to adequately fund like cleaning up
6 parks and gardening. New York is the greatest city I
7 the world with a parks system that does not reflect
8 modernity nor have the proper infrastructure to
9 support the climate crisis we are living in. We are
10 overdue for a transformative investment in our Parks
11 system. 1 percent of the City Budget can ensure that
12 parks are well-maintained and equitably serving New
13 Yorkers of all communities and backgrounds. The New
14 York City Parks Department does a valiant job
15 maintaining these aging resources but needs more
16 funding to do so. It is time to allocate 1 percent
17 of the City Budget to parks. Thank you.

18 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
19 you very much and we do have a question from Council
20 Member Narcisse.

21 MERCEDES NARCISSE: Oh, I was waiting for
22 the turn when it comes to the Council. I'm just
23 excited. I put my hands up after the testimony. I
24 don't have a question.

2 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Very
3 good Council Member.

4 MERCEDES NARCISSE: I'm so excited for my
5 young lady here from Canarsie. That's all.

6 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay.
7 Thank you.

8 MERCEDES NARCISSE: Thank you.

9 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
10 you very much. Okay. We will now move on to hearing
11 from Heather Lubov. Thank you.

12 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

13 HEATHER LUBOV: Good morning and Happy
14 Earth Day everyone. Good morning Chair Krishnan and
15 members of the committee. I'm Heather Lubov. I'm
16 the Executive Director of City Parks Foundation and
17 we are a citywide nonprofit that uses programming to
18 bring New Yorkers in to and to care for their
19 neighborhood parks. We reached 310,000 New Yorkers
20 and 350 parks each year through free sports, arts,
21 and environmental education programs and partnerships
22 for parks a community building program that we co-
23 manage with New York City Parks and that is a central
24 broker in our City stewardship system. Parks are the
25 most democratic public resources. Each community

2 starts at a different place and needs different
3 resources and equity is only achieved when
4 communities that have historically been under
5 resourced get more. Initially the Council's Parks
6 Equity Initiative matched the Administration
7 investment in community outreach on the New York City
8 Park side by finding City Parks Foundation staff to
9 conduct more intensive engagement and to provide
10 training grants, poaching, and physical sponsorship
11 that new empowers more than 500 park groups and
12 25,000 volunteers to address local needs that are
13 meaningful to their neighborhoods. The initiative
14 also provides each Council Member with funds to
15 address hyper local programming needs in parks. Our
16 survey show how important the funding is. The
17 overwhelming concerns of park groups today are
18 funding and fundraising. As well, the most common
19 goal is the desire to engage their community in more
20 public events and that's a need that was laid bare
21 during the pandemic when parks were essential.
22 During the pandemic, we saw a decline of nearly 100
23 park groups and 1,000s of individual volunteer. Many
24 of who lived in the hardest hit neighborhoods and
25 corporate volunteers all but disappeared. As the

2 city recovers and launches the next phase of the
3 Community Parks Initiative to renovate 100 neglected
4 parks we ask for an increase in support through the
5 Parks Equity Initiative to prioritize outreach in
6 these and other historically under resourced parks
7 and to expand our ability to reach communities in
8 languages other than English. During the pandemic we
9 encourage resource sharing, we facilitated
10 collaboration between funded conservancies and un-
11 funded volunteer groups and we administered a \$7
12 million private relief fund that help mitigate the
13 impact of cuts to parks nonprofits during a time of
14 increased usage but the private sector cannot replace
15 public support. The Mayor's budget would result in
16 the loss of thousands of jobs threatening the
17 livelihood and conditions of our parks. Our New York
18 City Parks supported Partnerships for Parks Teams is
19 already facing freezes of 8 percent of its staff
20 through pegs. So we call on the City to recognize
21 parks as the central infrastructure and keep the
22 promise of 1 percent for parks, increased funding for
23 the Parks Equity Initiative and lead the way toward
24 true equity in our open space eco-system. Thank you.

2 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
3 you very much and thank you to all of these panelists
4 who have agreed to testify at the beginning of the
5 hearing. We will now move on to testimony from the
6 Parks Department. At this point I will announce all
7 of the following panelists from the Parks Department
8 appearing today include Commissioner Sue Donoghue,
9 Mark Focht, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Operating
10 Officer, David Cerron, Assistant Commissioner for
11 Planning and Development, Alex Butler Director of
12 the Parks Inspection Program and Matt Drury Director
13 of Government Relations. At this time I'll
14 administer the affirmation to each representative of
15 the Administration. I'll call on each of you
16 individually for a response. So at this point,
17 please raise your right hands. Thank you very much.
18 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and
19 nothing but the truth before this committee and to
20 respond honestly to Council Member questions?
21 Commissioner Donoghue?

22 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, I do.

23 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
24 you. Deputy Commissioner Focht?

25 MARK FOCHT: I do.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

25

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

4 DAVID CERRON: Yes.

5 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
6 you. Director Butler?

7 ALEX BUTLER: I do.

8 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
9 you and Director Drury?

10 MATT DRURY: I do.

11 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
12 you very much and at this time I would like to invite
13 Commissioner Donoghue to present her testimony.

14 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you very much.

15 Good morning Chair Krishnan and Members of the Parks
16 Committee. My name is Sue Donoghue Commissioner of
17 the Department of Parks and Recreation and as you've
18 heard I'm joined by members of our senior team here
19 at the Parks Department including Mark Focht, our
20 Deputy Commissioner and Chief Operating Officer,
21 David Cerron, our Assistant Commissioner for Planning
22 and Development, Alex Butler our Director of the
23 Parks Inspection Program and Matt Drury our Director
24 of Government Relations. We are very pleased to be
25 here today to discuss equity as it relates to our

2 City Parks and open spaces particularly in light of
3 the COVID 19 pandemic. As you'll hear equity is
4 essentially vital principal that informs all of our
5 strategic and operational decisions and we thank the
6 Council for convening this important hearing. It's
7 especially fitting as Heather noted that this hearing
8 is being held on Earth Day. A time when we
9 commemorate the creation of the modern environmental
10 movement and recognize the importance of working
11 together to protect our planet. New York City Parks
12 is the primary steward of over 30,000 acres of City
13 Park land, 14 percent of New York City's land mass
14 including 10,000 acres of natural areas. We oversee
15 thousands of individual properties including parks,
16 playgrounds, community gardens and beaches. All of
17 which as we know are incredibly important spaces for
18 New Yorkers and their physical, mental and emotional
19 well-being. From our agencies perspective, the
20 concept of equity is simple. It's every New Yorkers
21 being treated fairly when it comes to their access to
22 parks and open space and regarding the resources
23 being allocated to those spaces. Our agency
24 prioritizes equity in every aspect of our strategic
25 efforts and well over half a billion dollars has been

2 invested in recent years in to several major capital
3 and expense initiatives dedicated to improving park
4 equity. We also utilize a data driven approach
5 regarding resource allocation and have developed
6 creative strategies to increase access to park and
7 park land amenities across the City. The agency
8 continues to advance its major equity efforts most
9 notably the Community Parks Initiative which has
10 already directed over \$300 million in capital
11 reconstruction funds for parks and neighborhoods that
12 had seen perpetual under investment for decades.
13 Historically not all New Yorkers have enjoyed equal
14 access to parks and open space and we're dedicated to
15 doing everything we can to change that. The agency
16 is always exploring creative approaches that will
17 increase access to green and open space for
18 neighborhoods that are under served which could
19 happen in a variety of fashion. We use open space
20 ratios and walk to park metrics to guide our planning
21 efforts and identify neighborhoods that are in the
22 greatest need of green space. We have partnered with
23 other city agencies such as the Department of
24 Education and the New York City Housing Authority to
25 improve and increase access to some of their

2 recreational spaces for the public through the
3 Schoolyards to Playground Program or various NYCHA
4 campus improvements. Vacant and underutilized land
5 is extremely scarce in New York City and the
6 complexity and duration of the city's land use review
7 process for each parcel often discourages property
8 owners who might otherwise be willing to sell to the
9 City. However, we remain dedicated to exploring
10 every opportunity to add new sites to our portfolio
11 and have successfully done so in recent years
12 including Brookfield Park in Staten Island, Chelsey
13 Green in Manhattan and additional portions of
14 Bushwick Inlet Park in Brooklyn. Our agency is laser
15 focused on making our parks the best they can be and
16 we are privileged and blessed to have the support of
17 New Yorkers all over the city. Many of whom have
18 formed local park groups that help provide tremendous
19 added value to our parks, providing stewardship and
20 volunteer care as well as programming that helps
21 activate our parks in vibrant and fun ways for
22 everyone to enjoy. Our Partnerships for Parks Team
23 which is a unique joint program with the city parks
24 foundation as Heather recently described cultivates
25 and supports a growing network of local Grassroots

2 Groups of all sizes. Over 500 community groups and
3 more than 25,000 volunteers. These New Yorkers care
4 for, advocate for and activate parks particularly in
5 high need areas and they engage an immense array of
6 individuals along with larger organizations and
7 businesses in this important effort. Our
8 Partnerships for Parks Team provides a wide range of
9 resources to local groups that care for parks
10 including workshops in coaching, supplies and
11 materials, small grants and on the ground logistical
12 support to make sure these groups meet their
13 potential which ensures our parks can meet their
14 potential as well. Our commitment to equity also
15 shapes our daily maintenance effort as we are
16 dedicated to keeping all of our parks and playgrounds
17 in the best condition possible. Over the years we
18 are proud to have consistently exceeded our
19 performance indicator targets in the Mayor's
20 Management Report for overall park condition and
21 overall park cleanliness even in the face of
22 tremendous challenges. To help make that a reality
23 our staff uses a variety of tools and approaches to
24 ensure that all of our properties are getting the
25 resources they need in a fair and equitable manner.

