

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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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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March 22, 2023

Start: 10:20 a.m.

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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Shekar Krishnan, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

David M. Carr  
Eric Dinowitz  
Robert F. Holden  
Linda Lee  
Christopher Marte  
Julie Menin  
Mercedes Narcisse  
Lincoln Restler  
Sandra Ung  
Marjorie Velazquez  
Gale A. Brewer

A P P E A R A N C E S

Emma Alberto Barrero, student at Samara Community School

Jerick Morales, student at Samara Community School

Camila Caminero, student at Samara Community School

Evangeline Medrano, student at Fort Green Bronx

Zoe Sealy, student at PS46 and Edward C. Blum Prep School

Sue Donoghue, Commissioner of New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

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

Jennifer Greenfeld, Deputy Commissioner for Environment and Planning of New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Joe Puleo, President of Local 93

Dilcy Benn, President of Local 1505, DC37

Daniel Clay, President of the Gardeners Local

Chris Loscalzo, member of Local 1010 and a Field Rep for Laborers Local 1010 LECIT, providing testimony on behalf of Lowell Barton, Vice President and Organizing Director for Laborers Local 1010

Lynn Kelly, Executive Director of New York Restoration Project

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

Alia Soomro, Deputy Director for New York City Policy at the New York League of Conservation Voters

Sherrise Palomino, Director of Advocacy and Programs at New Yorkers for Parks

Heather Lubov, Executive Director of the City Parks Foundation

Morgan Monaco, President of the Prospect Park Alliance

Emily Walker, Senior Manager of External Affairs at the Natural Areas Conservancy testifying on behalf of Executive Director Sarah Charlop-Powers

Tali Cantor, Director of Planning for the Union Square Partnership

Brad Taylor, President of the Friends of Morningside Park

Giulietta Fiore, Associate Director of External Affairs for the Historic House Trust of New York City

Kelsey Brow, Executive Director of the King Manor Museum in Jamaica, New York

Brian Hedden, Brooklyn Greenway Initiative

Sarah McCollum Williams, Executive Director of Green Guerillas

Scott Kearney

K Webster, Sara Roosevelt Park Community Coalition

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

Kathy Nizzari, Lights Out

Scott Daly, Senior Director of New York Junior  
Tennis and Learning

Merritt Birnbaum, President and CEO of  
Riverside Park Conservancy

Kevin O'Keefe, Founder and Executive Director  
of St. Vartan Park Conservancy

Terri Carta, Executive Director of Jamaica Bay  
Rockaway Parks Conservancy

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning. This is a  
3 microphone check for the Committee on Parks and  
4 Recreation. Today's date is March 22, 2023. Located  
5 in the Chambers. Recording done by Pedro Lugo.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Once again, good  
7 morning and welcome to the Committee on Parks and  
8 Recreation.

9 At this time, we ask if you can please  
10 place phones on vibrate or silent mode. Thank you.

11 We are ready to begin.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: [GAVEL] Good morning,  
13 everyone. Welcome to today's Committee on Parks and  
14 Recreation where we will be hearing on the Fiscal  
15 2024 preliminary budget and the Preliminary Mayor's  
16 Management Report for Department of Parks and  
17 Recreation. I am clearly not Shekar Krishnan, the  
18 Chair of the Parks and Rec Committee, but we're doing  
19 a little tag-teaming over here because he's on Zoom,  
20 virtually, so I'm going to be filling in for him  
21 whenever there is no quorum so we're going to be tag-  
22 teaming today. I believe Chair Krishnan is online,  
23 and so we wanted to officially open it up with your  
24 opening statement, Chair, whenever you're ready.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Good morning,  
3 everyone. First of all, thank you so much, Co-Chair  
4 Lee, Parks Co-Chair for a day. I'm very, very  
5 grateful to you for Co-Chairing today's hearing.  
6 Thank you to all the Members, my Colleagues who are  
7 here today as well as Commissioner Donoghue, Parks  
8 Department Staff, and members of the public as well.  
9 It is so nice to see all of you and, yes, clearly as  
10 much as I wish that I could be there in-person today,  
11 I'm not, and that's simply because I've got a health  
12 issue with my eye. I'll be recovering soon and back  
13 in action in no time, but I know the fight for Parks  
14 budget for 1 percent for our parks continues, and I'm  
15 very much a part of that fight virtual or in-person.

16 With that being said, good morning,  
17 everyone, and welcome to the Parks and Recreation  
18 Committee's hearing on the Fiscal 2024 preliminary  
19 budget and the Preliminary Mayor's Management Report  
20 for the Department of Parks and Recreation.

21 My name is Shekar Krishnan, and I am the  
22 Chair of the Parks and Recreation Committee. I would  
23 like to acknowledge my fellow Council Members who are  
24 present here today, Council Member and Co-Chair Lee,  
25 Council Member Dinowitz, Council Member Marte,

2 Council Member Carr, Council Member Menin, Council  
3 Member Narcisse, Council Member Restler, and Council  
4 Member Ung.

5 As my Colleague, Council Member Lee, had  
6 said, we will both be Co-Chairing today's hearing.  
7 Whenever there is quorum in the room, I'll be able to  
8 participate virtually. If for any reason quorum drops  
9 at any point, then Council Member Lee will take over.

10 Today, we will be hearing testimony from  
11 the Department of Parks and Recreation on its Fiscal  
12 2024 preliminary budget which totals 582.7 million  
13 dollars, a decrease of 41.5 million dollars since  
14 adoption. I want to emphasize that point because last  
15 year we were proud as a Council to fight for and  
16 achieve the largest Parks' budget in the history of  
17 New York City. Now, however, we are facing a  
18 preliminary budget that walks back the gains that we  
19 had made, that decreases our Parks budget since  
20 adoption by 41.5 million dollars, a budget last year  
21 that was fundamentally a workers budget. The Parks  
22 workers are the beating heart of our system, and we  
23 were proud last year to fight to defend their  
24 positions and also expand and create hundreds of new  
25 permanent positions for our Parks staff that takes

2 care of our parks every single day. The preliminary  
3 budget proposal that we are looking at right now from  
4 the administration is clearly less than 1 percent of  
5 the total City budget for Fiscal 2024. Another year,  
6 yet again, where the Mayor has not fulfilled his  
7 promise of ensuring the Department of Parks and  
8 Recreation receives 1 percent of the budget as he  
9 explicitly campaigned and stated would be achieved.  
10 The capital budget for the Department totals 3.9  
11 billion dollars committed between FY23 and FY27, 4  
12 percent of the City's total 96.5-billion-dollar  
13 preliminary capital commitment plan. The need for  
14 increased funding for the Parks Department is  
15 highlighted when putting New York City into  
16 comparison with its peers across the country.  
17 Comparing both per capita spending and the overall  
18 share of spending, New York ranks dead last when  
19 compared to other major cities. With 30,000 acres  
20 under the Parks Department's jurisdiction, far  
21 greater than other peer city, we spend 0.6 percent of  
22 our City's overall budget on New York City Parks,  
23 which amounts to a per capita spending level of 72  
24 dollars. Now on top of that, this is also a steady  
25 decline over decades of public spending on our parks

2 going back years where prior we had actually devoted  
3 more than 1 percent of our City budget for our Parks  
4 Department so not only are we behind every other  
5 major city, but our Parks Department and Parks system  
6 have seen a steady decline and retreat of public  
7 investments into our parks and green spaces which we  
8 know from this pandemic are essential for our mental  
9 health, for our well-being, for our children, for our  
10 seniors, for our families. Most peer cities in the  
11 United States spend over 1 percent of their budget on  
12 their city's parks department with some cities, such  
13 as Minneapolis, spending over 5 percent of their city  
14 budget on their parks department. In addition, the  
15 per capita spending of other major cities across the  
16 country on their parks budget is much, much higher.  
17 Now, again, for us in New York City, our per capita  
18 spending is 72 dollars when it comes to our Parks  
19 Department. In San Francisco, it is 245 dollars per  
20 capita; Chicago, 155 dollars; Washington, D.C., 151  
21 dollars. In other words, we have the largest Parks  
22 system in the country, but other major cities spend  
23 more than double what New York City does on their  
24 Parks budget per capita. The need for far more  
25 funding for our Parks system couldn't be clearer.

2 This means that New York City's Parks Department  
3 often has to do far more with much less relative to  
4 its peers. For example, in New York City, there is  
5 exactly one gardener responsible for every 114 acres  
6 of landscaped parkland. Meanwhile, in San Francisco  
7 and Chicago, that same one gardener would be  
8 responsible for every 18 acres of landscaped  
9 parkland. One gardener for 114 acres of parkland in  
10 New York City. In San Francisco and Chicago, one  
11 gardener for every 18 acres of landscaped parkland.  
12 We can and we must do better as a city, and it starts  
13 with prioritizing our park spaces and green spaces in  
14 our budget.

15           Now, the Fiscal 2024 preliminary budget  
16 includes 906,000 in new needs for Fiscal 2024 as well  
17 as 225,000 dollars in other adjustments and 3.8  
18 million in PEGs. There aren't many changes in the  
19 budget related to FY24. The majority of changes are  
20 related to FY23. However, something that is present  
21 is the vacancy reduction of 59 positions. This is  
22 combined with the vacancy reduction of 200 positions  
23 in the Administration's November plan so in total  
24 there are 259 positions to be cut from our Parks  
25 Department at a savings of 15 million dollars in

2 Fiscal 24 and the outyears. Now, as I mentioned  
3 before and we all know it, in every single district  
4 across New York City and every single park and  
5 playground across New York City, it is our Parks  
6 workers who are sacrificing and taking care of them  
7 every single day, maintaining them, making sure that  
8 they are spaces accessible for all New Yorkers, for  
9 all communities, but how that job can be done when we  
10 are removing positions, reducing the budget is the  
11 outstanding and most urgent question. This is not the  
12 time for cuts to our Parks. In fact, we should be  
13 talking about and investing more than ever before so  
14 that every single New Yorker, no matter what  
15 community you live in, has access to quality parks in  
16 their neighborhoods, in their boroughs, and just a  
17 short walk from their home.

18 This is an issue of equity that is not  
19 being properly or effectively addressed by this  
20 Administration. Budget cuts and high vacancy rates  
21 contribute to a Department that is unable to meet  
22 many basic functions. It is just as simple as that.

23 According to the Preliminary Mayor's  
24 Management Report, for example, the number of tree  
25 inspections decreased from 60,716 during the first

four months of FY22 to 28,790 during the first four months of Fiscal 2023, a 40,000 drop in the number of tree inspections in one year alone. Additionally, the number of trees planted during the same time decreased roughly by half, from 5,075 to 2,748, at a time when as we all know we are fighting to expand our tree canopy to achieve 30 percent tree canopy cover by 2035. This Parks Committee and this Council was proud to host last year the first ever Tree Canopy Hearing in New York City's history, and we saw how urgent it is, a matter of climate emergency, that we care for and expand our tree canopy, that every community benefits from the hundreds of millions of gallons of stormwater absorption that trees are capable of, the shade they provide, making sure that every community does not suffer as they do now unequally from hotter surface temperatures, whether it's communities in the South Bronx or my own in Jackson Heights and Elmhurst where we rank among some of the least when it comes to green space and park space as well as having some of the hottest surface temperatures. We know how important our tree canopy is in the fight for our climate, in the fight for making sure that there is green space throughout New

2 York City so how can it be that we are walking back  
3 our resources, our services to not only expand but to  
4 maintain the existing tree canopy. This Committee,  
5 this Council under the leadership of Speaker Adams is  
6 committed and unwavering in its commitment to fight  
7 for our parks across our city, to make sure that  
8 every single New Yorker has access to quality green  
9 space. If we are to be a world-class parks system  
10 that reflects how essential these spaces are for all  
11 New Yorkers, then we need to invest in them in a  
12 world-class way.

13 Today, this Committee is excited to hear  
14 testimony related to the FY24 preliminary plan,  
15 specifically related to PEGs, lifeguards, (INAUDIBLE)  
16 and vacancy rates. The Administration has used the  
17 possibility of a mild recession and lower than  
18 expected tax receipts to make massive cuts to  
19 agencies, and that includes our Parks Department.  
20 However, the Council has estimated several billion  
21 dollars greater than the Office of Management and  
22 Budget. This additional money can be used to fully  
23 fund the Parks Department and ensure that all New  
24 Yorkers have the experience that they deserve and  
25 that we are well on the way to achieving once and for

2 all something that is not radical but finally 1  
3 percent or 1 billion dollars for our Parks budget. We  
4 need to be marching steadily forward to that goal and  
5 not retreating from it.

6 I'd like to thank my Committee Staff,  
7 especially Michael, Jack, and Chima of the Finance  
8 Division, Chris and Patrick of the Legislative  
9 Division, and my own staff, Chuck and Greg as well as  
10 my Co-Chair for the day, Council Member Linda Lee,  
11 and her Staff, John, Amanda, for all their great and  
12 hard work and dedication to make today's hearing  
13 possible.

14 Before we begin with our testimony from  
15 the Administration, I'd like to call up our first  
16 panel, which will be several students from public  
17 schools who are here to talk about how important our  
18 parks are to them.

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Hello to all the  
20 students up in the balcony. Hi, everyone. Thanks for  
21 joining us today.

22 For the first panel, we're going to call  
23 up from Samara Community School in the Bronx, we have  
24 Emma Alberto Barrero (phonetic), if you guys can come  
25 up to the front here. I'm going to call all five of

2 you guys up at the same time. Jerick Morales, Camila  
3 Caminera, and from Fort Greene Prep School in  
4 Brooklyn we have Evangeline Medrano, and from PS46  
5 Edward C. Bloom we have Zoe Sealy.

6 You just have to make sure that when you  
7 guys are talking the microphones are on, and you can  
8 tell it's on because of the red light. Emma, are you  
9 ready?

10 EMMA ALBERTO BARRERO: Yeah.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, cool. All  
12 right, so start whenever you're ready and go ahead.

13 EMMA ALBERTO BARRERO: Good morning. We  
14 need 1 percent of the City budget to be earmarked for  
15 parks in New York City. Parks are important to our  
16 community, (INAUDIBLE) Park East, because they give  
17 us a place to experience nature, relax, and have fun  
18 and play. We researched the facilities at Crotona  
19 Park, the largest park in Council District 3. We  
20 recently had the opportunity to interview State  
21 Assemblymember Chantel Jackson who represents  
22 District 79 for our New York State. She asked for our  
23 input on how to spend 500,000 dollars that the State  
24 earmarked for improvements at Crotona Park. In order  
25 to write proposals for Assemblymember Jackson, we

2 visited Crotona Park to make observations, and we  
3 interviewed our family members since they are  
4 stakeholders in our community. We had so many  
5 priorities for improvements at the park such as  
6 cleaning the lake, adding food stands, installing  
7 more bathrooms and water fountains that work and  
8 provide clean filtered water. These are just some of  
9 the ideas we had to use the 500,000 dollars based on  
10 our research.

11 JERICK MORALES: However, we realized that  
12 we need much more than 500,000 dollars to make a real  
13 change at Crotona Park, and Crotona Park is just one  
14 park in our Community District. Therefore, we could  
15 not accept a cut to the City Parks budget. We need as  
16 much money as we can get to improve parks in our  
17 neighborhood, let alone across the City. In our  
18 interview with Assemblymember Jackson, we also  
19 learned that health is a major concern in Community  
20 District 3. According to data from New Yorkers for  
21 Parks, there were 442 incidents of childhood asthma  
22 per 10,000 children in 2021. This was more than  
23 triple the rate of childhood asthma rates in  
24 Manhattan. This illustrates the importance of parks  
25 in the Bronx. Funding for Parks is just one of the

2 many strategies we need to use to aggressively fight  
3 childhood asthma rates in our community. We see the  
4 impact of asthma on children's lives every day at our  
5 school. We can count at least five students that  
6 suffered from asthma in our fifth grade alone.

7 CAMILA CAMINERO: Tree maintenance is an  
8 important strategy for boosting overall health in the  
9 Bronx. The parks need to be fully funded so that we  
10 have enough staff in order to take care of the trees.  
11 Trees help reduce the temperature during climate  
12 crisis. According to the New York Time, the Bronx and  
13 East Harlem have the lowest tree canopy in the entire  
14 city. On average, the Bronx is up to 10 degrees  
15 hotter than the rest of New York City in the summer  
16 because of this. To conclude, Parks funding is  
17 directly related to community health. Thus, we cannot  
18 accept a cut to Mayor Adams' original promise of 1  
19 percent of the City budget devoted to Parks. We need  
20 that money. We need basketball courts, dog parks,  
21 more benches, better playgrounds, and leafy,  
22 beautiful trees. We deserve equitable Park funding in  
23 our Bronx community. Thank you for your  
24 consideration.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you, guys.

3 Thank you. Okay, next, Evangeline, whenever you're  
4 ready.

5 EVANGELINE MEDRANO: Good morning. My name  
6 is Evangeline Medrano, and I'm a sixth-grade student  
7 at Fort Greene Preparatory Academy and PS46 alum in  
8 City Council District 35. Thank you to the Parks  
9 Committee for allowing me to testify about parks and  
10 playgrounds with them.

11 I also want to thank Parks Chair Shekar  
12 Krishnan for making investments in playgrounds in  
13 every ZIP code in NYC and a big thank you to NYC  
14 Parks Commissioner Susan Donoghue for being here and  
15 supporting New York's parks.

16 I'm here to testify about Oracle  
17 Playground in Fort Greene Brooklyn. Our school is a  
18 jointly operated park attached to Oracle Playground.  
19 Parks and playgrounds are critical for kids of all  
20 ages and abilities. Having playgrounds is important  
21 for students. More time outside shows an increase in  
22 students' brain activity which makes the student more  
23 likely to perform better in all class subjects.  
24 Equally important, the playground is where my  
25 classmates have fun and social growth happens. The

2 City Council should invest in our future by providing  
3 1 percent of the City budget to the NYC Parks so that  
4 our parks and playgrounds can be a clean and safe  
5 place for kids to learn and play. Currently, our  
6 schoolyard is a sad place to look at. There is a big  
7 open space with cracked concrete and nothing to play  
8 on. Currently, my classmates use this space to walk,  
9 run, and jump rope. It's unfortunate and not fair to  
10 us. Other schools in the neighborhood share  
11 schoolyards that have nice basketball courts and  
12 track and fields. The Oracle Playground which  
13 students can use during PE and recess has limitations  
14 too. The playground has an old jungle gym, baby  
15 swings, and rocking animals that are broken. The  
16 playground needs to be renovated. Other playgrounds  
17 in the neighborhood have swings for all ages, pools,  
18 and working equipment. Not all playgrounds are equal.  
19 Ours has a lot of issues. The equipment doesn't work,  
20 and the playgrounds flood when it rains. When kids  
21 are in parks, we need access to water fountains,  
22 sprinklers, and functioning bathrooms. My classmates  
23 and I want a playground that we can all use, a  
24 playground that is clean and safe and has functioning  
25 equipment for kids of all ages and abilities, not

2 just some of us. This is possible if the City Council  
3 provides the Parks with the resources they need to  
4 improve Oracle Playground for me and my classmates to  
5 keep parks clean and safe across the City. The City  
6 Council needs to commit 1 percent for Parks.

7 To conclude, we have Zoe Sealy.

8 ZOE SEALY: Well said. Thank you,  
9 Evangeline. Good morning. My name is Zoe Sealy. I am  
10 a fifth-grade student and Vice President of Student  
11 Body at PS46 Edward C. Blum in Fort Greene in City  
12 Council District 35.

13 Our school shares the playground with  
14 Fort Greene Prep. The students at PS46 and Fort  
15 Greene Prep hope for a new playground and support  
16 increased funding for the city parks. Kids deserve a  
17 good quality playground. Many schools in the  
18 neighborhood have better playgrounds. Our schoolyard  
19 needs improvements so kids can play and learn. We  
20 need parks equity so all kids of all abilities and  
21 backgrounds can play and learn in NYC Parks. I want  
22 the Mayor to know that PS46 has a jointly operated  
23 playground that is old and outdated. I invite Mayor  
24 Eric Adams and NYC Parks Commissioner Sue Donoghue to  
25 visit PS46 to see our schoolyard and playground to

2 see for themselves the challenges that the students  
3 have faced when it comes to our playground and the  
4 inequality of our park for themselves. We want our  
5 parents to safely bring us to the park and not fear  
6 the dangers of broken equipment and some bees in the  
7 park.

8 I'd like to thank New Yorkers for Parks  
9 fighting for better parks and for playgrounds in NYC.  
10 Also, thank you for the daffodil project. Our school  
11 has been participating for two years in the project,  
12 and a shoutout to Crystal Hudson and to the entire  
13 City Council for your time and much-needed support.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you all so  
15 much. (INAUDIBLE) big hand of applause. You all spoke  
16 so powerfully, and I want to thank you all for your  
17 work, your fight every single day to make sure that  
18 our parks and playgrounds get the services, get the  
19 resources and funding that we need. I couldn't agree  
20 more with all of your testimony. Everyone, all our  
21 children, deserve good quality parks in all of our  
22 neighborhoods. I, myself, am a father of two small  
23 children who are 7 and 4 years old, and I know how  
24 much they love their parks, and so really the work  
25 that we're doing here in our City Council is to make

2 sure that we are leaving a better world for each and  
3 every one of you. You all are the future, and that's  
4 why it's on us and our job to make sure that we do  
5 make the parks and playgrounds better for you all,  
6 that we do plant more trees and more daffodils, and  
7 to know that we have all of you advocating for our  
8 parks every single day gives me so much hope and  
9 inspiration in the future. It keeps us all going in  
10 the work that we do, and I know that our world and  
11 our future is brighter because of each and every one  
12 of you. Thank you all so much. Thank you for your  
13 testimony. Keep up the amazing work, and I'm excited  
14 to see you all out there in our City's parks too.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you all so  
16 much. Thank you for the students and teachers and all  
17 the staff that have come to bring you all here today  
18 so thank you so much. You guys will be on this side  
19 soon when you grow up, okay, so we look forward to  
20 that day. All right. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Bye, everyone, and  
22 thank you New Yorkers for Parks too for your amazing  
23 advocacy and having all our students come out to  
24 testify too.

2           Now, I think we'll call up our Parks  
3 Commissioner, Sue Donoghue. Thank you, Commissioner  
4 Donoghue, for all your great work and advocacy  
5 tirelessly and all our Parks Department Staff every  
6 day for our Parks system. We call up Commissioner  
7 Donoghue and the Administration to testify, and I'd  
8 ask our Committee Counsel, Chris, to swear in the  
9 Commissioner and her team.

10           COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair. Good  
11 morning, Commissioner. I would ask that you please  
12 raise your right hand.

13           Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
14 whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your  
15 testimony before this Committee and to respond  
16 honestly to Council Member questions?

17           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I do.