2 Firstly, I have to recognize the incredible hard work
3 of our dedicated park staff who are responsible for
4 the maintenance of our green spaces. They're a wide
5 variety of maintenance staff roles including full
6 time year round staff, seasonal staff, as well as
7 positions filled through our Parks Opportunity
8 Program which is administered in coordination with
9 our fellow City agency the Human Resources
10 Administration. Some of our maintenance staff serve
11 on fixed post crews who primarily maintain a given
12 park or playground along with its comfort station and
13 other amenities. Others work as park of mobile crews
14 cleaning parks and playgrounds along a pre-assigned
15 route traveling from site to site as a team. On a
16 daily basis our park workers are able to observe
17 conditions in the spaces they care for, address
18 issues as they arise and report serious concerns to
19 their supervisors. Turning to the topic of the
20 legislation being formally heard today we actively
21 monitor and inspect the condition of our parks in
22 several ways including the Parks Inspection Program
23 or PIP which is independently administered by our
24 operations and management planning or OMP division.
25 PIP is a detailed objective, quality assurance

program which is conducted independently from the agency's maintenance and operation staff. For close to four decades PIP has helped to ensure that our parks are well maintained and welcoming for New Yorkers and visitors alike. Created in 1984, PIP initially focused on small parks and playgrounds but has expanded and evolved over the years growing to become comprehensive and flexible enough to apply to all varieties in park properties from small civic areas to our largest wooded areas. The rating developed by this rigorous and independent inspection program are a valuable management tool. In addition to 311 reports, day to day monitoring by our maintenance staff and regular inspections conducted by our park supervisors in line with our agency's standing commitment to transparency, historic PIP inspection details for individual parks are available on our public website in addition to citywide and borough performance data for a detailed line item inspection data is also available on the New York City open data portal. Lastly our PIP inspection results serve as the source data that helps inform our key maintenance indicators in park section of the Mayor's Management Report which is updated biannually

2 and available online. We would welcome the
3 opportunity to discuss the legislation further with
4 the Council alongside a more expansive briefing on
5 our inspection program. The COVID 19 pandemic and
6 the ongoing struggle for racial justice have brought
7 many important related social issues to the forefront
8 of public dialogue including the importance of access
9 to parks and open space. In New York City parks have
10 always been our backyards but in the past two years
11 they became our everything, our classrooms, our gyms,
12 our places of quiet reflection and our spaces to
13 safely reconnect with friends and family. At the
14 height of the COVID 19 pandemic in 2020 many parks
15 properties and facilities served a direct operational
16 role in public health efforts including testing
17 vaccination and food distribution. New York City
18 Parks has risen to the challenge during the pandemic
19 and it has strengthened our commitment to care for
20 all of the parks in our system especially those in
21 neighborhoods identified by the task force on racial
22 inclusion and equity in response to the
23 disproportionate impact of COVID 19 on communities of
24 color. As you've heard today a data driven approach
25 to fairness and equity informs and shapes every

2 aspect of our strategic and operational decision
3 making. The condition and cleanliness of our parks
4 is a top priority of this agency and we've worked to
5 make sure those resources are distributed in a
6 strategic and thoughtful manner. Of course, we are
7 constantly looking for opportunities to improve our
8 practices and protocols and look forward to working
9 with the Council as we continue to care for our
10 city's park system to benefit all New Yorkers. I
11 would like to thank the Council for giving us the
12 opportunity to discuss this topic today. After our
13 panels convenes our staff will continue to watch the
14 public's testimony via the Council's live stream but
15 first my colleagues and I will be happy to answer any
16 questions you may have. Thank you.

17 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
18 you very much Commissioner and I'll now turn it to
19 Chair Krishnan for his questions.

20 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Thanks so
21 much Chris. Thank you Commissioner for your
22 testimony. We really appreciate hearing your
23 perspective on the Parks Department and thank you to
24 all the great work of all our parks employee staff
25 that keeps our parks running every day. We have just

2 a few questions, and I also want to acknowledge that
3 Council Member Restler has joined as well.

4 Commissioner, my first question is how has the COVID
5 19 pandemic encouraged the Parks Department to thank
6 about how the City can add more open and green space
7 or build more parks in neighborhoods that currently
8 lack quality access to open space?

9 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan
10 for this question as we've discussed and I think
11 you're aware the Parks Department has a long history
12 of innovative and thoughtful approaches to expanding
13 access to open space whether it be through our
14 Schoolyards to Playgrounds Program, whether it be
15 through our Community Parks Initiatives, whether it
16 be through our Parks without Borders Initiative which
17 was about just opening up parks and making them more
18 welcoming and accessible. We think about plazas we
19 think about green streets, we think about green ways
20 we are really anxious to move forward on
21 opportunities to expand access to green ways across
22 the city. We are constantly looking for innovative
23 approaches for adding and increasing access to our
24 green spaces. We know how important it is and we are
25 always looking at innovative approaches.

2 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Thank you
3 and I am heartened to hear also the more expansive
4 approach as well. We've talked before, you've come
5 and visited 34th Avenue, an open street in Jackson
6 Heights. The vital role is played for us during the
7 pandemic and the importance of thinking about that as
8 park space as well and we bring more green to 34th
9 Avenue so I appreciate that [recording glitch] of the
10 parks as well. What is the current total budget
11 allocation for parks maintenance citywide and how
12 does that compare to the prior three fiscal years?

13 SUSAN DONOGHUE: So in terms of budget,
14 just bear with me one second. So our total budget
15 for park maintenance citywide is \$430 million. This
16 is larger than the last three fiscal years but it
17 does include \$70 million of federal stimulus funding
18 that was related to COVID.

19 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: And how
20 does that compare to the prior three fiscal years?

21 SUSAN DONOGHUE: It's \$430 million today,
22 FY 21 it was \$330 million, FY 20 it was \$380 million
23 and FY 19 t was \$350 million.

24 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Thank you.
25 And we had a budget hearing. We will have another

2 one coming up as well but I would like to ask a bit
3 about as we mentioned before \$1 billion and 1 percent
4 to parks to crucial and restoring funding we've lost
5 over the years. So, since our last hearing as well
6 I'd like to ask about what is the agency's commitment
7 to securing the stated promise by the Mayor of 1
8 percent for parks and have they been more reflection
9 but you by the Parks Department, by the
10 Administration and how we get to that goal.

11 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan
12 and I appreciate the question. As always, we are
13 looking for ways that we can add resources, work with
14 our partner agencies and to continue to support the
15 Parks Department and our efforts. As we all know,
16 the City is coming out of a very challenging time
17 with COVID and we are continuing, you know, ongoing
18 discussions with City Hall. This is an
19 Administration that is very committed. We know is
20 very committed to parks and open space and equity in
21 the city so those questions are, those conversations
22 are ongoing.

23 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Thank you
24 and we look forward to hearing it in the Executive
25 Budget that comes out soon where, how the

2 Administration tends to fulfill its promise. We have
3 a hearing on equity today but achieving 1 percent for
4 parks or \$1 billion is a crucial part of the fight
5 for equity. As we have already heard from testimony
6 from the public as well, the 1 percent of the budget,
7 \$1 billion for parks would actually be helping so
8 many communities that don't have access to green and
9 park space and from an equity standpoint when we
10 think about the lack of resource and we think about
11 the divestment from parks over decades I could not
12 think of a more powerful and effective way to address
13 the need for equity and parks equity than to increase
14 our parks budget to 1 percent or \$1 billion. My next
15 question is what if any parks under the department's
16 jurisdiction that operate with a conservancy
17 agreement are able to keep any portion of revenue
18 earned from concessions operating within their
19 boundaries? Can you talk a bit more about that?

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes absolutely. 12 of
21 our licensed partners keep some or all of the revenue
22 earned from concessions?

23 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: And, I'm
24 sorry go ahead.

2 SUSAN DONOGHUE: And that, we have 20,
3 that's of 25 groups that operate under a license
4 agreement with the city.

5 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: And so 12,
6 overall it is 12 out of 20.

7 SUSAN DONOGHUE: 25, 25 who have an
8 operating agreement or a license agreement with the
9 City. 12 of those keep some or all of the concession
10 earned from revenue.

11 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Okay.

12 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Revenue earned from
13 concession, sorry.

14 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Got it.
15 And do you have a more specific sense of the
16 percentage that's kept towards, of concession revenue
17 when you say some to all with those 12 parks how does
18 it break down in terms of how much roughly? What's
19 the range of percentage and how many are able to keep
20 all? How many are able to keep some?

21 SUSAN DONOGHUE: It's a wide variety but
22 it's generally either a 50 percent of the concession
23 revenue or 100 percent is the range.

24 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Okay. And
25 how many are able to keep 100 percent of the revenue?

2 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Of that 12, seven are
3 able to keep all.

4 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Seven are
5 able to keep all? Okay. Thank you. And I think I
6 noted this before as well but I just wanted to note
7 it again that Council Member Restler has joined the
8 hearing as well earlier. According to the Center for
9 an Urban Future's report on park infrastructure the
10 Parks Department had a staff of over 11,642 in the
11 1970s at the height of the fiscal crisis. What is
12 the current full and part-time maintenance workforce?

13 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan
14 for the question. So for our maintenance and
15 operations workforce, year-round staffing is 2300,
16 seasonal staffing is 5,000 for a total of 7,300 MNO
17 staffing and then in addition to that we have, you
18 know, additional administrative and support staff so
19 kind of other staffing that supports that that the
20 total number I think goes to 9,900. But strictly MNO
21 staffing that total is 7,300.

22 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: And what is
23 this number broken down by borough or by park
24 district?

2 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Do you want to me list
3 by each borough Councilman?

4 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: By each
5 borough would be helpful, yeah.

6 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yeah. So for the Bronx
7 it is 865, Brooklyn its 1,058, Manhattan it's 872,
8 Queens its 1,010, Staten Island is 374 and then we
9 have citywide services that provide trades and
10 support staff throughout the borough, that's another
11 226, we have fleet support services that are part of
12 our maintenance and operation team at 77 and then of
13 course our forestry staff which is vitally important
14 in terms of maintaining our parks that's another
15 1,178 individuals.

16 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Uh-huh,
17 thank you. And what has been the trend over the last
18 few budget cycles in terms of the increased or
19 maintenance workforce and the distribution?

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan
21 for the question, the trend has stayed pretty
22 consistent. We did certainly during COVID as across
23 the City there were such budget challenges. There
24 was certainly a decrease during COVID where we didn't

2 have seasonal staffing but in general it stayed
3 pretty consistent over time.

4 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: And what
5 would be the optimal number of full-time staff in
6 your opinion for the Parks Department?

7 SUSAN DONOGHUE: I don't really have an
8 optimal number that I would quote. I would say that
9 we make really good use of the resources that we have
10 and our team works really hard to provide coverage
11 across the boroughs and, you know, kind of an
12 innovative and creative way as possible.

13 CHAIRPERSON: SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Well, I
14 mean presumably it would be helpful to have more
15 given the amount of maintenance work that freed up
16 our staff, so, given an optimal number, we would have
17 to say what factors in particular would help
18 determine what that optimal number is and how we get
19 there?

20 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair
21 Krishnan, I appreciate the question. I mean we are
22 always looking at, as I said we spend a whole lot of
23 time in terms of our PIP ratings that's something
24 that we utilize to inform our maintenance decisions
25 and strategy so we are constantly looking at how we

2 are allocating staffing, where we need to be
3 deploying staffing for the best effect and the
4 optimal maintenance across the city. So we do
5 depending on some of our PIP rating we will shift
6 staffing slightly. We'll add training. We'll deploy
7 crews in certain areas. We also, one of the things
8 that we do that has been very effective, we have hot
9 spots crews that we deploy across the city, hundred
10 different areas that we've identified that are highly
11 utilized. Barbeque areas or areas of music and so we
12 definitely look to very strategically place our
13 employees where they are most needed across the
14 boroughs.

15 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: And, you
16 know, I think one thing is put simply too when we
17 talk about a budget increase for parks, you know, not
18 just being a parks equity issue, it's also a worker's
19 issue too, right? I think so many as we have
20 reviewed at the last budget hearing, there are so
21 many seasonal workers and otherwise who are affected
22 by the proposed cuts in the preliminary budget to the
23 Parks Department who would be effected by an increase
24 in the budget. So, would you agree that an increase
25 in the budget for Parks to \$1 billion would

2 significantly help ensure that we can expand the
3 Parks workforce, that we can provide worker
4 stability?

5 SUSAN DONOGHUE: We absolutely support
6 the stability for our workers, absolutely and it's an
7 important aspect of what we do. We spend a whole lot
8 of time with our -- I mentioned in my testimony, our
9 Parks Opportunity Program. I spend a whole lot of
10 time training, providing resources and assistance for
11 our park workers, especially entry level workers so
12 we are always looking to provide good opportunities
13 and a good workforce and workplace for our employees,
14 absolutely.

15 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: And I do
16 think increasing the budget would be a crucial piece
17 of that as well, so, I, you know, I think that it's
18 important that we see the fight for 1 percent as I
19 said before as both from an equity standpoint as well
20 as a worker's justice standpoint and I know that
21 we've had, you know, plenty of testimony before from
22 parks workers and DC 37 staff about how crucial it is
23 too. I want to turn to a couple of questions about
24 parks equity as well. How many private organizations
25 whether they are referred to conservancies or

2 alliances, I think you already answered this but will
3 you do it again, currently maintain and operate a
4 Department of Parks pursuant to an agreement or
5 contract with the Department, is that 25?

6 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes, that would be 25.

7 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Uh-huh, and
8 what is the number of friends of groups and other
9 volunteer type groups that the Parks Department
10 interacts with?

11 SUSAN DONOGHUE: That's in the 100s,
12 Chair Krishnan, it's an incredibly important aspect
13 and really something that we are so blessed to have
14 be part of the Parks System is the dedicated
15 volunteers and park organizations. As I said, our
16 Partnerships for Parks group alone works with over
17 500 community based organizations. We at the Parks
18 Department, a big part of what we do is look to
19 encourage stewardship and caring for our Parks System
20 in all forms and I'm biased but I believe that
21 volunteers help both sides, it helps the Parks
22 Department and it's a wonderful thing for people to
23 get out and volunteer in their parks. So, we have
24 been really fortunate over the years as I said,
25 Partnerships for Parks works with over 500 groups and

2 over 25,000 volunteers. So people come out and help
3 support their parks and for us it's both, you don't
4 have to be part of a formal group. We love people to
5 just come out. We encourage people to clean up after
6 themselves all of those things. Stewardship is
7 incredibly important to us so, you know, the, whether
8 it be a really small Friends Out Group, a local
9 organization, an individual volunteer, it's all a
10 really important part of helping to support and
11 steward this incredible parks system.

12 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: And that's
13 impressive to hear the 100s of volunteer and friends
14 group doing a testament to how many community, how
15 beloved parks are to so many communities. You know
16 one of the things that that brings to my mind,
17 especially in a community like Elmhurst and Jackson
18 Heights where we've often had to take care of our
19 public spaces, whether parks or plazas on our own.
20 With, you know, they've been, I used the example in
21 the plaza text of diversity plaza, that one was
22 installed by the Bloomberg Administration. We had
23 done work over years as a volunteer group to really
24 bring in more resources with no support from the City
25 and so one of the biggest concerns is that when you

2 have the friends groups or volunteer groups,
3 oftentimes the burden they bear is so high with
4 little support and infrastructure from City agencies
5 and so it's not sustainable as a model and so when we
6 think about expanding green space and parks
7 especially in low-income community of color that's
8 going to come up over and over again. These are the
9 communities that don't have the ability to create and
10 fully fund conservancies or other private public
11 partnerships, or, and really need and that's why it's
12 so important to have public funding because our
13 communities from an equity standpoint depend on it.
14 Has there been any thought by the Parks Department as
15 to how to better assist and support all of the
16 volunteer and friend group who bear so much of the
17 burden of taking care of our parks?

18 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair

19 Krishnan, it's such an important question and one
20 that we do think a great deal about. It's really the
21 whole reason for being of our Partnership for Parks
22 Division. What they do is they go out and they do
23 provide, they provide tools. They provide workshops.
24 Here's how you, you know, to help inform people about
25 how you advocate you know for funding for the local

2 elected officials. They help support volunteer
3 efforts. They provide everything from tools to plans
4 to it's a really important way of how we've helped
5 support those Grassroots and local organizations on
6 the ground and it's through Partnerships for Parks
7 that we have these incredible and extensive
8 relationships with Parks groups all across the City.
9 So it's very much, and as you heard from Heather,
10 it's a partnership with the City Parks Foundation but
11 our Partnerships for Parks Division is certainly the
12 way that we help to encourage and support local
13 Grassroots Organizations.

14 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Mm-hmm.

15 And could you see again budget increases to 1 percent
16 of \$1 billion for parks being a crucial part of
17 making sure that the Parks Department has the
18 resources to support many of the friends groups and
19 volunteer groups that run the Parks, take care of the
20 Parks on their own?

21 SUSAN DONOGHUE: As Commissioner of the
22 agency we are always looking to expand access to
23 resources, absolutely. And I appreciate the
24 Council's interest and support of these effort and
25 you know we get so much done. It's about

2 partnership, it's about the local community groups,
3 it's working with our elected officials and
4 supporting the Parks System.

5 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: You know I
6 want to just emphasize that point again too because I
7 do feel like it is a crucial part of, when we think
8 about expanding public funding for parks and you know
9 their institute, as I said before there are public
10 private partnerships that do well, that help to
11 maintain their parks but that shouldn't be a reason
12 to retreat from public funding and parks funding
13 because really it's the public dollar that helps
14 support so many of our volunteer groups that are
15 otherwise overburdened. I hear so much from
16 constituents in my community too that take care of
17 our parks and public space, the shoestring budgets
18 they're on and how difficult it is for them as
19 volunteers to make it work. So, I do think it's
20 critical the Parks Department maintains a focus on
21 this as an equity point. From an equity standpoint
22 as well, I do want to go through a few pieces of data
23 that our Parks Community is doing such a great job
24 putting together and that we hope to also publicize
25 as well but in the briefing papers before this

2 hearing, I just want to point attention to a couple
3 of different excellent maps that really showcase the
4 disparities and we talk about equity and we talk
5 about how it's been exacerbated by COVID. For
6 example, on Page 16, there's a map that shows park
7 acreage per 100,000 residents that exist in each ZIP
8 Code throughout New York City. And the ZIP Codes are
9 colored in varying shades of green, darker areas
10 indicate greater amounts of park acreage compared to
11 lighter shaded areas on Page 16. And on top of that
12 there's an overlay of purple outlines that show the
13 ZIP Code in the bottom 25 percent of park access in
14 the City. And so in other words, what you really see
15 and park access is defined as the amount of
16 functional park acreage available to a resident
17 within a 10 minute walk and what you see is while
18 each overall, the overlay between the areas that have
19 park access and within 10 minutes while each borough
20 has at least one ZIP code in the bottom 25 percent of
21 park access. The cluster of ZIP Codes in Queens
22 really stand out in having some of the least amount
23 of park acreage that's access and that includes
24 Elmhurst and Jackson Heights. And the map powerfully
25 shows how this disparity is portrayed and how it

2 particular impacts Queens especially. I also want to
3 take a look at the Page 17, the COVID death rate map
4 and what you see is the map here which again shows
5 the COVID death rates per 100,000 that exist in each
6 ZIP code throughout the City. The ZIP codes are
7 colored in varying shades of blue. Darker areas
8 indicate higher COVID death rates compared to lighter
9 shaded areas. There is an overlay of a red outline
10 that indicates the ZIP code that is in the bottom 25
11 percent of park access. So, in other words, if a map
12 showing distribution of COVID death rates and the a
13 red outline to show how those areas of death rates
14 match up to bottom 25 percent of park access and you
15 see that several ZIP codes with higher numbers of
16 COVID death rates are also in the bottom 25 percent
17 of park access. For example, Jackson Heights has the
18 16th highest COVID death rate at 699 deaths per
19 100,000 and the sixth lowest park access at 5 acres
20 per 100,000 residents. On Page 18, we also have a
21 map here that shows median household income and also
22 how it's overlay of how it compares to park access in
23 the bottom 25 percent. So the color again dark blue
24 shows a higher median income compared to a lighter
25 shade of blue which shows lower income. The red

outline shows again which areas are in the bottom 25 percent of Park access in the City. And what you see again is that, for example, areas that are a lighter shade of blue and outlined in red have a lower median household income or in the bottom 25 percent of parks. So you're seeing the overlay between household income and park access. And you see for example that Morris Heights, Mount Hope and University Heights in the Bronx has a median household income of \$29,000 give or take and access to 22.8 acres per 100,000 residents. Finally, on Page 19, we see a map of the same distribution but by race and communities based on percentage of non-Hispanic white residents in each ZIP code and then an overlay of which ones are in the bottom 25 percent of park access. And what you see again is that, for example, 3.7 percent of the residents in East Flatbush are non-Hispanic white, so roughly 96 percent black and brown community and they have access to 6.8 acres of parkland for 100,000 residents. So however, you look at these maps by household income, by race, by COVID death rates you see there is a clear correlation or a clear overlap between these factors and communities with lower

2 income, communities of color, communities with high
3 COVID rates and there are maps as well in the
4 briefing papers that follow or charts on Pages 22 and
5 21 that further combine all of these variable
6 together too. But I want to take those as a snapshot
7 and just say, you know, I think these maps powerfully
8 show from Council's Parks Committee the inequities in
9 our system by any of these measures and coming out of
10 this pandemic I'd love to hear a bit from you on
11 behalf of the Parks Department, how does the Parks
12 Department envision addressing these inequities when
13 you look at income, when you look at race, when you
14 look at COVID. What ways can programs be prioritized
15 to address communities that have some of the starkest
16 disparities, whether it's East Flatbush, whether it's
17 the Bronx or whether it's Queens?