18           COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

19           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Okay. Good  
20 morning, Chair Krishnan, Co-Chair Lee, Members of  
21 the Parks Committee. I want to start off first by  
22 thanking those five wonderful students who  
23 testified in support of our parks and open spaces.  
24 Well done. I also want to let you know I'd be  
25 happy to visit your school playground in Fort

2 Greene so thank you for inviting me. I look  
3 forward to it.

4           Members of the Council, my name is Sue  
5 Donoghue, and I am so pleased to be here this  
6 morning testifying as the Commissioner of the New  
7 York City Department of Parks and Recreation. I'm  
8 joined this morning by members of my incredible  
9 senior staff who are sitting behind me, members of  
10 my team, and also by Matt Drury, our Director of  
11 Government Relations.

12           Firstly, I want to start out by  
13 thanking the Council for its continued and vocal  
14 support of our City's open spaces over the past  
15 year and for championing the importance of parks  
16 for all New Yorkers. Thank you for allowing us the  
17 opportunity to discuss the agency's Preliminary  
18 Budget for Fiscal Year 2024 and to provide an  
19 overview of our agency's mission to build and  
20 maintain our city's green and open spaces.

21           Though most New Yorkers are familiar  
22 with many aspects of our park system, not everyone  
23 is aware of the full array of properties,  
24 programs, amenities and facilities that make up  
25 New York City Parks' portfolio. New York City

2 Parks' primary responsibility is to plan,  
3 maintain, and care for over 30,000 acres of green  
4 and open space, encompassing 5,000 individual  
5 properties, ranging from playgrounds and beaches  
6 to community gardens and natural areas. These  
7 properties, as you know, span the entire city from  
8 the Conference House Park at the southern tip of  
9 Staten Island to Coney Island Beach and the  
10 Rockaways to the forests of Van Cortlandt Park at  
11 the northern-most edge of the Bronx. We provide  
12 thousands of recreational and educational public  
13 programs throughout the year, including free Shape  
14 Up NYC fitness classes, Kids in Motion children's  
15 programing, and nature education provided by our  
16 Urban Park Rangers.

17           Throughout our city's history, when New  
18 Yorkers have needed to exercise or space to enjoy  
19 themselves with family and friends, find solace,  
20 or just relish some sorely needed quiet time and  
21 solitude, they have always turned to our City  
22 parks, and this reliance has only grown in recent  
23 years. There is no denying that the COVID pandemic  
24 has been a challenging time for our agency and for  
25 the entire city, as reverberations are still being

2 felt in the national economy, impacting labor  
3 markets and supply chains, but I'm extremely proud  
4 of the hard work and dedication exhibited by our  
5 incredible agency staff, guided by a clear  
6 principle: parks and green spaces are for  
7 everyone, and we must always strive to make them  
8 as open, accessible, and equitable as possible.  
9 I'm pleased to report that the past year has been  
10 a very busy one for our agency, and our dedication  
11 to our core mission is stronger than ever.

12           In 2022, we expanded our commitment to  
13 providing safe and engaging recreational and  
14 cultural programming opportunities for young  
15 people across New York City by expanding  
16 recreation center hours at nine sites, adding  
17 1,400 programming hours for beloved programs like  
18 Saturday Night Lights. Seven of the nine sites  
19 were in neighborhoods most impacted by the  
20 pandemic as identified by the Taskforce on Racial  
21 Inclusion and Equity so that these communities can  
22 fully enjoy the fun, health, and wellness that our  
23 recreation centers help provide. We planted  
24 thousands of new trees across the city, including  
25 thousands in heat-vulnerable neighborhoods, and to

1 help New Yorkers better understand the state of  
2 our urban tree canopy, we launched a first-of-its-  
3 kind dynamic tree map, the NYC Tree Map. This map  
4 on our agency website showcases nearly one million  
5 individually managed City trees, including unique  
6 identification numbers, species information, and  
7 maintenance status, and New Yorkers can report  
8 tree conditions in parks and on streets directly  
9 to Parks staff, increasing the efficiency of our  
10 tree care efforts. We also managed over 600  
11 capital park improvement projects and renovated,  
12 rebuilt, and expanded 21 GreenThumb community  
13 gardens throughout the city, including eight  
14 gardens located within NYCHA campuses. Despite  
15 significant challenges, we convened a successful  
16 2022 beach and outdoor pool season, where more  
17 than 1 million swimmers visited our City pools to  
18 cool off, local businesses and concessions  
19 thrived, and we launched a brand-new water safety  
20 initiative to teach children safe behavior in, on,  
21 and around water. Even while faced with the  
22 challenges of a nationwide lifeguard shortage, New  
23 York City was one of the only major U.S. cities to  
24 open all of our public pools and beaches, a  
25

2 testament to the City's commitment to equitable  
3 access, and we are in the midst of a very  
4 aggressive staff recruitment and training campaign  
5 to make the 2023 beach and pool season the best  
6 that it can be.

7           None of this would be possible without  
8 our incredible agency employees who have  
9 shouldered a tremendous responsibility throughout  
10 the pandemic, which is why one of my top  
11 priorities is ensuring that our agency's internal  
12 culture is built on a foundation of equity and  
13 respect. To help advance these goals, we have  
14 established a new Diversity Equity Inclusion and  
15 Belonging office to lead fact-finding discussions  
16 and increase accountability, continued our  
17 agency's Reflections On platform, which a series  
18 of internal listening sessions dedicated to  
19 numerous challenging social concerns facing our  
20 employees, including Asian hate crimes, gender  
21 identity and domestic violence, and we launched an  
22 oral history project to capture the important  
23 stories of what our Parkies went through during  
24 the pandemic in their own words.

2           Turning to the specific topic for this  
3 hearing, this year's Preliminary Budget reflects  
4 the Administration's ongoing commitment to  
5 promoting an equitable recovery by making  
6 investments in a greener, healthier city, and  
7 gives our Agency the resources we need to continue  
8 getting the job done, while demonstrating fiscal  
9 responsibility amid the ongoing economic and  
10 fiscal challenges facing the city. New York  
11 City Parks' Fiscal Year 2024 Preliminary Expense  
12 operating budget is 582.7 million dollars. This  
13 budget will allow us to continue delivering core  
14 services and keeping our city parks clean and  
15 safe, including new baseline funding for an  
16 expansion of the Rat Reduction Initiative and the  
17 ability to pursue a more flexible strategic  
18 approach to the acquisition of new parkland. We  
19 are continuing to innovate in how we are deploying  
20 our staff and other resources. Earlier this week,  
21 we were proud to announce the deployment of 240  
22 newly hired Second Shift dedicated Parks staff to  
23 address cleanliness in City parks during peak days  
24 and hours. Tasked with addressing trash, litter,  
25 and graffiti at 100 hotspot sites in 62 parks

2 across the city, this new operational deployment  
3 will work from Thursday through Sunday in the  
4 evening hours to keep our open spaces cleaner and  
5 greener than ever. This new strategy represents  
6 the first full-time staff dedicated specifically  
7 for peak evenings and weekends in the history of  
8 the Department.

9           The agency's 10-Year Capital Plan is  
10 8.56 billion dollars, allowing the agency to  
11 renovate, reimagine, and preserve our parks,  
12 playgrounds, and public spaces, including a new  
13 investment in the restoration of the beloved  
14 Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Riverside Park,  
15 which commemorates the sacrifices of Union Army  
16 soldiers and sailors who served in the Civil War.  
17 Over 120 years old, this incredible historic  
18 treasure had fallen into a dangerous state of  
19 disrepair over time so we will be advancing a  
20 complete restoration of the monument and  
21 surrounding plazas. With the consultation and  
22 guidance of our dedicated Arts and Antiquities  
23 division, this renovation will guarantee that this  
24 elegant and meaningful commemorative space will

2 remain a vital historic resource for years to  
3 come.

4           New York City Parks has consistently  
5 demonstrated our long-held commitment to robust  
6 and meaningful public engagement. Our dedicated  
7 staff will never stop working tirelessly, but our  
8 city parks we know are at their best when New  
9 Yorkers help care for our public open spaces, so  
10 we work closely with our park users and community  
11 residents to really get them involved in their  
12 local parks. These efforts can range from our  
13 Super Stewards who help care for our street trees,  
14 forests, and nature trails to the local residents  
15 that attend our community design input sessions to  
16 shape our playground redesigns, to Partnerships  
17 for Parks, our incredible joint program with the  
18 City Parks Foundation which supports and champions  
19 local neighborhood volunteers by giving them the  
20 tools they need to advocate and care for their  
21 parks and green spaces in a dedicated, sustained  
22 manner. Earlier this week, the Mayor announced the  
23 launch of We Love NYC, a civic campaign which will  
24 celebrate New Yorkers who are making a difference  
25 through community service and identify volunteer

2 opportunities to which everyone can contribute. In  
3 the coming months, the campaign will focus on ways  
4 New Yorkers can help improve the city,  
5 prioritizing public safety, support for small  
6 businesses, and, of course, caring for parks. We  
7 look forward to partnering with the Council and  
8 other stakeholders on this vital effort to empower  
9 New York City residents so that together we can  
10 drive positive change in our communities and make  
11 New York a more livable and greener city.

12           In closing, I want to thank Mayor Adams  
13 for granting me the incredible privilege of  
14 leading this agency and the opportunity to work  
15 with each of you to continue improving our parks  
16 and open spaces for all New Yorkers. Many of you  
17 are already familiar with our incredible Borough  
18 Commissioners and their district teams who work  
19 alongside our hard-working central agency division  
20 staff to deliver for New Yorkers every day. We are  
21 always available to answer questions and address  
22 concerns from your offices and are happy to hear  
23 your thoughts on any topic, whether it regards a  
24 local park in your district or a citywide agency  
25 policy. New York City Parks looks forward to

2 continuing our close partnership with the Council,  
3 to create a bright, green future with a more  
4 equitable, inclusive and resilient parks system.

5 Thank you for the opportunity to  
6 testify today, and we would be happy to answer any  
7 questions that you may have.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much,  
9 Commissioner, and thank you for always be so  
10 available to all of us on the Council. Let's clap  
11 for her.

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: You and your team  
14 have been so great just coming out and visiting  
15 all of our Districts and talking to us about all  
16 the issues, both capital as well as staffing that  
17 are needed in our Districts so thank you so much.

18 The first set of questions that I had  
19 were related to the PEGs for the budget and so  
20 just a few questions around the PEGs. Since the  
21 Fiscal 2023 adopted budget, there have been  
22 several rounds of PEGs that have reduced the  
23 budget by 41.5 million. This decrease is largely  
24 due to vacancy reductions, and Fiscal 2024 had  
25 PEGs of 11.1 million to the November plan and 3.9

2 in the January plan so can you tell us what impact  
3 will the PEGs have moving forward on the  
4 Department's ability to perform its duties, and I  
5 understand there's some things in there with  
6 seasonal workers as well so if you clarify all of  
7 that for us, that would be great.

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.

9 Thank you, Council Member, for the question. Under  
10 this Administration, New York City Parks has  
11 actually experienced a net gain of more than 300  
12 City-funded headcount, and we, of course, remain  
13 dedicated to keeping our parks and playgrounds  
14 safe and clean for all New Yorkers to enjoy.  
15 You're right, the City has experienced PEGs. The  
16 City reduced vacant positions across all agencies  
17 in response to concern over economic and fiscal  
18 risks and uncertain economic future, also due to  
19 the rapidly expanding asylum-seeker population  
20 really to protect the City's long-term fiscal  
21 stability and the ability to deliver quality  
22 programs and services. It's important to note that  
23 for our agency, we did have a reduction of 200  
24 vacancies in the most recent November plan that  
25 was spread equitably across the agency, and we had

2 59 vacancies reduced through the capital division.  
3 I want to emphasize that these were vacancies.  
4 They are not existing staff. As is always the  
5 case, it's an ongoing Commissioner with the  
6 Mayor's Office and OMB to address potential  
7 further needs, but we feel strongly that with the  
8 folks we have in place and the team we have in  
9 place that we'll still be able to fulfill our  
10 mission.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Just for  
12 clarity because I remember at one of the previous  
13 hearings that we had, in terms of the positions  
14 that were never filled, what was the percentage,  
15 what's the max you've been able to fill out of the  
16 X number of positions that were on the budget line  
17 item just out of curiosity.