18 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan
19 for the question and for all maps and illuminating
20 information. As you know in a densely populated City
21 like New York it can be really challenging to add
22 green space and that's why we at the Parks Department
23 are always looking at innovative ways that we can
24 utilize existing open spaces. As I talked about in
25 my testimony whether it be partnering with the

2 Department of Education on school yards so the
3 Schoolyards to Playgrounds Initiative. It's a way to
4 open up access to open space that heretofore wasn't
5 available maybe to the community or the public. Or
6 working with NYCHA and looking at NYCHA campuses.
7 It's not parkland necessarily but it's a way to
8 provide more access to open space. Through our
9 Community Parks Initiative where we are investing
10 millions of dollars that investment and analysis was
11 based on looking at under resourced areas, poverty
12 rate, where we targeted those investments was based
13 on analysis and it was very data driven to look at
14 addressing equity issues and gaps. We are looking at
15 all of the weapons in our arsenal if you will,
16 whether that be where we plant trees to green, where
17 we're looking at expanding access to greenways so
18 that people can have access to a larger park. We're
19 being thoughtful about all aspects of open space
20 under our prevue and not under our prevue. We think
21 about our forested areas, our natural areas, our
22 trail system. There are many different avenues by
23 which we are looking to add to the innovative with
24 adding to and creating open space but greening
25 existing space. And as you know we look at the

2 entries to parks, I talked about the Parks without
3 Borders Initiative, opening up our parks, making them
4 more accessible and friendly so really in every
5 aspect, every angle that we're looking at open space
6 we're looking to do that as equitably and make them
7 as welcoming and accessible as possible.

8 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: I
9 appreciate that and I also look forward to us working
10 together on those issues and a few points you
11 mentioned in particular. You know as a member of the
12 Education Committee and also a public school parent I
13 think the issue of looking at Schoolyards to
14 Playground Conversion is so crucial, not just from a
15 green, creating more park space but an educational
16 standpoint it's a way to make sure our students have
17 opportunities for physical activity to get out more
18 and really shift the focus of education away from
19 just common core subjects and make for a more well-
20 rounded education. Same thing with NYCHA, as a
21 housing lawyer I've seen too often representing NYCHA
22 tenants to pervasive painted buildings, the lack of
23 repairs by NYCHA while at the same time the
24 playgrounds are in disrepair too. So, the notion of
25 focusing on our public schools and public housing I

2 think it crucial. Speaking about the Community Parks
3 Initiative just a few more questions from my end.
4 How have the projects that are being developed under
5 the Community Parks Initiative and the Anchor Parks
6 Initiative been effected by the proposed FY 23 Parks
7 Budget?

8 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan
9 for the question and I'm pleased to say that the
10 Community Parks Initiative has not been at all
11 impacted by the present budget. We are on track as
12 part of the initial CPI program. The City invested
13 \$318 million to complete Capital Reconstruction on 67
14 different parks, 64 of 67 are complete and then last
15 year \$500 million in baseline Capital Funding was
16 allocated, \$50 million a year to complete renovations
17 at 10 sites per year for the next 10 years. That has
18 not been impacted at all. None of that, the CPI
19 initiatives have been impacted at all by the budget.

20 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: And how
21 many projects are fully funded on these Initiatives
22 and currently in construction?

23 SUSAN DONOGHUE: So, as I said we have 64
24 of 67 are complete. The construction is complete.
25 We have one site that's in construction and two sites

2 that are in procurement so of those 67 original that
3 we announced, 64 out of the 67 are done, one is in
4 construction, two sites are in procurement and then
5 as of the new baseline funding that was allocated in
6 the fall of 2021, we've got 10 sites that are moving
7 forward. Those 10 sites were announced in fall of
8 '21 and three projects have started design thus far
9 with community input meetings and the remaining seven
10 projects are expected to start design by mid -- this
11 year, mid-2022.

12 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Thank you.

13 And then turning to a couple of questions about the
14 Parks Inspection Program. Does the Parks Department
15 reallocate or increase maintenance resources when a
16 specific park or playground does not meet their PIP
17 inspection criteria?

18 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
19 question Chair Krishnan and I appreciate it and we
20 are always happy to talk about our Parks Inspection
21 Program. We use multiple indicators when making
22 decisions about how we allocate resources that
23 includes cleanliness ratings, 311 reports and staff
24 observation. So we will at times reallocate staffing
25 as needed if we see problems recurring from the PIP

2 inspections with when we will do additional training,
3 we'll put additional focus on certain areas but we
4 use multiple different indicators to make these
5 decisions.

6 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: And how did
7 COVID affect the PIP process?

8 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
9 question and thankfully it did not negatively impact
10 the process. I'm so proud of our parks workers, both
11 our PIP inspectors and our parks just staff in
12 general who were out all through COVID and certainly
13 were essential to the City's recovery from the
14 pandemic but in the last two years we've completed
15 over 6,000 inspections and that did not change under
16 COVID. The, you know our folks were still able to be
17 out conducting their own inspections and did not
18 change with COVID.

19 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Thank you.
20 And I have two questions. Local Law 98 of 2015
21 required that the parks report on maintenance
22 resources allocated to various park properties. Did
23 the most recent report highlight any areas of the
24 City where park resources and maintenance suffered
25 the most?

2 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you for that
3 question. I do not believe that it did identify
4 areas where parks suffered the most but I'm going to
5 throw the question over to my COO and Deputy
6 Commissioner Mark Focht to answer that.

7 MARK FOCHT: Thank you Commissioner and
8 good morning Chair Krishnan good, nice to see you
9 again.

10 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Morning.
11 You too.

12 MARK FOCHT: The local law 97 report that
13 you referenced did not show any discrepancies or
14 impacts of COVID in that it is a report that reports
15 after the fact based upon staff spent this time doing
16 tasks. So, and as the Commissioner has repeated
17 noted in this hearing our resources are allocated
18 based upon need so the Local Law 97 report again
19 reports after the end of the Fiscal Year on where the
20 resources were allocated based upon need.

21 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: And in the
22 Parks Inspection Program, how many inspections were
23 performed again in 2020 compared to 2019?

24 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Mark I'm going to answer
25 as 6,000 year, right?

2 MARK FOCHT: Exactly.

3 SUSAN DONOGHUE: 6,000 inspections a
4 year.

5 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: And my
6 final question is the Council Administration restored
7 and added a total of \$80 million in Play Fair Funding
8 in a fiscal year. Can you specify how that funding
9 is being allocated for inspection maintenance
10 practices? How many positions have been filled to
11 date with those funds? How many positions remain to
12 be filled? And what is the timeline to fill those
13 positions?

14 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Chair Krishnan
15 or the question and you know I do want to point out
16 that that funding provided amazing value for the
17 Parks Department throughout the City so it's very
18 much appreciated. The distribution of Play Fair
19 individuals, we had a 100 CPW and 50 gardeners and
20 they have been hired, that has been consistent
21 throughout. They were, the way they were distributed
22 was based on a number of underperforming sites in
23 each borough as well determined by PIP ratings for
24 the CPWs and a number of horticultural areas for the
25 gardeners. So they've all been hired, they were

2 distributed and they have been incredibly invaluable
3 throughout the system.

4 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Thank you.

5 No further questions from my and I'm going to turn it
6 back over to our moderator, Chris. And I want to
7 thank you Commissioner for your testimony and for
8 answering all my questions and for answering the
9 Committees questions as well as my colleagues.

10 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
11 you very much Chair, thank you Commissioner. At this
12 point I will now call on other Council Members to ask
13 their questions in the order that they have used the
14 Zoom Raise Hand Function. Council Members if you
15 would like to ask question just a reminder please use
16 the Zoom Raise Hand Function and you'll be limited to
17 five minutes to your question and answer period. The
18 Sergeant at Arms will keep a timer and let you know
19 when your time is up. You should begin once I call
20 on you and the Sergeant has given you the go ahead to
21 begin. We will first hear from Council Member
22 Narcisse followed by Council Members Dinowitz
23 followed by Council Member Kagan.

24 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

2 MERCEDES NARCISSE: 1,058. So if I echo
3 on MOYA the park in Canarsie specifically, I know
4 many but as you mentioned about Canarsie park, is
5 that any reason that the parks lapidated like this.
6 Like why we have so many staff and you have the money
7 in the budget, sometimes, I know we've been having a
8 little slow down bringing the budget up but what
9 happened? I'm sure it's not only Canarsie park and I
10 have witnessed it to myself personally? What's the
11 problem that the parks are so bad?

12 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member
13 Narcisse. I'm sorry to hear in terms that that park
14 is so bad. Are numbers don't show that that there is
15 a significant diminution in service in that area but
16 it's certainly something that we will look at and
17 have the borough look at specifically for Canarsie
18 Park.

19 MERCEDES NARCISSE: Yeah, because one of
20 the things that I realize in and especially Canarsie
21 Park, Prosper Park, those are utilized by people
22 everywhere. So, the staffing being short, especially
23 around piers where activity by the water and in
24 Queens as well, they're requirements I mean to me to
25 think that in the summertime around where people are

2 picnicking we should have an increase in staffing to
3 maintain those parks. Especially in the most needed
4 area. We don't even have enough miles or whatever
5 the measurements, the metrics that you use per
6 capita, we don't have enough square open for the
7 people to be at the park. So the least that we can
8 do is to maintain the parks. To maintain them clean.
9 I have another questions about the schoolyards. Are
10 there any plans to expand on the City Schoolyard to
11 Playground Projects?

12 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
13 question Council Member, it's absolutely something
14 that we would love to entertain and move forward. As
15 with all things, you know, it involves resources and
16 capital dollars to be committed but it's absolutely
17 something that we want to talk with our sister
18 agencies and determine a way for it.

19 MERCEDES NARCISSE: Another question I
20 don't know about so many parks but one of the things
21 that I witnessed in Marine Park Salt Marsh right
22 across from Marine Park. The bridge is falling
23 apart. If that is something that brought up to
24 attention because that's dangerous too, it's a safety
25

2 issue. So I'm looking forward to see what we can do
3 with that.

4 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council
5 Member. I appreciate that. We will note it and
6 absolutely take a look at it for sure.

7 MERCEDES NARCISSE: Okay. I appreciate
8 your time and like the Chair mentioned. This is a
9 public health issue for me. It's very important that
10 we maintain all the parks around the City especially
11 in the high risk area. We saw what happened, a lot
12 of folks don't have no backyard. They don't have
13 anything but the park for open space for family and
14 myself personally there is times that I had to use my
15 parks for my children to raise them. So it is
16 important for us to have our parks well maintained so
17 whatever we can do like the Chair mentioned we want
18 to increase the budget. It is important. It is the
19 time more than ever. COVID has highlighted the
20 problems that we face . . .

21 SGT. BRADLEY: Time.

22 MERCEDES NARCISSE: . . . in our
23 community so thank you for your help and I'm looking
24 forward to making the City a place where we can live,
25 work and enjoy our parks. So thank you so much.

2 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you.

3 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
4 you very much. Next up is Council Member Dinowitz
5 followed by Council Member Kagan.