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Our total  
19 budgeted headcount is roughly 4,600 people, and we  
20 right now have just a 2 percent vacancy rate. We  
21 did, as I said, take the initial reduction of 200  
22 positions that all agencies took a reduction of  
23 vacancies, but in general our headcount is about  
24 4,600.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, and did the  
3 Administration discuss the types of PEGs that  
4 would be taken as well as the amounts and did you  
5 all have a say in that at all?

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We all  
7 understood that there was a need to address fiscal  
8 uncertainty in the expected climate and, as I  
9 said, it was across all agencies needed to take  
10 vacancy reductions.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, and then have  
12 they also discussed further PEGs at all or that  
13 hasn't been mentioned?

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay.

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That hasn't been  
17 discussed.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Moving on to  
19 the vacancy rates, as of February 2023, vacancy  
20 rate was 6 percent, is that correct, with the  
21 recreation services unit?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Council Member,  
23 that may have been at a point in time. Right now,  
24 our vacancy rate is 2 percent so I think that was  
25 just a snapshot in time. As you said, the timing

2 can be difficult. We were at that point hiring up  
3 actually for the summer season and hiring a whole  
4 bunch of seasonal so it may have been a reflection  
5 of that effort, but our vacancy rate right now is  
6 quite low at 2 percent.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Can you  
8 identify the cause of the high vacancy rates in  
9 the past? You just mentioned seasonal. Does OMB  
10 want to fill all these positions? If you could  
11 clarify that as well.

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. We  
13 work closely with OMB on filling positions, and we  
14 have a great partnership and relationship as I  
15 said. We're bringing on thousands of new seasonal  
16 staff and working closely to get those PARs  
17 approved and have those folks on board by April  
18 when we most need them. We are confident that  
19 we'll be able to do that and have been able to do  
20 that each year and so right now we have a very low  
21 vacancy rate, and we're confident that that will  
22 continue and we'll continue to hire up and make  
23 sure we're ready for the summer season.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: When the vacancy  
25 rates are lower, what percentage usually is that,

2 like in the off-seasons? How high does that go  
3 usually?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Sorry. With our  
5 normal vacancy rate do you mean?

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Right, so in the  
7 off-season because I know right now you guys are  
8 hiring up which is why it's lower than in February  
9 so now it's 2 percent versus 6 in February so do  
10 you know when, I guess more the winter months when  
11 it's lower, what's the usual vacancy rate during  
12 those months?

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It's generally  
14 quite low. It's generally in that range, around  
15 the 2 percent range, and the fluctuation is  
16 largely because we are hiring and you're seeing  
17 the seasonals come into the budget and vacancies  
18 being filled by seasonals.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. If you could  
20 just get back to me on what the off-season vacancy  
21 rates are, that'll be great.

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Sure.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: The reason why I'm  
24 asking that question is because I'm just curious  
25 to know if there's a way to retain workers who may

2 be in the summer/spring months but then also are  
3 there other opportunities to fill those rates in  
4 the winter/off-season months as well.

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you. I  
6 appreciate the question, Council Member. We're  
7 always looking to hire seasonals absolutely. When  
8 we have open positions, if it's the end of a  
9 season, we're always looking to bring good people  
10 into the agency, especially people who are  
11 experienced and know the job and have worked with  
12 us seasonally so we do absolutely use that as a  
13 pool for hiring people into the agency for sure.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Awesome. How many  
15 vacancies do you expect to fill by the end of  
16 Fiscal 2024? Do you guys have a sense of that  
17 based on previous years?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We expect to  
19 retain that low vacancy rate. We generally do have  
20 a regular attrition of 40 to 50 positions each  
21 month so a vacancy rate of zero is kind of  
22 unrealistic, but we expect to have positions  
23 filled and continue with that low around 2 percent  
24 vacancy rate.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. One potential  
3 cause of vacancy is the long time it takes to  
4 fully onboard someone after hiring them so what is  
5 the typical timeline for a new hire to begin once  
6 they've received the offer from the Parks and  
7 Recreation Department?

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It's typically  
9 quite quick actually. As I said, we have a strong  
10 working relationship with OMB. We are right now in  
11 the process of bringing on thousands of seasonals,  
12 and that process starts in February, it's a  
13 regular process, we do it every year, and we'll  
14 bring on 3,600 new seasonal positions to have them  
15 in place for April.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. My next few  
17 questions are around the personnel action  
18 requests, the PARs. The PARs is a number that  
19 describes for those that don't know the amount of  
20 requests for hiring that are approved by the  
21 Administration so between July 2022 and February  
22 2023, the Department was approved to hire 997  
23 applicants out of the 5,728 that were submitted to  
24 the Administration, and that's an approval rate of  
25 17.4 percent, and it is by far I think the lowest

2 out of any of the agencies so just out of  
3 curiosity, and I think there's conflicting data  
4 between the Department, the Council, and the OMB  
5 regarding the PARs so how many PARs were submitted  
6 by the Department in FY22 and how many were  
7 approved and denied because I know we all seem to  
8 have different numbers on this so I just want to  
9 make sure.

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. Thank you,  
11 Council Member, for the question, and I appreciate  
12 it. There does seem to be discrepancies and  
13 differences and I think, as I said, that  
14 represents the snapshot in time so when we have a  
15 lot of seasonal positions to hire, which we do say  
16 in February, it would look like a higher vacancy  
17 rate, and that then greatly reduces as we're  
18 hiring seasonal positions and as we're hiring  
19 them. As I said, we work very closely with OMB. We  
20 get those PARs approved on a regular rolling  
21 basis. We don't see lags in that. As I said, if it  
22 showed a 17 percent vacancy rate in February, our  
23 vacancy rate now is 2 percent so we are bringing  
24 on people. We're effectively hiring and bringing  
25 them onboard, getting the approvals we need to

2 have people hired quickly and onboard for the  
3 season.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: I know it's hard  
5 because right now we're in the middle of the  
6 Fiscal Year, but for FY22, since it's already  
7 completed, could you give us a sense of the PARs  
8 that were submitted by the Department in FY22  
9 versus how many were approved and then denied  
10 also, if you have those numbers?

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We'd have to get  
12 back to you for FY22. We can absolutely get back  
13 to you with those numbers and those percentages  
14 for sure.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Awesome. If you  
16 could let us know because hopefully by now, I know  
17 audits and finalizing of the numbers take a  
18 little, but hopefully by now you guys have a sense  
19 for FY22.

20 Are there any roadblocks that regularly  
21 come up when trying to fill vacant positions? What  
22 are the barriers, the roadblocks because I realize  
23 some of it may not be you and it may be out of  
24 your Department and agency so I'm just curious to  
25 know what you've experienced.

2                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
3 Council Member, for the question, and I appreciate  
4 it. I think, just like on a national level,  
5 there's challenges in hiring everywhere, in every  
6 industry, whether it be public or private sector,  
7 everyone is having challenges with hiring. We  
8 experience the same. There are certain hard-to-  
9 fill positions absolutely, but we are actively  
10 working. We are attending and hosting job fairs  
11 and working with sister agencies on job fairs to  
12 get out there as much as possible. Advertise the  
13 open positions we have. Aside from more of a  
14 national, what we're seeing across the board, I  
15 don't think we have any specific challenges that  
16 are unique except that it reflects what's going on  
17 nationally. In general, as I said, we are quite  
18 productive in our hiring, work closely with OMB,  
19 have been very, very successful in bringing on new  
20 hires, and, as I said, we'll have thousands in  
21 place, 3,600 new hires in place for the spring and  
22 summer season with our seasonal plan.

23                   CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. I know that  
24 on the social services sector, because on the  
25 mental health side of things, and there's a huge

2 lack of folks there to hire as well, so I totally  
3 hear you on that one. I think in our conversations  
4 with different city agencies there have been a few  
5 different hurdles that folks have been going  
6 through in order to get the hires through, and I  
7 just know that, for example, this is just like an  
8 example just on contracts, like as a non-profit,  
9 we would have a lot of hard times getting certain  
10 things passed or through because the process  
11 itself sometimes is one that is very siloed and  
12 broken up and it has to go through many different  
13 agencies and hands before it gets registered so do  
14 you see any ways that the process could be  
15 streamlined at all in terms of the hiring from  
16 your perspective, like where do you think the lags  
17 are happening?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for  
19 the question, and I definitely hear you in terms  
20 of challenges with contracting. Thankfully that's  
21 different than hiring, and we're working closely  
22 with OMB. They're very, very focused on any kind  
23 of improvements and timelines that will help  
24 hiring go more quickly or more smoothly, and the  
25 agency works very well with OMB, and we feel like

2 there are the right processes and procedures in  
3 place so we can bring on people effectively.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. That's good.

5 I'm always curious to know how are ways that maybe  
6 we on the Council can also help push that on our  
7 end for whatever we can do so...

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I appreciate  
9 that.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: I always like to  
11 see how we can streamline.

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Just keeping along  
14 the PARs, I was just wondering why the number is  
15 so low for this agency compared to others. I think  
16 you kind of alluded to it, but if you could just  
17 clarify that as well with the seasonals and  
18 everything?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Why our vacancy  
20 rate is so low?

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: The personnel  
22 action requests.

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah. Because we  
24 work really hard with OMB to make sure that there  
25 is a good positive relationship, that we are quite

2 productive, and because of our seasonal hiring,  
3 because we do this every year, there is really a  
4 good process in place to bring people on quickly.  
5 It's something that happens every year. We have an  
6 excellent team in place that knows the system well  
7 and can move things through in our budget and  
8 hiring office, and we have a great relationship  
9 with OMB to make sure that hiring is not impacted.  
10 They know the importance of bringing people on for  
11 the summer season and getting our parks ready and  
12 available for people to enjoy them.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Are part-time and  
14 seasonal positions counted the same as full-time  
15 positions?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No.

17 DIRECTOR DRURY: For PARs, I believe,  
18 yes. For PARs, I believe so, yeah.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay.

20 DIRECTOR DRURY: In short, I think the  
21 data your folks were examining didn't reflect the  
22 thousands of approvals that had happened  
23 essentially after the snapshot that you were  
24 presented with. That's the short story there.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. That's a good  
3 clarification. What's usually the typical reason  
4 why there are denials with the PARs?

5 DIRECTOR DRURY: I think we can  
6 characterize that, denials of PARs are exceedingly  
7 rare, like practically don't happen.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: If I'm  
9 understanding the process correctly, if there's a  
10 request for approval that goes in and it gets  
11 denied for something minor and you put the request  
12 back in but it's the same person (INAUDIBLE) then  
13 it counts as twice, right, not one?

14 DIRECTOR DRURY: Yeah, that's correct.  
15 Not to get into the weeds, there are essentially  
16 duplicate PARs in that sense so another reason why  
17 the metric can be a little misleading at times.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. I'm just  
19 going to pause for a second and hand it back over  
20 to the Chair. I'm sort of trying to lump it in  
21 categories of the personnel and all that stuff. I  
22 don't know, Chair Krishnan, if you wanted to ask  
23 any followup questions.

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure. Thanks so  
25 much, Chair Lee.

2 I did have a few followup questions,  
3 and I appreciate it again, Commissioner, so good  
4 to see you even virtually and Matt and the whole  
5 Parks team too, and thank you for your sustained  
6 dedication and work for our parks every single  
7 day.

8 I do want to follow up on a couple of  
9 points based on the questions that my Colleague  
10 had asked about the hiring. One in particular was  
11 can you go a bit through, Commissioner, just so  
12 we're clear on this, there's been some confusion,  
13 similarly as with the personnel action reports but  
14 also about we baselined 715 new positions in the  
15 last budget, which was a record number, and part  
16 of that, there's been some back and forth and  
17 confusion about the Play Fair positions in  
18 particular covering City Parks workers, community  
19 gardeners, park ranges, PEP, can we get a sense of  
20 exactly, of those Play Fair positions which are  
21 vital for our park system, what were baselined in  
22 the last budget, what positions are remaining that  
23 need to be baselined, and where that stands  
24 overall.

2                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. Thank you,  
3 Chair Krishnan, and I appreciate the question and  
4 all of your support for Parks. You're right. We  
5 did have the 715 new positions that were added to  
6 the budget in the last Fiscal Year which we so  
7 appreciated. As I said in my testimony, we right  
8 now have experienced a net gain of more than 300  
9 City-funded headcount, which we are thrilled with,  
10 and it's allowing us to do more and have the  
11 second shift and all of that. The one-shot funding  
12 that does expire after a year, as you know and  
13 we've discussed, we were able to hire many of  
14 those folks into, when we were doing the hiring  
15 for the 715 positions, we were able to hire a good  
16 deal of those into our baselined headcount and  
17 there's no doubt that the one-shot funding  
18 provided by the Council is incredibly important to  
19 our day-to-day operations and to our overall  
20 budget, absolutely.

21                   CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it. Just to  
22 be clear, of the 715 new positions, a number of  
23 the Play Fair positions were absorbed though there  
24 are still some that are outstanding as one-shots,  
25

2 and how many of those are still outstanding as  
3 one-shots?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Just bear with  
5 me.

6 DIRECTOR DRURY: Sorry, sir, of the 715  
7 baselined?

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: As I understand  
9 it, and I just want to make sure we're clear,  
10 there's 715 new baselined positions. As I  
11 understand it, the Play Fair positions, about 280  
12 of them or so, a good number were absorbed into  
13 the 715 new positions so baselined, but it sounds  
14 like there's still some positions that have not  
15 been baselined as part of the 715, some of the  
16 Play Fair positions, and I was just curious to  
17 know how many are left that are one-shots once you  
18 take out those that were baselined as part of the  
19 715?

20 DIRECTOR DRURY: Sorry. What we would  
21 call the one-shot funding is separate and apart  
22 from the 715 baselined adds that are reflected in  
23 this active FY23 Fiscal Year that we're in. There  
24 were also included above and beyond that I believe  
25 it was roughly 50 what we would call one-shot-

2 funded ranger positions so that was above and  
3 beyond the 715 or so baseline increase so it's  
4 sort of two pools if you will.

5 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it. Okay,  
6 there's 50 urban park rangers. What about the  
7 others, right? There were the 100 city parks  
8 workers, 50 gardeners, 80 PEP officers, were they  
9 all picked up, I mean separate from the urban park  
10 rangers, were they all absorbed into the 715  
11 positions so they're all baselined now? Where does  
12 that stand?

13 DIRECTOR DRURY: That's correct. I'm  
14 sorry. I misunderstood. When we moved from FY22  
15 into this current FY23, the baselined increase of  
16 715 essentially absorbed, that's right, the 150  
17 CBWs and gardeners and 80 PEP officers so that is  
18 correct. That is reflected in the 715 from the  
19 previous Fiscal Year.

20 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it. Just to  
21 be clear and get it on the record too. When you  
22 say essentially absorbed, all of them were  
23 absorbed, right, that's about 230 positions, they  
24 were all absorbed into the 715?

2 DIRECTOR DRURY: The positions were  
3 absorbed. We would have to doublecheck if every  
4 individual employee ended up staying on or maybe  
5 finding another job, but the positions were  
6 essentially absorbed for sure.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it. Okay. Can  
8 you get back to us just on, understanding the  
9 positions were absorbed, if there were any other  
10 employees themselves that were not picked up or if  
11 they're on one-shot or temporary funding? It'd  
12 just be helpful to be clear on where we stand  
13 going into this budget negotiation what's left  
14 over from the last one.

15 DIRECTOR DRURY: Yeah. My understanding  
16 anecdotally is that we're very successful in  
17 retaining, when shifting staff from one-shot  
18 funding to baselined permanent funding, we're very  
19 successful in that normally, but we're happy to  
20 doublecheck the numbers on that.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure.

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Just to add to  
23 that, Council Member, we worked really hard to  
24 make sure that those people who are not baselined  
25 do have those opportunities, are a part of the

2 hiring process so that they can become full-time  
3 employees of the agency. We have absolutely found  
4 that those who are with us and working and  
5 understand parks make great candidates for full-  
6 time positions so we do work hard to bring those  
7 people in and offer them opportunities. Not  
8 everyone takes them, not everyone stays with Parks  
9 we know even though it's a great place to be, but  
10 as much as we can, absolutely, that was a pool  
11 that we worked with to hire to fill full-time  
12 positions.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure. Okay. Got  
14 it.

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I would add that  
16 one-shot funding is incredibly important and  
17 beneficial for the agency and much appreciated.

18 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. I mean it  
19 sounds like again the 50 urban park rangers, those  
20 are one-shots currently, right, just to confirm?

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah,  
22 absolutely, and all those positions were hired,  
23 absolutely.

24 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. Can you all  
25 provide us with a list after the hearing of the

2 number of positions that were baselined versus  
3 those that were only funded by one-shots for a  
4 year?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely, we  
6 can do that, yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. I do also  
8 want to recognize that we've been joined by  
9 Council Members Holden, Velazquez, and Brewer.

10 One more question on the topic of  
11 baselined positions. Commissioner, you testified  
12 to this, and, as I said in my opening as well, I  
13 really do believe and I know you all feel the same  
14 way too, that our Parks workers are the heart of  
15 our park system and, if we are going to have the  
16 park system that really reflects how valuable  
17 these spaces are for all of us, we need to make  
18 sure that we are creating permanent baselined  
19 positions and permanent year-round positions,  
20 we've kind of talked before with your testimony  
21 about seasonal positions, but what is stopping the  
22 Department from baselining all existing positions,  
23 and what can the Council to help ensure that  
24 positions are baselined and jobs are secure for

2 several years instead of having to fight for them  
3 every year?

4                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
5 Council Member, for the question and for  
6 recognizing the incredible importance of our  
7 staff. As I said in my testimony, it's something  
8 we work really hard on is internally making sure  
9 that the Department is a great place to work. In  
10 terms of what's stopping baselining all funding is  
11 just funding and limitations, concerns, as I said  
12 in my testimony, about the fiscal environment and  
13 having a defined amount of money to be able to  
14 spend, but we do work really hard in making sure  
15 we're providing opportunities for people who have  
16 been with us or people who are with us seasonally  
17 to being them onboard. We know they are great  
18 positions to have. We know it's a great agency to  
19 work for and, absolutely, we work hard to bring on  
20 as many people from a seasonal line into a  
21 baselined position. It's what we look to do,  
22 absolutely.

23                   CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Would  
24 you agree then that in our push to secure 1  
25 percent or 1 billion dollars for Parks, expanded

2 funding for the expense maintenance side of our  
3 Parks Department would help us create permanent  
4 baselined positions in our Parks Department and  
5 move away from the fact that we have to rely on  
6 temporary one-shot workforces?

7           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
8 Council Member, and we so appreciate the focus on  
9 supporting and funding our park system and the  
10 work of the Council, the work of New Yorkers for  
11 Parks, and the Play Fair Coalition to really  
12 highlight the importance of our parks and open  
13 spaces is so very much appreciated. Certainly, as  
14 a Commissioner of an agency, resources are  
15 important and we need them, and we so appreciate  
16 the advocacy and support. We do feel that with the  
17 process we have in place, with the team we have in  
18 place we're able to accomplish our mission, but,  
19 certainly, resources are important and a vital  
20 part of getting the job done.

21           CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. I'm going to  
22 take over now because we've lost quorum. Sorry,  
23 not to make you guys dizzy with the back and  
24 forth.

2 I'm going to move now to a few  
3 questions about the lifeguards because I know that  
4 has been brought up in terms of concerns over  
5 hiring, if there's going to be enough people, and  
6 what does that mean for our pools and how we can  
7 keep them open. Just out of curiosity, do you  
8 think that your department will be able to fully  
9 staff all budgeted lifeguard positions and is it  
10 going to be the same pay as last summer or will it  
11 be increased?

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
13 Council Member, for the question, and it's  
14 certainly keeping our beachgoers safe and public  
15 pools and beaches open and available for New  
16 Yorkers is a top priority of ours and something  
17 that we work hard at and we've been working hard  
18 at ever since September when the beaches and pools  
19 closed. As I mentioned in my testimony, we were so  
20 pleased we were one of the only large cities in  
21 the country that opened all its pools and beaches  
22 last year, and that was a testament to the  
23 incredible work of the agency and our dedication  
24 to providing free access to pools and beaches. At  
25 the same time, we know that there is a very

2 significant national lifeguard shortage and so  
3 that's why we've been working really hard on  
4 recruitment and partnership with city agencies  
5 like the DOE and others to get the word out and  
6 bring in as many candidates as we possibly can.

7           In terms of pay, as you know, last  
8 summer, during the summer of 2022, we were able to  
9 increase pay to 19 dollars an hour. We are working  
10 very hard and very closely with Labor Relations  
11 and with the Mayor's Office to ensure that we will  
12 be able to again increase pay, and it is  
13 absolutely a priority of ours. I can't say at this  
14 point, we don't know yet, we have people in  
15 training right now. We're in the process of  
16 recruiting our lifeguards, returning lifeguards to  
17 come back so I can't say as of this point in time  
18 what our numbers will be, but we're working quite  
19 hard at it, absolutely, under the confines of a  
20 very difficult national lifeguard shortage still.

21           CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Right, exactly, but  
22 that's good to hear though that hopefully, fingers  
23 crossed, you'll be able to match the pay from last  
24 year for this year as well. I know that the  
25 lifeguards are definitely getting paid more in the

2 private sector side so we want to try to retain  
3 and hire as many as we can on the public side.

4           Currently, because I know you're  
5 staffing up right now, how many lifeguards are  
6 currently hired for this upcoming year and what is  
7 the historical average, is it on par, if you could  
8 talk a little bit about the numbers?

9           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you. At  
10 this point, we don't have lifeguards hired yet.  
11 The way that it works is that we started  
12 certification back in December and then, once we  
13 have the cadre of people who have made it through  
14 that process, then they go into training so we  
15 presently have two separate training processes  
16 that are moving forward to train new lifeguards so  
17 we haven't yet hired them. I can't give you a  
18 number in terms of how many are hired. That  
19 process has not effectively started on the hiring  
20 front because we still have lifeguards in  
21 training, and then we will start the process of  
22 also bringing back returning lifeguards so I don't  
23 have a number yet but working really hard on all  
24 levels and on all areas to bring in as many as we  
25 can.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. In the  
3 hypothetical situation, which hopefully this won't  
4 happen, but if it does proceed that the shortages  
5 that we're seeing are sort of below what we're  
6 expecting then what's the Plan B I guess in terms  
7 of how to figure out which beaches or pools to  
8 prioritize, does that mean keeping all of them  
9 open but maybe shortening hours, if you could go  
10 into what y'all are thinking, that would be great  
11 too.