6 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

7 ERIC DINOWITZ: Thank you. Happy Earth
8 Day everyone. Thank you Chair and thank you
9 Commissioner Donoghue. First you know I want to
10 thank you. You know you have a great staff. You
11 have great parks maintenance workers in the Parks
12 Department. You're always very responsive to the
13 needs that we have in District 11. I know you won't
14 exactly say it but we all know the Parks Department
15 needs more resources so I'm looking forward to
16 working together to make sure that you get the
17 support that you need so that our parks and
18 communities get the care and attention and support
19 that we deserve. So I've been hearing this word
20 access a lot, you know, accessing our parks, that's
21 how important it is. When I hear access and
22 accessibility I think access for everybody so
23 accessibility, ADA compliance, Americans with
24 Disability Act compliance, it's vital to ensuring
25 equity and that everyone has the ability to enjoy our

2 parks. So, you know, I think about our playgrounds
3 and our children who may have a disability. Maybe a
4 kid's grandparent wants to play with them on the
5 jungle gym area. There are no ramps. Maybe the kids
6 other brother or sister has a sports injury. Not to
7 mention, you know, we have children with autism
8 spectrum disorder or a vision or a hearing stability.
9 You know we want to ensure everyone can access our
10 parks regardless of their permanent or temporary
11 disability, their visible or invisible disability so
12 can you share with us what percent of our playgrounds
13 have inclusive elements, ADA compliant swings and
14 ramps and how that compares across the borough?

15 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member
16 Dinowitz and I so appreciate the question and we
17 could not agree with you more. When we talk about
18 access it's not only welcoming spaces and spaces that
19 people feel comfortable going in to whether that be
20 our comfort stations, whether that be our landscapes
21 but absolutely in terms of ADA access and making
22 places as available to as many as people as possible.
23 I do not, I don't have the exact number for you but I
24 will absolutely follow up in terms of the number of

2 ADA accessible playgrounds in the borough or across
3 the borough, I will be happy to follow up on that.

4 ERIC DINOWITZ: Right. And there are
5 different ADA elements including, you know,
6 wheelchair accessible comfort stations, ramps,
7 general areas, swings. You know, sensory activities
8 for people with different types of disabilities and
9 so I have the pandemic era cuts I mean have they, I'm
10 assuming that you're working towards making all of
11 our play spaces ADA compliant and welcoming. How is
12 the cut issues, budget cuts and pandemic era cuts
13 affected your plan to make our playgrounds ADA
14 accessible?

15 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you for the
16 question Council Member Dinowitz and luckily the cuts
17 have not impacted our plans to make our playgrounds
18 and play spaces accessible. We have a healthy
19 capital budget and it's something that we look at in
20 all of our designs and that has not changed and that
21 continues to be at the forefront of our efforts to
22 design and renovate our parks. I just two weeks ago
23 was in Bronx Park and we opened the Waring Playground
24 in Bronx Park and it's an absolutely wonderful
25 example. It had not only wheelchair accessible

2 swings, ramps to access the playground and had
3 braille, all different sensory type of amenities for
4 kids of all different abilities so it's . . .

5 ERIC DINOWITZ: Love to hear it. Love to
6 hear it.

7 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yeah. It's a prime
8 example of the work that we're doing. We have
9 wonderful designers that we work with in house and
10 that we partner with and accessibility is at the
11 forefront of our thinking, absolutely.

12 ERIC DINOWITZ: So I'm certainly looking
13 forward to seeing that breakdown of all the different
14 elements, currently in our playgrounds and especially
15 how it compares across the boroughs. One other
16 question on this is conservancies were mentioned
17 before, conservancy and friends, do we see, I mean,
18 this is one of the piece of information I'm going to
19 assume that you don't have but I'm interested in is
20 do we see in Parks with friends or conservancies do
21 they have more ADA compliant components than strictly
22 city run parks and my last question, it's very clear
23 that parks with, you know, conservancies, friends of
24 groups, they look nicer, they get more attention.
25 They are better for the community. You know, like

2 Council Member, when I see one of those parents who
3 is raising my kids in our parks. So, I, on your
4 website I see you have this Community Parks
5 Initiative, you're building better partnerships with
6 communities but what spec-, is there proactive
7 outreach done to help create these groups. You know,
8 specifically in communities, you know, of color,
9 communities without these groups, for instance,
10 working with the local Council Member or working with
11 CBOs or schools to help create those groups from the
12 ground up. Is there any outreach done like that?

13 SUSAN DONOGHUE: So thank you Council
14 Member Dinowitz for your question and I'm just going
15 to address the first question first which is Parks
16 with Friends of groups or conservancies or alliances
17 attached to them do not have more ADA accessible or
18 less ADA accessible equipment. Most of the
19 restoration, the Capital work is done by the Parks
20 Departments. Not typically through a friends group
21 and so the answer would be no. There is no
22 differential between having a friends group and
23 having more ADA accessible. As I said, the
24 renovation, the capital construction is generally
25 done by the Parks Department and we are looking at

2 Ritlar for all of four parks spaces. Making sure
3 that there is accessibility across the board. And
4 then to your . . .

5 ERIC DINOWITZ: All right just sometimes
6 and as I mentioned sometimes to these friend's group
7 or conservancies may be able to lobby or advocate for
8 things more than the parks without those groups
9 that's why I'm interested in kind of seeing that
10 comparison. Understanding that they'll directly do
11 the capital work but their advocacy may impact which
12 parks do have that compliance that's why I'm really
13 interested in seeing that?

14 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yeah. But I would just
15 state that you know we also are following those ADA
16 regulations with any renovation that we do. There
17 are standards that we are held to so not only are we
18 very much interested in and actively looking at that
19 throughout our design we are also any renovation is
20 going to have ADA standards that we're adhering to.
21 So that's across the board, across the park system,
22 we're looking at that and then terms of your question
23 about, you were asking about. Oh, so in terms of
24 reaching out to groups and encouraging friends of
25 groups I would say yes, absolutely. That is a big

2 part of what our Partnerships for Parks Organization
3 does is they're working with Grassroots, very local
4 on the ground organizations to help encourage
5 stewardship, to help encourage volunteerism. We are
6 founded at that kind of local support for volunteers.
7 It lends itself to helping to create a network,
8 helping to create friend's groups around these parks
9 and so that's something that we're actively engaged
10 in. As I said, we have over 500 community groups and
11 25,000 volunteers that re-engage across the park
12 system and we're really, really fortunately in parks
13 has a history of really active volunteer engagement
14 and supporting parks and that's something that we
15 cherish and something that we look to absolutely
16 support and augment.

17 ERIC DINOWITZ: Thank you so much
18 Commissioner.

19 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you.

20 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL:
21 Thank you very much. Next up is Council Member Kagan
22 with questions.

23 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

24 ARI KAGAN: Thank you so much Chair
25 Krishnan and ready with example for each one of us to

2 start with public testimony not to end with public
3 testimony so everybody was hear what public has to
4 say. Thank you so much for your leadership and thank
5 you Commissioner Donoghue, thank you for coming for
6 the rise in Coney Island. Thank you very much for
7 the dream to work to head us toward our famous
8 legendary landmark Coney Island Boardwalk which
9 definitely needs to be fixed and restored.

10 Recreation is not about expenses but about sources
11 and the revenue problem because I know that for any
12 project you clearly need more money all the time.
13 You mentioned it already. So many ideas, some of
14 them I'm trying to put in to legislation but some of
15 them would be done just in the park side develop for
16 parks developing in the legislation. For example, I
17 always thought that why did that concession on
18 beaches. We don't have any in New York City and
19 anybody who is any beach goer who does to the beach
20 should bring everything for himself like, I'm a prime
21 example every time I need to go there I need to bring
22 everything with myself. Why we cannot use private
23 businesses and to offer this service to beach goers
24 and new revenue to the Parks Department because it's
25 a permits sales tax, income tax, jobs, et cetera.

2 Another idea is like if it's good for Central Park
3 Conservancy to charge money for memorial plaques on
4 benches. We have so many benches not just on Coney
5 Island Boardwalk but in every playground, in every
6 park, so many benches. Is it even possible to
7 establish such a program so people who want to put
8 memorial plaques on some kind of bench can pay some
9 kind of fee to the Department of Parks and get the
10 permission to put this plaque like in Central Park
11 and Sentinel Park? I saw it through a conservancy.
12 Another idea, when I go on the boardwalk and I see a
13 lot of stands, you know like, there's like graffiti
14 on them, et cetera, why not use the existing
15 infrastructure of the Parks Department like comfort
16 stations for example or any kind of like booth or
17 stands like is on the boardwalk. There is graffiti
18 for paid advertising. That's another revenue source
19 like if you can get the special permit or special
20 legislation that I would like to introduce but that's
21 another opportunity get to revenues. Because, for
22 example, on the beach issues, lifeguards who leave at
23 6:00 p.m. and nobody who works in New York City will
24 not be able to see him at 6:30 p.m. That's money for
25 lifeguards even like to maintain just comfort

2 stations themselves or what do you think about this
3 idea?

4 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member
5 Kagan and I appreciate your thinking and appreciate
6 all of the good ideas. It's really helpful to us.
7 I'm going to let, luckily we have our expert in
8 Concessions, David Cerrone is on the phone to just
9 talk about concessions on beaches, and you know, he
10 can respond to that. We do have in the Parks
11 Department in terms of your adopted park or adopted
12 playground idea. There is an opportunity. We do
13 make that available and so we can absolutely get you
14 information about that. That's something that people
15 can do in places outside of Central Park, certainly.
16 And then in terms of paid advertising that is
17 something that you know there are a lot of rules and
18 regulations around that we are very careful about.
19 You know there's, you know, an approval process. We
20 don't want our parks and open spaces to become overly
21 commercialized and there are rules in terms of you
22 know public facing assets in parks and what can be
23 advertised and not advertised. So while we do have
24 certain sponsorship opportunities and things like
25 that there is a whole process just in terms of what

2 can be posted and displayed in parks, public design
3 issues and things like that so we try and be as
4 stewards of this incredible public property, we try
5 and be very careful about advertising.

6 ARI KAGAN: Comfort stations, what are
7 comfort stations? Even if for their own maintenance
8 because it would be clean. I don't think anybody
9 would object some advertising outside on the comfort
10 station. What do you think?

11 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Mm-hmm, potentially.
12 David do you want to talk just a little bit about
13 concession on beaches? I think we just need to un-,
14 yeah.

15 DAVID CERRONE: Hi Council Member Kagan.
16 Thank you for the question. I think, you know, with
17 regard to beaches and in particular Coney Island I've
18 said it's an amazing asset not just for Brooklyn and
19 people of Coney Island for all of New Yorkers. You
20 know I go there quite a bit. And it's amazing. You
21 know, we have a number of concessions there with the
22 boardwalk, with Luna Park, the Wonder Wheel. We also
23 partner with the Coney Island Alliance and they
24 provide a variety of different food options really
25 across the boardwalk so we're not always just

2 centered on that amusement district. I think with
3 regard to sand, I mean I will absolutely take another
4 look at it. The, you know, the matter we've run into
5 in the past is we have to work very closely with DEC,
6 the Department of Environmental Conservation.
7 Anytime you do something on sand there's a lot of
8 requirements and restrictions. Of course, we always
9 want to be as respectful of the environment as
10 possible and sometimes you know as a result of that
11 it means you know just leaving the sand for the beach
12 goes but we will absolutely take another look at
13 this.