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.  
13 Thank you for the question. We are going to push  
14 really hard to get as many lifeguards as we can,  
15 and then what we did last year in lieu of having  
16 enough for a full cadre we did prioritize opening  
17 all our pools and beaches, we anticipate we would  
18 do that again this year, but what we'd do is due  
19 to not having a sufficient number to fully open a  
20 pool, we'll open an area of the pool so that we  
21 can allow swimming for the public and be able to  
22 provide as much available space at our pools and  
23 beaches where we can have lifeguards in place to  
24 keep it safe for New Yorkers but also provide what

2 we know is such important access to public pools  
3 and beaches for cooling.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: I think I know the  
5 answer to this question, but I'll just ask it for  
6 the record. What pay level do you think would make  
7 the City competitive to allow the Department to  
8 bring on sufficient lifeguards and what is  
9 stopping this?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for  
11 the question. As I said, last year we were pleased  
12 to increase our pay to 19 dollars an hour. We know  
13 that did make an appreciable difference. It made  
14 us competitive with other entities, and we are  
15 hopeful we'll be able to be in that range again  
16 this year.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Awesome. I was  
18 going to say we just need more money, but, yeah,  
19 that would be nice.

20 Just a couple more questions before I  
21 turn over to my Colleagues. I'm sure I'm not the  
22 only one that has a ton of questions on street  
23 trees and tree pruning. That's like one of my  
24 favorite topics that I was not expecting to become  
25 an expert in, but we have lots of trees in my part

2 of Queens. I just wanted to know real quick it  
3 seems like there's a large backlog for the street  
4 trees planting, and that's one of the things we  
5 hear in our civic meetings a lot is they take out  
6 the dead tree stumps and the trees but then  
7 there's no replacement of the trees and so just  
8 wondering what the current backlog is on planting.

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. Thank you  
10 very much for the question, and you're right.  
11 Queens does have an awful lot of trees. In terms  
12 of our tree planting, it's such an important part  
13 of the Parks Department and such an important part  
14 of our mission to green street trees and in parks  
15 across the city. We were really pleased last year.  
16 We had a record number of tree planting with  
17 planting 13,000 trees in FY22. We are very much  
18 looking forward to planting that same amount this  
19 year. We do have, and the PMMR reflected this, a  
20 lower number of trees being planted. That's  
21 because of timing of when the PMMR comes out and  
22 just not being lined up with the planting season,  
23 but we do prioritize, as you know, tree planting.  
24 We know how important they are to New Yorkers, to  
25 keeping New York City cool, and we anticipate

2 moving forward aggressively with our tree planting  
3 in this Fiscal Year.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Are there any  
5 discrepancy or disparity in terms of boroughs that  
6 are waiting on average a longer wait time than  
7 others?

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No. Across the  
9 board, we focus on equity in all that we do, in  
10 our capital renovations, in our greening, in our  
11 tree planting so there wouldn't be a disparity,  
12 no, across boroughs largely.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. What can we  
14 as the Council do to ensure that more trees are  
15 planted quickly, timely manner, are there things  
16 that we can do on our end?

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for  
18 the question, and it's much appreciated. I think  
19 the continued focus and recognition of the  
20 importance of our street trees is so important,  
21 helping New Yorkers to understand the important  
22 role that they play in cooling the city. The kids  
23 talked about asthma rates. They help with  
24 particulate matter. I think just helping New  
25 Yorkers to understand that our trees are valuable

2 green infrastructure and, as such, need to be  
3 protected and that we need to focus on continuing  
4 to plant, protect, and maintain as many as we can.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Awesome. For the  
6 Million Trees New York City Apprenticeship  
7 Program, does this have an impact on the planning?  
8 Would it help? Is the funding that is currently  
9 allocated for this program enough? If you could  
10 speak to that.

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for  
12 the question. It's interesting it's really not a  
13 Million Trees Apprenticeship Program. We did have  
14 that years ago in the Parks Department and a great  
15 program. This is really a Forestry Apprenticeship  
16 Program that's targeted towards climbers and  
17 pruners. Climbers and pruners are both a hard to  
18 recruit title for us at the Parks Department and  
19 an area where we're really looking to diversify  
20 our workforce. It's a great job. It's well-paying.  
21 It's interesting. You're working outside. We're  
22 very anxious to be able to expand the ranks of  
23 climbers and pruners, but a lot of kids growing up  
24 in New York don't think of a job climbing and  
25 pruning trees, and so what we want to do is expose

2 more people to that so we're starting with a small  
3 pilot program within the agency and actually  
4 accepting applications for climbers and pruners to  
5 go through a training program with us internally  
6 so that we can add to the ranks of climbers and  
7 pruners. Again, a great well-paying job with a  
8 great career trajectory at Parks and an  
9 opportunity for us to really diversify that  
10 workforce and bring more people into the fold who  
11 can help us with a really important job in New  
12 York City.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: I was actually very  
14 curious if we could go through that training for a  
15 little bit, see how to climb those trees. That  
16 would be interesting.

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We'd love to  
18 have you come and visit the program.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: That would be  
20 awesome. I'll just ask a couple more questions and  
21 then hand it over to my Colleagues. My favorite  
22 topic, which are the tree roots, I've already been  
23 to many civics this year where they're talking  
24 about how the roots are destroying the pipes and  
25 the sidewalks so, even though it's a City property

2 tree, it punctures the sewage lines of the  
3 homeowners and then they have to spend upwards of  
4 15,000 plus to fix the sewage pipes and then this  
5 is also the case for the sidewalks where the roots  
6 are coming up, and technically they're not  
7 supposed to touch the tree but they're responsible  
8 for the sidewalks so just wondering what do you  
9 think the Department can do either in partnership  
10 with us or what are things that you could do to  
11 address this issue? Also, the branches, of course,  
12 are falling on cars and destroying property and  
13 going into the homes, which is, again, like if you  
14 see our IQ case log in my office, it's very much  
15 about trees.

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I know. I'm  
17 sure, especially in Queens. Thank you very much  
18 for the question. I appreciate it. I'm going to go  
19 back to the question you asked about what can  
20 Council Members do. That's where advocating for  
21 the importance of trees is so important and  
22 helping homeowners to understand their value. We  
23 at the Parks Department have done so much work in  
24 terms of expanding the species of trees that we  
25 plant, to be very thoughtful about things like

2 root growth and to be thoughtful about their  
3 viability on the streets and their impact. We do  
4 have a Trees and Sidewalks program that's in place  
5 to help to address some of these issues. We work  
6 closely with DOT to help us with sidewalk  
7 improvements and so, again, I think just the focus  
8 on the importance of these street trees to the  
9 greater environment. They can, at times, cause  
10 disruptions, we understand, but we believe the  
11 overall value and benefit supersedes the  
12 challenges.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Great. Thank you.  
14 Now, I'm going to turn over to some of my  
15 Colleagues, I know, that have questions so,  
16 Council Member Carr, you are up first followed by  
17 Council Member Restler.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you so much,  
19 Chair Krishnan, Co-Chair Lee, Colleagues,  
20 Commissioner, always great to see you, Matt as  
21 well.

22 Just kind of going off what Council  
23 Member Lee was asking with the Trees and Sidewalk  
24 program, obviously that's of great interest to my  
25 constituents too. We do have great canopy in

2 Staten Island, but the Tree and Sidewalk program,  
3 there's a backlog and oftentimes constituents have  
4 to have a very high rating to kind of merit being  
5 included in a given year's contract so I was just  
6 wondering what in the preliminary budget is the  
7 appropriation for the Tree and Sidewalk program at  
8 this stage and what level of rating do you think  
9 that means you'd be able to address if that's what  
10 you got in this budget?

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
12 Council Member Carr, for the question. I'm going  
13 to bring my expert in trees up to sit with me and  
14 answer. Jennifer, do you want to just come up?  
15 Jennifer is our Deputy Commissioner for  
16 Environment and Planning and our expert on trees.  
17 Thank you, Jennifer.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Thank  
19 you for that question, Council Member. Right now,  
20 there is a million dollars in expense funding, and  
21 then we're still finalizing the capital funding  
22 for Trees and Sidewalks program. We don't know  
23 yet, but we're probably sort of doing some  
24 movement from expense to capital, but we don't  
25 have that final number.

2 As to your second question, we're still  
3 looking to repair a rating of 80. I don't think  
4 the funding will allow us to go below that.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Okay. What would  
6 it take to do 75 and up or even 70 and up? What  
7 kind of appropriation would that require?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: I don't  
9 know that offhand, but we can take a look at it  
10 for you.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Okay. That's  
12 important information to have because I'd like to  
13 help you do a little bit more, but I have to have  
14 a goal in mind.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Of  
16 course.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: In terms of  
18 inspections, Chair Krishnan talked about the  
19 reduction in inspections and I know we've talked  
20 about this individually, but where are we in terms  
21 of that because I think we have to make sure that  
22 we're doing inspections, and actually I saw from  
23 my constituent case log many of them have been  
24 done and I appreciate that, but where are you in  
25 terms of policy about making sure we get the

2 inspections done even if we know we don't  
3 necessarily have the budget to do all of them once  
4 they've been rated?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Thank  
6 you for that question. We actually, as you did  
7 notice, we increased our inspections for trees and  
8 sidewalks. We brought on some consultants who we  
9 trained, and our goal is actually to reduce the  
10 backlog to just sort of what's coming in by the  
11 end of the Fiscal Year so we have 6,000  
12 outstanding service requests we expect to do by  
13 the end of this Fiscal Year but they keep coming  
14 in.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Of course.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: We won't  
17 every be down to zero.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Understood. I  
19 appreciate that. That's a great answer. I wanted  
20 to pivot a little bit back to PEPs. This has  
21 always been a longstanding need, and I'm grateful  
22 to hear that we baselined 80 positions that got  
23 absorbed from earlier part of the testimony so how  
24 many PEPs officers do we have citywide and what's

2 the borough breakdown and how does that compare to  
3 FY22 and FY 21?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
5 Council Member, for the question and for  
6 recognizing the importance of the PEP staff. We  
7 absolutely agree and their role and enforcing park  
8 rules and keeping things safe in our parks is so  
9 important. We currently have 300 PEP officers that  
10 are spread across the city. In terms of the  
11 breakdown by borough, that's...

12 DIRECTOR DRURY: Yeah, we can circle  
13 back. Those deployments shift throughout the year  
14 depending on different dynamics, but we can get  
15 back to you with sort of snapshot, but it is  
16 certainly sort of commensurate in terms of Park  
17 presence and things of that nature.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Okay. I think we  
19 have a need for more in the borough. Obviously, I  
20 don't know what the number is at this stage, but  
21 I'm particularly concerned because eventually  
22 Parks is going to have continual ascending  
23 responsibility for Freshkills, and Sanitation has  
24 been kind of doing the bulk of the security work.  
25 I know that was true in last year's budget, and

2 they actually increased their security commitments  
3 in the last budget, but I'm concerned as you take  
4 over that space, it's now many times over the size  
5 of Central Park. I'm not so much concerned about  
6 policing individuals interacting with other  
7 individuals. I'm concerned about protecting our  
8 environmental and open spaces, and too many of our  
9 West Shore sites are still the subject of dumping  
10 and if we're going to prevent that moving forward  
11 we definitely need more PEPs patrols.

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
13 Council Member, for raising that. We're so excited  
14 about Freshkills, but you're absolutely right.  
15 Huge new park space that is going to be opening,  
16 and we absolutely want to make sure that it is  
17 well cared for and safe for visitors so thank you.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Appreciate it,  
19 Commissioner. Thank you, Chair.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Council  
21 Member Restler.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so  
23 much, Chair Lee, for stepping in and for your  
24 thoughtful leadership. We miss you, Shekar. Hope  
25 you're doing all right.