14 ARI KAGAN: It's not like I'm not hoping
15 that we can get a, it's not [recording glitch] at the
16 beginning of the but not like close up the boardwalk
17 but in some sections it shouldn't be like having
18 every minute like last shift of one who helps people.
19 I'm not talking about food, I'm taking about like
20 chair or umbrella or something like this, you know.

21 DAVID CERRONE: Okay. That's, that's
22 how, I mean to understand if you're talking about
23 equipment rentals?

24 ARI KAGAN: Yes. Yes.

2 DAVID CERRONE: In terms of chairs and
3 umbrellas?

4 ARI KAGAN: Yeah.

5 DAVID CERRONE: Okay. Okay. That's
6 helpful. I appreciate it.

7 ARI KAGAN: Thank you.

8 SUSAN DONOGHUE: And Council Member Kagan
9 thankfully our Deputy Commissioner Mark Focht said to
10 me there is on our website there's information about
11 opportunities to have donor recognition and plaques
12 so we will make sure you get that. It's on our
13 website but we will forward you the information.

14 ARI KAGAN: Okay. Thank you.

15 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
16 you very much. We now have questions from Council
17 Member Restler.

18 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

19 LINCOLN RESTLER: Well firstly I want to
20 thank my good friend Chair Krishnan for chairing this
21 hearing on Earth Day and I want to thank Commissioner
22 Donoghue and the whole Parks Department Team, you
23 know, I think more than ever during this pandemic we
24 have all been extraordinarily appreciative of the
25 really hard work that Park's staff do each and every

2 day to maintain our green spaces and, you know, for,
3 for most of us in New York City or Parks are our
4 front yards, or backyards. They are the spaces we
5 depend on most and never more than over these last
6 couple of years when we've all needed to get outside
7 and it was the place that we could socialize. So I
8 really want to express my gratitude there and just
9 congratulate Commissioner Donoghue who is clearly off
10 to a terrific start and I think it's an inspired
11 choice for the Parks Department. I had a question
12 and I saw Carter Strickland was on here a moment ago
13 and maybe he still is about, you know, one way in
14 which we've had a lot of success in getting
15 renovations at some of our SCA playgrounds and
16 schoolyards is through partnerships with the trust
17 for public land and you know, I think we would all
18 agree that the Parks Capital Process is not as
19 efficient or cost effective as we'd all like it to
20 be. Is the Parks Department seriously considering
21 partnerships like the one SCA has in place, like the
22 one I think even NYCHA has been able to do on rare
23 occasional although we would certainly like to see
24 that more broadly to bring in outside partners who
25 can much more cheaply and much more efficiently get

2 our playground renovated. Just as an example, we
3 have a schoolyard in Borem Hill, PS38 that is in
4 horrible condition and the Trust for Public Land has
5 come in. It's going to be fixed up in a year and at
6 a, you know a third of the price that it would've
7 cost the Parks Department to do the same work and a
8 1/3 of the timeframe. So just interested if that's
9 something's that's on your radar and agenda
10 Commissioner Donoghue to try and improve or
11 dilapidated playgrounds?

12 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council member
13 Restler and I appreciate the question. I am very
14 familiar with the Schoolyards to Playgrounds
15 Initiative. I led that during my tenure at the Parks
16 Department it was part to Plan NYC and it's when we
17 partnered with the Trust for Public Land to get over
18 250 Schoolyards to Playgrounds done. That was done
19 through the School Construction Authority which as a
20 public authority certainly does have different rules
21 and regulations that guide their process and leads to
22 different timeframes for sure. I am very much
23 looking forward to working with Carter and any and
24 all partners to help advance and improve our open
25 space absolutely. We are in discussion with a number

2 of different entities and I, given my past history
3 definitely a big fan and recognize the importance of
4 innovative approaches like Schoolyards to Playgrounds
5 as I mentioned earlier in response to Chair
6 Krishnan's questions I recognize and we acutely
7 recognize at the Parks Department we need to be
8 innovative in thinking about approaches to open
9 space. We, you know, we can't create them. In a
10 densely populated City it can be hard but we need to
11 think about every single aspect of our open space, so
12 yes, absolutely I look forward to partnering with
13 trust for public land other entities to help us to
14 achieve those goals.

15 LINCOLN RESTLER: Right and I, you know,
16 I think if there was an MOU agreement with the Parks
17 Department, with the Trust for Public Land and other
18 partners, I don't, again I'm only citing them because
19 they are doing great work in my district. But it
20 could be a way to more expeditiously and cost
21 effectively see upgrades where they're needed and
22 would really welcome where the FDA has developed an
23 MOU with outside partners. Parks exploring similar
24 phase and you deserve a lot of credit on this Schools
25 to Playground Initiative, and, you know, from the

2 Play NYC days it's been a tremendous success. I
3 think as Council Member Narcisse noted we just want
4 to see it expanded more and more and more and, you
5 know, we have great play, we have great schoolyards
6 in our communities that are closed on the weekend and
7 closed in the evening hours and when they really
8 could be utilized and are vital resources that are
9 fenced off. And so the more that we can work with
10 you to identify the resources to ensure that those
11 locations are open day in and day out. It's critical
12 not just to our health and mental and physical well-
13 being but also to our safety because it's so
14 important for our young people to have a place to go.
15 I just wanted to ask about Friends groups, if it
16 might, you know I think we've have varying success in
17 friends groups and parks throughout our district in
18 partnering with the Parks Department and just
19 wondering if you have any advance for the North
20 Brooklyn Parks Alliance and Community Board 1 to try
21 to kind of store a complicated history with the Parks
22 Department I guess over the years, kind of inside,
23 outside, if we're looking to strengthen the
24 partnerships having our friends groups do more to
25 support the maintenance and conditions in our parks.

2 Is there any recommendations that we've hit some road
3 blocks?

4 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Thank you Council Member
5 Restler for the question. I'm sorry I didn't hear
6 the last part, if.

7 LINCOLN RESTLER: I mean if we've had
8 friends groups that basically road blocks in their
9 efforts to try to get involved in being, in improving
10 the conditions, even in putting resources in to
11 improving the conditions and maintenance of our park
12 spaces and we've hit kind of bureaucratic challenges
13 that make it hard for those partnerships to take
14 place and just wondered if you had any advance on how
15 we can try and unstick some of that?

16 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yes. Absolutely. And
17 thanks so much for the question. Having come from a
18 partner organization myself, I'm very familiar with
19 and supportive of the, you know, the organizations
20 large and small, helping us out and I recognize that
21 we really need the support of, you know, as I said
22 elected officials, community groups, friends of
23 groups, partner organizations and we do have, we have
24 a strategic partnerships group here. We have
25 Partnerships for Parks, many different ways to

2 interact and engage with the Parks Department so I'm
3 really committed to seeing those and helping those
4 partner groups thrive and I think there's a whole lot
5 of opportunity to do that so absolutely committed to
6 eliminating road blocks and helping that to happen.

7 LINCOLN RESTLER: Right. I mean I think
8 the work you did at Partner Park Alliance was the
9 goal standard in terms of partnership with the
10 department and just doing so much good for our
11 borough and if you have any specific suggestions for
12 me of people I can reach out to or follow up with I
13 would greatly appreciate it and then I'd be remised
14 with Chair Krishnan just allows for 10 more seconds.
15 There were a couple of budgetary asks from our last
16 hearing that I had raised in question so I'm happy to
17 follow up in writing but if there's any additional
18 information on the outstanding costs for the parcels
19 in the park that have not yet been developed and the
20 costs for developing a park space at Box Street it
21 would just be great to get that information from the
22 Department as we go through the budget process.

23 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Yep. Absolutely. I'm
24 happy to follow up with that. I'm you know pushed
25 for gain lid as you and I talked about directly when

2 I was in Brooklyn. You know there's a number of
3 different factors there that need to be finalized in
4 order to get a cost estimate. I'm not familiar with
5 the second park you mentioned Council Member?

6 LINCOLN RESTLER: I'll send you an email
7 on it. It's Box Street Park it's another one of
8 these waterfront parks that was promised in the re-
9 zoning 15 years ago and that we had seen very little
10 progress. So . . .

11 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Okay.

12 LINCOLN RESTLER: . . . it's so I'd
13 appreciate it. I don't mean to distract us at a
14 hearing on another thing but I'd be remiss not to
15 just follow it up so I will send an email over to
16 your team but thank you very much for your
17 partnership and for all the good work you are doing.

18 SUSAN DONOGHUE: Perfect. Thank you.

19 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
20 you very much. At this point there are no other
21 questions from Council Members for the Parks
22 Department so thank you very much Commissioner and
23 other members of the Parks Department for appearing
24 today and at this point we will now move on to
25 testimony from members of the public who registered

2 to speak. I'd like to remind everyone that unlike
3 our typical Council Hearings we will be calling on
4 individuals one to one to testify as I stated earlier
5 each panelist will be given three minutes to speak so
6 begin once the Sergeant has started the timer and
7 given the cue to begin. Council Members who have any
8 questions for a particular panelist should use the
9 Raise Hand Function in Zoom as well and I will call
10 on you after each panelist has completed their
11 testimony. At this time we will hear from Carter
12 Strickland followed Lynn Kelly.

13 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

14 CARTER STRICKLAND: Okay. Thank you to
15 the Council and you Chair Krishnan and the Parks
16 Department for this important hearing. I'm Carter
17 Strickland I'm the New York City Director for the
18 Trust for Public Land. It is certainly true that
19 parks were a critical infrastructure to help the City
20 through the crisis. Just to illustrate that we did a
21 recent study which is cited in the report on the
22 economic benefit of parks in New York City which are
23 substantial but part of that included a finding that
24 there were 527 million visits based on a survey every
25 year to parks in New York City and that's only from

2 residents and I want to point that's 50 percent more
3 than the total number of visitors to the national
4 park system in New York State Parks combined so it's
5 substantial. On equity, one indicator we use is the
6 number of residents in a 10 minute walk of the park
7 and that's national statistic. New York City
8 actually gives credit holds itself to a higher
9 standard but just for comparison between cities on
10 that metric New York City does well, 99 percent of
11 its residents. There are two issues with it, one
12 you've explored in the Committee report is just the
13 impact of the COVID 19 pandemic when schoolyards and
14 playgrounds were closed from April 1 to June 23 of
15 2020. By our calculation in looking at our geo-
16 spatial analysis that meant the loss of park access
17 for 1 million New Yorkers dropping citywide access
18 from 99 percent to 86 percent. That's pretty
19 substantial and it was in places like Central
20 Brooklyn, Eastern Southern Queens, Eastern Bronx and
21 Central Staten Island places that suffer from a
22 number of other inequities. And that just shows the
23 importance of bringing back these smaller places.
24 You know, secondly the distribution of overall open
25 spaces non-equitable. Our analysis again shows

2 similar to the analysis in the Committee report that
3 communities of color in New York City have 33 percent
4 less park space per person than white communities and
5 low-income communities have 21 percent less park
6 space per person within a 10 minute walk compared to
7 high-income communities. And putting those two sort
8 of caveats in New Yorks otherwise good park access
9 score means that to fix this program we need to build
10 new parks that will address the inequitable
11 distribution of parks and one way to do that of
12 course is the schoolyards but there's also creative
13 ways to use our other publically owned assets like
14 streets. So in conclusion we encourage the Council
15 to keep pushing on the Parks Department to keep
16 pushing on making New York City's Park System even
17 more equitable. Thank you.