2 I'll tell you, Commissioner, I was  
3 having breakfast with a reporter this morning, and  
4 they were asking me who are the best folks in the  
5 Adams' administration, and maybe it's because I  
6 was on my way, but yours was the first name that  
7 came to mind, and I just want to thank you for the  
8 leadership that you provide in the Parks  
9 Department and your team, each of the Deputy  
10 Commissioners that are here, Braddick and Nelson  
11 and Greenfeld, have all been really great to work  
12 with, and Matt. Really appreciate how responsive  
13 the arsenal has been and how helpful you've been  
14 in addressing issues in our District.

15 I thought that the kids who testified  
16 this morning were brilliant and on point, and I'm  
17 a strong supporter of the Play Fair Coalition and  
18 the need to deepen our investment in Parks, and I  
19 frankly believe with your leadership, if we were  
20 to prioritize 1 percent of our budget going to  
21 Parks, it would be well-spent, and it would make a  
22 real difference so I really do hope that this  
23 Council, under Chair Krishnan's leadership, steps  
24 up and delivers on a campaign that's been around  
25 since I was a little kid to finally get to 1

2 percent for Parks, and as Marge was smiling, that  
3 was a long time ago.

4           There are a few things I'd like to ask  
5 about today. Firstly is trees. I have greatly  
6 appreciated the partnership with your agency on  
7 trees. We're really excited in District 33 to be  
8 filling every single available tree bed over the  
9 next four years, 3,400 new trees getting planted.  
10 We're going to be investing 750,000 in capital per  
11 year during that time to match the Parks  
12 Department's significant investments to realize  
13 our goal of getting every single tree bed filled,  
14 but I'm really concerned about the data in the  
15 PMMR, and I recognize your point that last year  
16 was a record year, but to see us down almost 50  
17 percent on the first four months of the year, only  
18 2,748 trees planted compared to twice as many last  
19 year is very disconcerting. Are we getting back on  
20 track to getting close to our 32,500 from last  
21 year? Where do we expect to end at the conclusion  
22 of this Fiscal Year?

23           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
24 Council Member, for your question and for your  
25 incredible focus in your District on trees and

2 making sure that every street tree pit is planted.  
3 We really appreciate that, and it's so good for  
4 your District and so good for the City so I  
5 applaud you for that effort.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you.

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It's fantastic,  
8 and for being a partner in our tree planting. We  
9 recognize that the numbers in the PMMR looked  
10 concerning. As I said, that's largely due to the  
11 planting cycle and the date, the deadline for the  
12 cutoff of the PMMR came before really our planting  
13 cycle had really kicked in so the numbers look  
14 smaller than they actually are. There are  
15 interesting issues in terms of our planting season  
16 has actually changed due to climate change and  
17 when we're able to plant, but we are very much on  
18 track to plant again at least the 13,000 trees  
19 that we did last year. It's a huge focus as you  
20 know, and while the numbers look low in the PMMR  
21 we are confident that we will plant at least that  
22 number, the 13,000, again this year.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay. I'm  
24 pleased to hear that you believe you're still on  
25 track to hit those numbers. It's the same period

2 of time compared to year-over-year. I don't know  
3 if climate change has had such a big impact in the  
4 last 12 months that it would make that comparison  
5 no longer relevant, but I'm pleased to hear that  
6 you're on pace. If there are things that we can do  
7 to be helpful, I know that Chair Krishnan has held  
8 multiple hearings just on this topic, and, as  
9 Council Member Carr mentioned a second ago, it's a  
10 real priority for all of us. As Chair Lee was  
11 mentioning, the pruning reductions, we're  
12 similarly concerned, and we're doing two pruning  
13 classes in our District, in Greenpoint and  
14 Brooklyn Heights, this spring. We want everyone to  
15 be a citizen pruner, but 73 percent reduction  
16 year-over-year in the PMMR, that's a major  
17 reduction. Are we on track similarly and the tree  
18 inspections that we're also down, but are we on  
19 track to get back to the I believe the target for  
20 FY23 is 65,000 trees pruned?

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for  
22 the question, and I do recognize that decline and  
23 it is significant there. We did experience  
24 problems with a major contract in terms of the  
25 tree pruning, and that has led to the diminution

2 of numbers there on the pruning side. We are  
3 absolutely working hard to move that number up and  
4 to get to more tree pruning. We were still able to  
5 conduct proactive maintenance and pruning that we  
6 could do with our internal staff and have  
7 prioritized that, but, yes, we are absolutely  
8 focused on bringing that number back up, and it  
9 was related to problems with a single contract.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Chair, would it  
11 be okay if I just had one more question? Thank you  
12 so much.

13 Helpful to know, helpful that it's  
14 getting back on track. Thank you for that  
15 information.

16 As you know, the Greenpoint-  
17 Williamsburg Rezoning promised multiple major new  
18 park spaces, I hope that Box Street will be fully  
19 funded in the executive budget. I believe Parks  
20 supports that. Hope that that will happen. We've  
21 been working closely with your team to try to get  
22 Bushwick Inlet Park on track. Your team has been  
23 great. I wish we could get a little bit more  
24 cooperation on it, though, from the administration  
25 as a whole. The issue I just wanted some clarity,

2 I know Chair Lee mentioned this briefly, our  
3 understanding from Council Finance is just 17  
4 percent of the PARs that were submitted to OMB  
5 were actually approved. Could you clarify is that  
6 accurate data and why are so few Parks positions  
7 getting swiftly approved by OMB?

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
9 Council Member, for the question. We do believe  
10 that that number is not accurate today. That was  
11 based on a snapshot in time and related to the  
12 fact that it was a period when we did have a  
13 number of PARs because we were hiring seasonally  
14 and hiring up significantly. Our effectiveness  
15 with having PARs approved is not nearly reflected  
16 in that number. We don't have an issue. We do have  
17 a very positive relationship with OMB. Our PARs  
18 get approved effectively so I think that number  
19 unfortunately that's out there was a snapshot in  
20 time that does not reflect reality.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay. I  
22 appreciate you mentioned a 2 percent vacancy rate.  
23 I've never heard of anything like that from any  
24 other agency in the City so maybe there are folks  
25 that are looking out for you at OMB, but the data

2 we had was over 5,700 PARs submitted so a snapshot  
3 in time but over a significant number of jobs and  
4 to only see 17 percent of them getting approved, I  
5 don't know if there's multiple submissions for the  
6 same PAR or what is happening, but I am very  
7 concerned about OMB trying to realize savings by  
8 failing to hire, and we cannot afford to save  
9 money on the backs of our parks and failing to  
10 provide services and hire the staff that we need  
11 to improve the conditions in our parks and so, if  
12 it's a snapshot, it's a really big snapshot, and  
13 it is very concerning to me that OMB is not being  
14 as cooperative as they need to be to ensure that  
15 our parks are getting the support that they need.

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
17 Council Member. I appreciate that and I appreciate  
18 your concern. As I said, we're bringing on  
19 thousands of seasonal workers, 3,600, so I can  
20 assure you that from our end and from our work  
21 with OMB that we don't have a problem getting our  
22 PARs approved but thank you, I appreciate it.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Okay,  
24 now we have Council Member Holden.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you,  
3 Chair, and thank you, Co-Chairs. I'd like to stay  
4 with the trees because it is an important topic in  
5 my District. Commissioner, again, I appreciate  
6 your testimony and dedication obviously, but why  
7 are we having so many problems with contracts and  
8 pruning, stump removal, tree planting? Is  
9 something going on here that we don't know?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
11 Council Member, for the question and appreciate  
12 your support and recognition of the importance of  
13 our trees, and there is no doubt that we have had  
14 complications and difficulties with some of our  
15 contracts. What we are looking to do...

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Well, all of the  
17 contracts relating to trees it seems. Are there  
18 any other contracts?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Across the  
20 agency?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: No, relating to  
22 trees. Why are trees so difficult to plant, to  
23 remove the stumps, to prune, I mean is something  
24 going on? That's what I'm asking.

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I don't believe  
3 something is going on, no, but what we are looking  
4 to do at the agency is work to expand that pool of  
5 contractors. There is no doubt (INAUDIBLE) an  
6 expanded pool, more people out there bidding would  
7 be beneficial. We've worked really hard to bring  
8 in and attract M/WBE contractors...

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Are we  
10 succeeding?

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We are,  
12 absolutely.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: I've heard that  
14 for years now because I've been complaining before  
15 the pandemic about tree planting because it keeps  
16 going up, everything's going up. I understand  
17 that. There's inflation. However, there's almost  
18 like a conspiracy.

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: A tree planting  
20 conspiracy.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: I'm serious.

22 DIRECTOR DRURY: If I may actually, I  
23 believe this Fiscal Year we actually, for the  
24 first time in quite some time, we actually saw an

2 average reduction in the cost of tree planting so  
3 we think our efforts actually are...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So what is it  
5 now?

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We'll have  
7 Jennifer come up and answer, but we have...

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Because it was  
9 at 3,600...

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It was,  
11 absolutely.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And I remember  
13 when it was 250 dollars to plant a tree in New  
14 York City, but I'm going (INAUDIBLE)

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: I know,  
16 exactly. First of all, to answer your question, I  
17 do think competition has a lot to do with all of  
18 these problems with tree planting, pruning, stump  
19 removal. There aren't a lot of people in the  
20 business and trees and sidewalks. We spent years  
21 with very few trees and sidewalks contractors and  
22 we really focused on recruiting new ones, and now  
23 we have a much larger bid group so that's been  
24 great. For tree planting, we increased the number  
25 of active contractors by over 40 percent from 2021

2 to this year, and the reduction in cost, it was on  
3 average, I can't remember the last one, but now  
4 it's 3,130 is the new average and so that's about  
5 12 percent on all the contracts. For bid prices,  
6 we saw reduction of 12 percent, but on the M/WBE  
7 contracts which is where we really want to sort of  
8 cultivate the new contractors, we've seen a  
9 reduction of 37 percent on our costs.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: That's good  
11 news.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: It's  
13 excellent news, and two of those M/WBE  
14 contractors, and they're small contracts, sort of  
15 graduated and were successfully bidding on our  
16 larger contracts.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay. Because  
18 I'm running out of time. We talked about in the  
19 last administration, I had an idea and I think  
20 Parks was also working on it to have an in-house  
21 tree planting program. Do you have any updates on  
22 that? Is that still going on?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We listened.  
24 Absolutely, good idea.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: We are  
3 actually starting an in-house crew. We got  
4 approval to bring that in so we'll have a pilot  
5 program starting next Fiscal Year. Thank you for  
6 the idea.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Next Fiscal  
8 Year? Okay. Also, we have a problem with storm  
9 runoff, especially in my District. A lot of people  
10 have paved over their yards, which is illegal.  
11 Some had done it before the law took effect, and  
12 we're getting the rain gardens put in to the area.  
13 I made a suggestion to DEP, I said why don't we  
14 put trees in every rain garden, at least most that  
15 could take them. Are we doing that?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We have. Thank  
17 you for the question.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And maybe you  
19 can get DEP to do it.