18 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
19 you very much. We will now hear from Lynn Kelly
20 followed by Carlos Castell Croke.

21 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

22 LYNN KELLY: Hi. Good afternoon, thank
23 you to Chair Krishnan and the rest of the Parks
24 Committee Council. I'm Lynn Kelly I'm the Executive
25 Director of New York Restoration Projects. For over

2 25 years our organizations has planted trees,
3 renovated gardens, restored parks and transformed
4 open space throughout New York City. We bring
5 resources to neighborhoods and to parks that are
6 often under resourced unfortunately by the City of
7 New York because of the lack of funding given to the
8 Parks Department. In the last year we've produced
9 thousands of pounds of fresh produce for the City of
10 New York during our COVID and the 80 acres of park
11 land that we manage up in upper Manhattan on behalf
12 of the Parks Department provides much needed open
13 space to tens of thousands of New Yorkers. You heard
14 from my colleague, Carter about the report, it's a
15 great report. If you haven't read it, I suggest you
16 do because it really underscores the need for the 1
17 percent for parks and that's what I want to mention
18 here as a part of my testimony which is we are proud
19 members of the Play Fair Coalition. We agree that
20 Commissioner Donoghue is an inspired choice to lead
21 the Parks Department. The Commissioner is not a
22 magician. She needs to have the resources to be able
23 to make it work and that is if not now after COVID
24 and we've seen increase of use of all our parks then
25 when. So we ask that you please join us in pushing

2 the administration to keep to the campaign promises
3 of making sure that 1 percent for parks is actually
4 restored in the City Budget. In our opinion parks
5 workers are essential workers and they deserve those
6 adequate resources. We're the only citywide land
7 conservancy that operates in all five boroughs and
8 many of the neighborhoods that we do operate in were
9 hardest hit by COVID so we've seen the need for open
10 space firsthand. So thank you for having this
11 hearing, for listening to all of us. I love the new
12 format of letting the public go first, that is
13 fantastic and we look forward to working with you.
14 Thank you.

15 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
16 you very much. Our next speaker is Carlos Castell
17 Croke followed by Rosa Chang.

18 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

19 CARLOS CASTELL CROKE: Good morning. My
20 name is Carlos Castell Croke and I am the Associate
21 for New York City Programs at the New York League of
22 Conservation Voters. NYLCV represents over 30,000
23 members in New York City and we are committed to
24 advancing a sustainability agenda that will make our
25 people, our neighborhoods and our economy healthier

2 and more resilient. Our advocacy through the Play
3 Fair Campaign has exemplified the importance of parks
4 to health, resiliency and the sustainability of our
5 City. Every year we slowly see the worsening effects
6 of climate change and dangerous carbon emissions on
7 our daily lives. Right now we need our parks more
8 than ever. 2.6 million trees in our City removed,
9 1,300 tons of glutens from the atmosphere and store 1
10 million tons of carbon each year. As a major source
11 of the City's urban canopy, parks can reduce urban
12 effects by lowering temperatures up to 9 degrees.
13 Parks also contribute to the resilience by fighting
14 flooding, capturing almost 2 billion gallons of storm
15 water runoff and ensuring water quality by filtering
16 out as much as 95 percent of major pollutants. Not
17 all communities benefit equally from parks. Just as
18 environmental justice communities suffer from higher
19 rates of pollution and adverse health problems we
20 also lack access to green space. Poor neighborhoods
21 and neighborhoods populated by people of color have
22 access to 21 percent and 33 percent less park space
23 respectfully. Parks serving primarily non-white
24 populations are also half the size of parks that
25 serve majority of white populations that are 5 times

2 more crowded. This exemplifies the disparities,
3 environmental justice clean use space daily. COVID
4 19 has only exacerbated these disparities
5 unfortunately. New Yorkers without access to
6 adequate green space over the past few years haven't
7 had the safe outdoor recreations of spaces or cooling
8 effects of parks that made the pandemic bearable for
9 so many of us. We need to expand access to green
10 space so underserved communities can ensure that
11 parks that we do have are properly funded and cared
12 for, investing 1 percent of the New York City Budget
13 in parks will ensure that our parks are safe, clean
14 and accessible for all. Ensure 173 will continue to
15 help us fight for parks equity by highlighting parks
16 that routinely fail inspection and we can show which
17 parks aren't fully serving the communities and make
18 sure that parks in underserved areas get the
19 attention they deserve. We look forward to continued
20 partnership with the Council to promote parks equity
21 and fight for 1 percent. Thank you.

22 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
23 you very much. Next up is Rosa Chang followed by
24 Aaron Sanders.

25 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

2 ROSA CHANG: Thank you. Hello Chair
3 Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and
4 Recreation. My name is Rosa Chang and I am the co-
5 founder of Brooklyn Bridge Manhattan a Grassroots
6 community led non-profit working to build a new 9
7 acre public park underneath the iconic Brooklyn
8 Bridge. Every residence in New York City should have
9 equitable access to green space but as we all know
10 and have discussed today this is absolutely not the
11 case. Brooklyn Bridge Manhattan represents the
12 unheard voices of Chinatown and the lower east side.
13 Within a half mile radius of the bridge there are
14 47,000 residents, 64 percent who identify as
15 [recording glitch] and 20 percent seniors. 20
16 percent of our families are below federal poverty
17 level. This TRID neighborhood is one of the city's
18 most densely populated areas and one of the areas
19 most heavily impacted by the pandemic. The Manhattan
20 side of the bridge is neighbored by NYCHA Smith
21 houses the Title I marine high school full of low
22 income racially diverse children and the long
23 language in south street seaport. Since 2010 there
24 has been only \$16 million in open space capital
25 investment in our surrounding communities and we have

2 only 20 percent of the city median of open space and
3 on the Brooklyn side there is the \$370 million
4 publically funded 85 acre Brooklyn Bridge Park. This
5 extreme contrast shows the clear inequity and how our
6 park spaces are distributed and funded throughout our
7 City. The way to address this is by building more
8 parks in neighborhoods without. We are here to ask
9 for your help because our community has been
10 constantly overlooked and under invested. We are
11 weighed down by the infrastructural burden of the FDR
12 and the closed streets from the civic center security
13 zone. Our neighborhoods are split apart by the
14 Brooklyn Bridge itself. Each has an economic and
15 health cost. COVID has made it plenty clear that
16 parks are a basic infrastructural necessity in a
17 dense urban environment like New York that should be
18 free and open to all of us. I'm here to ask you all
19 to uplift our low income bipoc communities by
20 supporting our parks and by helping Brooklyn Bridge
21 Manhattan Project bring equitable access to great
22 space. Our proposal includes resilient park with
23 integrated storm water retention, playgrounds for all
24 ages and all abilities and a community and cultural
25 hub. This park would not only benefit the

2 surrounding area, it would benefit the entire city.

3 It's implementation would serve as a massive economic
4 booster by connecting our struggling businesses with
5 a 20,000 daily tourists already crossing the world
6 famous Brooklyn Bridge. By hiring MWBE contractors
7 and creating over 3,000 local permanent jobs and
8 generating over 400,000 million of economic output.

9 As we recovered from the pandemic Brooklyn Bridget
10 Manhattan would be an invaluable contributor to the
11 revitalization of New York City. I want to formally
12 invite every single one of you on a tour of Brooklyn
13 Bridge Manhattan. We would love your support in
14 making equity and clear space a reality for our under
15 resourced and over-burdened population.

16 SGT. BRADLEY: Time.

17 ROSA CHANG: The best use of the nine
18 acres underneath the landmark Brooklyn Bridge is not
19 a DOT parking lot. It is as a desperately needed
20 park that sustains and nourishes our community.

21 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

22 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
23 you very much. Our next speaker is Aaron Sanders who
24 will be followed by Jonathan Robinson.

25 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

2 AARON SANDERS: Good morning. My name is
3 Aaron Sanders and I am the associate director of
4 Advocacy and Policy at the Natural Areas of
5 Conservancy. Thank you Chair Krishnan and various
6 Council Members for the opportunity to provide
7 testimony today. The Natural Areas of Conservancy is
8 a non-profit organization that was formed in 2012
9 with the goal of increasing capacity of NYC parks and
10 its partners to restore and manage 10,000 acres of
11 forest and wetlands under the agency's jurisdiction.
12 Today I represent our organization, the Play Fair
13 Coalition and Forest Role Coalition. I am testifying
14 today to highlight the importance of NYCs urban
15 forests, parks and open spaces and how they continue
16 to provide innumerable benefits to New Yorkers during
17 the pandemic. I also want to discuss tangible ways
18 that we can improve our parkland after COVID. The
19 COVID 19 crisis highlighted many of the inequalities
20 that New Yorkers face, uneven access to parks and
21 open spaces is one important example of this issue.
22 A study from the Trust for Public Land found that
23 poorer neighborhoods have 21 percent less access to
24 parks than wealthier neighborhoods. The disparity is
25 more pronounced among racial lines. Communities of

2 color have 33 percent less access to parks than white
3 communities. According to our own research conducted
4 by 12 other partner cities that we partner with and
5 the forests and cities network the Natural Area
6 Conservancies determined that only 17 percent of the
7 organizations that we partner with locally and
8 nationally felt that they could adequately fund and
9 support natural areas and wetlands during the
10 pandemic. These findings underscore how the pandemic
11 has disproportionately impacted the New York City
12 Parks System. The primary means of access to nature
13 and recreation for millions of New Yorkers. Park
14 access has become even more important and essential
15 to New Yorkers during the height of the pandemic when
16 so many places were closed. Parks were the only
17 places where we could go and enjoy respite. At its
18 core, this discussion is about how COVID has affected
19 park equity and it really comes down to the \$90
20 billion dollar plus budget. New York City Parks has
21 been underfunded for decades and that lack of
22 investment in communities across New York City has
23 become even more glaring during the pandemic when
24 park use soared. Unfortunately New York City parks
25 receive less than 1 percent of the budget. In

2 addition to COVID related budget cuts, historically
3 low public funding allocations for NYC parks has
4 exacerbated this issue. Addressing this inequality
5 is why the Natural Areas Conservancy is a proud
6 supporter of the Play Fair Coalition advocating 1
7 percent for parks and a Forest for All Coalition
8 advocating for the 35, 35, tree canopy covered
9 benchmark and I'll truncate my testimony. In
10 closing, we recognize that COVID has had a severe
11 impact on our parks system. Despite these
12 challenges, New Yorkers utilized them more than ever
13 our Urban Forest and Park System.

14 SGT. BRADLEY: Time expired.

15 AARON SANDERS: Is a recreational and
16 ecological benefit that we must commit to supporting.
17 I want to thank everyone for listening to my
18 testimony and thank you for your leadership.

19 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
20 you very much. Our next speaker is Jonathan Robinson
21 followed by David Salton.

22 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

23 JONATHAN ROBINSON: Thank you for the
24 opportunity to speak with you today. As
25 communications director for Marine Park Alliance it's

2 vital for me to share with you the concerns of my
3 organization and the constituency it advocates for
4 specifically regarding the lack of resources and
5 support parks receive to fill their critical role in
6 our communities. The City Parks have been
7 underfunded and unfairly funded for far too long now.
8 Marine Park the largest City Park in Brooklyn has
9 nearly 800 acres of green space across it's natural
10 grassland, salt marshes and its recreational areas
11 yet it has nowhere near the needed amount of staffing
12 and upkeep for a park of its size. As things stand,
13 even if it were to receive additional staffing and
14 resources this would likely come at the expense and
15 to the detriment of another City Park. Marine Park
16 Alliance works hard to bridge this gap providing
17 volunteer programs to maintain the park and free
18 recreational and cultural programming to enrich the
19 experience of all park visitors yet this is merely a
20 Band-Aid over a gaping wound for a thriving healthy
21 green space services like these should be ensured
22 through the City's budget. The Mayor can begin to
23 fix this by delivering on its promise to dedicate 1
24 percent of the budget to parks. The COVID 19
25 pandemic has only further underscored the need for

2 parks and shown how stretched their already thin
3 resources are. As a vital point of connection
4 between social service providers and the people who
5 depend on the services parks should have an ample
6 budget, not face steep budget cuts that result in the
7 loss of critical parks jobs and services. Of course
8 correction is needed now and the mayor must take
9 action to give the City's parks the 1 percent of the
10 City Budget that he promised. Thank you for your
11 time.

12 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
13 you very much. Our next speaker is David Salton
14 followed by Jackson Chabot.

15 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

16 DAVID SALTON: Good morning and thank you
17 to Chairperson Krishnan and other members of the
18 committee for this opportunity to testify. My name
19 is David Saltonstall, I am the vice-president of
20 Government Relations and Policy for the Central Park
21 Conservancy. A lot of people know that conservancy
22 is the non-profit organization that takes care of
23 Central Park, which we do 365 days a year or our
24 staff manages and cares for virtually every aspect of
25 the park and we're honored to be stewards of a place

2 that has meant so much to so many New Yorkers. COVID
3 did confront the conservancy with a lot of challenges
4 including a two month period in the early days of the
5 pandemic when more than 300 New Yorkers were treated
6 in field hospitals set up on the parks east meadow.
7 I think it was a site that no one ever expected to
8 see and hopefully one that we will never see again.
9 Like other parks, COVID also brought us like a huge
10 surge of visitors as New Yorkers gravitated outdoors.
11 Central Park now receives more than 42 million visits
12 a year, that's more visitors than any park in the
13 nation by far. It's in fact more visitors than the
14 top 10 national parks combined. Here's another
15 measure just from COVID in 2021, our teams hauled
16 away 1,850 tons of trash which was almost 50 percent
17 increase over the year before as people came outside
18 and as the commissioner and others have said parks
19 became not just our living rooms but very often our
20 dining room and our play rooms. But let me be clear
21 for all of us here at the conservancy we know that
22 Central park is not like other city parks when it
23 comes to resources. Because we are operated as a
24 non-profit in partnership with the City and because
25 we have so many generous supporters we do have

2 resources that other parks do not, but, along with
3 the growth of the conservancy we have grown our
4 commitment to park equity and to helping other parks
5 and that dates back years. It's been one of our
6 guiding principles for decades and that commitment is
7 rooted in not just words but in actions. Since 2014,
8 the conservancy's institute for urban parks has
9 worked in over 43 parks across the City and over 34
10 Council Districts and provided over 32,000 hours of
11 support across its programs. That includes our work
12 to help maintain the historic Harlem parks and our
13 five borough program spends many many hours every
14 year helping to train park workers in other parts of
15 the city and to provide equipment and resources and
16 we do this work because we believe fervently at the
17 conservancy that everyone regardless.

18 SGT. BRADLEY: Time expired.

19 DAVID SALTONSTALL: Of what ZIP code they
20 call home deserves to have access to clean, safe,
21 open spaces. And that's really why we are here today
22 to stand in solidarity with all those who believe
23 that parks are essential infrastructure and must be
24 treated as such, to say yes to finding new ways to
25 creating open space in underserved neighborhoods and

2 to say yes to supporting parks as key drivers of
3 physical and mental health and finally to say yes to
4 the Play Fair Coalition and spending 1 percent of
5 City resources on City Parks which would be a giant
6 step forward in the fight for park equity. New York
7 City has always been a leader in urban parks, we were
8 also an epicenter of COVID and we think now is the
9 time to understand our history and weave those two
10 threads together and recognize that parks are
11 essential infrastructure that everybody deserves in
12 every neighborhood. Thank you and I'm happy to take
13 any questions.

14 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
15 you very much. Our next and final registered speaker
16 for this hearing is Jackson Chabot or Chabot, please
17 begin when ready.

18 SGT. BRADLEY: Time starts now.

19 JACKSON CHABOT: Thank you I'm Jackson
20 Chabot. Good afternoon everyone my name is Jackson
21 Chabot and I'm the Director of Public Space Advocacy
22 at Open Plan and before my testimony I want to thank
23 Council Member Krishnan for his approach at the
24 beginning of the hearing allowing members of the
25 public to testify first. Oftentimes members of the

2 public area waiting hours upon hours and so kudos to
3 you Council Member, thank you for that. At Open
4 Plans we care a lot of about streets and you might
5 say, okay why am I here today about parks? But the
6 fact of the matter is that getting to parks is also a
7 matter of equity. And so if New Yorkers cannot get
8 to parks then it is not the 10 minutes doesn't matter
9 and so you know part of this what I want to describe
10 today is the mobility to and through parks as well as
11 being able to enjoy them. We're proud members of the
12 Play Fair Coalition and we fully support the 1
13 percent for parks campaign and I want to encourage
14 the Council as well as the Parks Department to use
15 that funding if it comes through wisely. We don't
16 need more vehicles in parks through the Parks
17 Department, we need more electric bikes, we need more
18 smaller type of devices to pick up and remove trash.
19 The getting to parks is really consequential because
20 of the AM New York article yesterday indicated
21 traffic deaths are already up 44 percent over last
22 year in New York City and this is already a
23 historically deadly year last year. As I mentioned
24 before with electric bikes I have encouraged the
25 Department to purchase them but as well to not change

2 their levels of enforcement. This has been seen in
3 both Prospect Park as well as in Central Park where
4 black and brown New Yorkers and delivery workers are
5 getting ticketed of riding through the park and
6 discouraged from using the park as a mobility
7 corridor. These are greenways in and of themselves.
8 They are safe places for people to bike, walk, scoot,
9 walk their dogs, et cetera and so I encourage a
10 thoughtful approach to incorporating e bikes into the
11 park. The creation of more public space and
12 creativity is a point of conservation today was very
13 heartening and encouraging. I would encourage the
14 Parks Department to think strategically about open
15 streets and places like 34th Avenue as future park
16 space. The fact of the matter is we live on an
17 island and there's not more space to be had so
18 therefore we need to reclaim it from other places and
19 with this things like open streets, things like 34th
20 Avenue have great potential to become a park. I
21 would also encourage 34th Avenue to be continued to
22 Elmhurst but that's another conversation. And then
23 two final points, greenways as mentioned in the
24 conversation deserve their fair funding. I often
25 bike on Ocean Parkway and Eastern Parkway and they're

2 more like my mountain biking courses than they are
3 safe places to pleasantly ride. In conclusion, I
4 want to highlight federal funding and testify to the
5 Transportation Infrastructure Committee hearing the
6 other day, with federal funding we have the
7 opportunity to continue the clean up corp to support
8 those volunteers as well as Parks Department
9 employees and so with that I appreciate your time
10 today and thank you for holding this hearing.

11 CHRIS SARTOREE, COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank
12 you very much. Thank you for your participation all
13 of you. And seeing no other panelists I will now
14 turn it back to Council Member Krishnan to offer any
15 other remarks and to adjourn the hearing.

16 CHAIRPERSON SHEKAR KRISHNAN: Thank you
17 so much Chris. Well, I first want to say a big thank
18 you to everyone who came to testify today on this
19 crucial issue as well as to Commissioner Donoghue and
20 all of the Parks Department representatives who were
21 here, the staff, who every day take care of our
22 City's parks and also to my colleagues too who
23 participated in today's hearing. I think as we've
24 seen overall, especially as Commissioner Donoghue
25 mentioned on Earth Day I could think of no better

2 fitting way to commemorate Earth Day than by having a
3 discussion and having a hearing on parks equity.
4 There is so much that we have to do coming out of
5 this pandemic as we know from our own experience in
6 our communities to the data itself that we presented
7 today as well our City can, should and must do so
8 much more to make sure that every community has
9 access to well-maintained quality green space that
10 requires everyone playing a role but it's from our
11 City government to our conservancies to our
12 individual communities to most importantly our Parks
13 Department making sure that our parks are well
14 funded, they are equitably funded and of course that
15 requires most importantly investing 1 percent or \$1
16 billion in our City's parks. Again, we've seen that
17 it is historically, not anything new, not even the
18 most but it is correcting and course correction of a
19 systemic over time disinvestment in our parks that
20 needs to be undone. We all have a role to play in
21 ensuring that we address equity in our parks. We all
22 have a role to play in ensuring that every community
23 of New York City can have access to green space, no
24 matter income, no matter race and no matter the
25 impacts of COVID because we know that this pandemic

2 has only highlighted longstanding inequalities when
3 it comes to the issues of parks and playgrounds in
4 our city. Thank you all so much for being a park of
5 today's hearing. Looking forward to our continued
6 work together and in particular I want to thank our
7 most especially all of those on our Council's Parks
8 Committee, Monica, Chema, John, Chris, Patrick. I
9 want to thank from my own staff Gregory Clark too for
10 all of their hard for this hearing and for making
11 today possible. Thank you so much and with that and
12 my gavel. (pounding) We will adjourn today's
13 hearing. Thank you all so much.

14 SGT. BRADLEY: Ending live stream. Have
15 a good day everyone.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date June 15, 2022