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you. We do  
21 work very closely with DEP on green infrastructure  
22 projects, and it's been a great partnership and  
23 certainly rain gardens, it's something that we  
24 support. We know our trees are vital to also  
25 capturing rainwater. Where we can, we are working

2 together with them on greening on the streets and  
3 across the city, absolutely.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Just one other  
5 side thing, I have 19 seconds, 300 PEP officers  
6 like my Colleague said is not enough. 3,000 would  
7 be fine. Because right now just getting the police  
8 to respond to a parks incarcerated and I have a  
9 lot in my District is difficult because of the  
10 staffing levels now in the police so I think  
11 Parks, again, getting more PEP officers is vital,  
12 I mean more than 300 for the entire city. Again,  
13 obviously, vacations and off days and so forth,  
14 we're not doing the job in PEP so we really need  
15 to hire more and 1 percent for Parks, we've been  
16 trying forever on that, and I've heard this  
17 mentioned so many years that I hope I'm around if  
18 it happens because it's getting to a point where  
19 we're broken records on the City Council. We keep  
20 saying this and we don't get it from the  
21 administration, but thank you, Commissioner, and  
22 thank you, Chair.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Thank you,  
24 Council Member. Next, we have Council Member  
25 Narcisse.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Good morning,  
3 Commissioner Donoghue. Thank you for coming to my  
4 District, and I'm sure (INAUDIBLE) is very happy  
5 for the pickleball, and I have to shout out to my  
6 own constituent in the room, Maria Garrett, who is  
7 the President of Fresh Creek Association, that for  
8 many years has been fighting to make sure that we  
9 have a nice space in Canarsie area.

10 First, the question, this one is for  
11 Maria, asking what's the status of the equipment  
12 in our parks, and she had observed during the  
13 summer, she used the park every day, during the  
14 summer she realized it's very hot for the drivers  
15 with the vehicle, there's no AC in them, and that  
16 makes their job even harder. That's her question.

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Okay. Thank you  
18 so much, Council Member. We so appreciate the  
19 advocates and supporters and all the great  
20 community groups who help us in our Park every day  
21 and are looking out for our parks. It's very much  
22 appreciated and helps extend our abilities to do  
23 our good work.

2 In terms of specifically vehicles that  
3 our Parks staff are using and not having AC, is  
4 that the question?

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yes.

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm not really  
7 certain on an individual level. We do work hard to  
8 make sure all of our staff have vehicles that they  
9 need and that they are in good working condition.  
10 We have a whole fleet unit that looks after our  
11 vehicles so we'd be happy to look into a specific  
12 situation at a specific park and get back to you  
13 or get back to Maria.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you. Now  
15 I'm coming from my questions. I have to say thank  
16 you to our Chair Krishnan who's always on top of  
17 everything, wants that 1 billion dollars, and the  
18 Co-Chair that's doing a phenomenal job, Co-Chair  
19 Linda Lee.

20 My question is about the rat mitigation  
21 plan because I have witnessed, I was stunned one  
22 day in the park in the Canarsie area again that  
23 rats were playing while the children were playing  
24 in the parks next to them. I have videotape to  
25

2 prove it because one of my staff did that so  
3 what's the plan on that?

4                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for  
5 the question, Council Member, and it is a huge  
6 focus not only of our agency but of this  
7 administration as you know, and so the Parks  
8 Department has very specific protocols around  
9 addressing and attacking borrows where rats will  
10 form and making sure that we are eliminating  
11 those. We're working really hard across the board  
12 in terms of everything from addressing the rat  
13 borrows and eliminating them to making sure that  
14 we have the right trash receptacles in place that  
15 have covers so that rats cannot get to food, and  
16 at the end of the day too it's our hardworking  
17 staff out there. We know that rats are attracted  
18 to where there is food, and so our staff is  
19 working hard each day to make sure that they are  
20 picking up trash, not leaving bagged trash around,  
21 and also working across the board just to make  
22 sure that we have the on-the-ground maintenance  
23 that we need to address the rat problem across the  
24 city.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I hope not to  
3 see rats in there. I have to shout out to Marty.  
4 He's been phenomenal, a very wonderful person to  
5 work with, and he told me he's working on it and I  
6 believe him too.

7 For baskets around the parks, how far  
8 apart are they and how often are they picked up?  
9 Do you have a schedule plan layout because I have  
10 visited other places and I have seen other  
11 countries, like they have a war on rats for real,  
12 and they have the baskets strategically placed  
13 about 100 or 50 feet away so how far apart are the  
14 baskets placed in our parks?

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
16 Council Member, for the question. I don't know  
17 that it's uniform how far away we place the  
18 baskets because it really depends on individual  
19 park location, individual size of the park. The  
20 placement of the baskets is really dependent on  
21 the location that it's serving, but we are very  
22 much focused. This city also has a very aggressive  
23 war on rats going on as I'm sure you've probably  
24 seen, and we are part of a rat mitigation task  
25 force that's being led by City Hall that involves

2 a number of different agencies. We're trying to  
3 attack it from many different ways, both from  
4 containerization to making sure that trash is  
5 picked up on a timely basis to working closely and  
6 hiring more exterminators to be able to be out  
7 there and addressing the rat situation.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Do you have a  
9 plan on how often those baskets are being picked  
10 up because I've seen a lot of it overflows?

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Okay, thank you.  
12 I would absolutely want to follow up with you and  
13 let us know where you're seeing that. In some  
14 parks, we have individual fixed post staff that's  
15 responsible for cleaning the baskets. In other  
16 parks that are larger, we have a crew that goes  
17 around that's more of a maintenance crew that is  
18 in a vehicle so we are actively picking up trash  
19 on a regular basis on a regular schedule. That's  
20 where we're also really excited about the second  
21 shift of workers that I mentioned in my testimony.  
22 The second shift is specifically geared towards  
23 making sure we're cleaning our parks in the late  
24 afternoon and evening hours. We all know that's  
25 when the parks are busiest, and it historically

2 has been that our staff leaves at 3 o'clock in the  
3 afternoon and then school kids come and families  
4 so being able to extend our maintenance and  
5 cleaning operations to be later in the afternoon,  
6 it means that we're able to pick up those baskets,  
7 not leave trash overnight, and it will help  
8 address both overflowing trash cans because we're  
9 getting to those trash cans more and into the  
10 later evening hours when the when the park is most  
11 heavily utilized, and it will also help us with  
12 not having trash overnight or having patrons come  
13 in the morning and have the park be dirty.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: For workers,  
15 how many seasonal workers have you had that  
16 transferred to full-time for the last year?

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I don't know  
18 that we have the exact number of how many of those  
19 seasonal workers transferred, but that's  
20 absolutely a number that we can get to you for  
21 sure.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you.  
23 Another question I have. How many positions in DPR  
24 are dedicated to tree planting?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Thank  
3 you for that question. Most of the tree planting  
4 we do is done through contractors so this in-house  
5 crew is just going to be a handful of people, but  
6 we have foresters who do inspections and manage  
7 the contracts. I don't have the exact number, but  
8 I can tell you what that is, but the trees are  
9 primarily planted by the contractors, the ones  
10 along the streets and in the parks.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: For your  
12 budget, it is only totally from the City or you  
13 have private funding as well?

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: For trees  
15 specifically, Council Member?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: No. In general  
17 for Parks.

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: The budget that  
19 we're discussing today is from the City.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: No. I'm saying  
21 do you get money privately to help with parks? Do  
22 you have donations privately?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We do. We're  
24 very fortunate. We have great partnerships with  
25 different corporations, people who do support us.

2 We have a whole Adopt-A-Park program. We have  
3 people purchase benches. We've had support from  
4 corporations that help us with renovating  
5 basketball courts, a number of different  
6 facilities across the City, absolutely.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: What's that  
8 range, like how much in total roughly? You don't  
9 have to give me definite. I can get the definite  
10 later.

11 DIRECTOR DRURY: The value can range  
12 pretty widely. Sometimes we've had donated  
13 playground renovations that the value of which can  
14 be millions of dollars, and in other cases there  
15 are what you might call sort of corporate clean-up  
16 events, things like that, where it's hard to  
17 attach a dollar figure if that makes any sense. It  
18 can range really quite widely.

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Our Budget  
20 Director just gave us a number, 22 million in  
21 grant funding.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: 22 million.  
23 For the basketball for example, if you're getting  
24 a basketball from donors, do they specifically

2 tell you where to locate them or they can be kind  
3 of across your decision or the donor's decision?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It really  
5 varies, Council Member. A lot of times, a donor is  
6 interested in a specific area. They grew up in  
7 Brooklyn or they grew up in Queens or the Bronx  
8 and they want to give back in that neighborhood so  
9 it really varies. Sometimes we can say this is an  
10 area that we know needs to be redone, but often it  
11 comes from the donor and where their interest  
12 lies.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay. I'm not  
14 going to push on the stumps because I heard it  
15 before. There's a lot of problems in my community  
16 where the sidewalk for many years, they've been  
17 dealing with, and it's a safety issue so I think  
18 we need to do better on that one, so I'm going to  
19 let my Colleagues because my Co-Chair is doing a  
20 wonderful job. Thank you. Thank you, Chair Lee.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Next, we  
22 have Council Member Brewer followed by Council  
23 Member Dinowitz.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very  
25 much, and I know I continue to thank you for

2 Soldiers and Sailors, mentioning it and also for  
3 funding it. It's a really big deal for everybody.

4           Second, I want to thank Steve Simon for  
5 everything, and I think he even managed to get  
6 some kind of pickleball in Riverside Park, god  
7 help us, so I just want to thank him for that too.

8           With the trees, I know this is a broken  
9 record, but it is the constant refrain in terms of  
10 loving them. Even though we put money in for  
11 participatory budgeting, no trees have appeared.

12 Is that something, when you have the money,  
13 locations, what's the timeframe on that?

14           DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Thank  
15 you so much for that question and thank you for  
16 your support of tree planting. It's really  
17 important to us as well.

18           I can get information about your  
19 specific allocation if you're interested. Each  
20 borough, it's dependent upon contract procurement  
21 and timeframe and when we get an allocation from a  
22 Council Member it goes into the next active  
23 contract that is going to be available in that  
24 area.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That was last  
3 year so we hoped that it would happen as soon as  
4 possible, and I'm sure that PB trees are on again  
5 so it'll be another allocation so we would like to  
6 try to get them done.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Great.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: How much does it  
9 cost to plant a tree?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: On  
11 average, it's 3,130 dollars this past year.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Second,  
13 schoolyards. This is not on anybody's agenda  
14 except mine so needless to say there are  
15 schoolyards 10 minutes from a park, you can't get  
16 a schoolyard opened basically. There's joint and  
17 then there's the Trust and then there's DOE so I  
18 would like to see more schoolyards opened with  
19 joint, I don't know if Trust has enough capacity  
20 or if you have enough under joint-operated  
21 playgrounds. They're the best. I'm about to put 10  
22 million dollars into a schoolyard. It makes no  
23 sense to have it just operated by DOE so is there  
24 some interest, everything costs money, I'm aware  
25 of that, but is there some interest in opening up

2 more playgrounds that would be joint or are you  
3 going to say no, we can't do it, blah, blah, blah?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
5 Council Member, for the question. I really  
6 appreciate it. The Parks Department has a very  
7 strong history in the Schoolyards to Playground  
8 program...

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And you need  
10 more of a history.

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.  
12 We worked closely with TPL for many years and  
13 opened hundreds of playgrounds across the city.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know every one  
15 in Manhattan.

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. They're  
17 wonderful. We understand the benefit that they  
18 provide to communities, and we absolutely support  
19 TPL's great work, and we are happy to work with  
20 DOE when and where we can to be able to open up

21 (INAUDIBLE)

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So far, Parks  
23 has said no to new ones. Are you saying yes?

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm not aware of  
25 Parks saying no to new ones, but we are open

2 always to working with our sister agencies to see  
3 what's possible.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right, so  
5 we're going to give you some schoolyards to open  
6 and then pay the custodian which is the obvious  
7 other part of the (INAUDIBLE)

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That is the  
9 issue (INAUDIBLE)

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The head of the  
11 custodians was my student so he will take care of  
12 it.

13 On the rats, I know that there's a task  
14 force and so on. Are the baskets that you have now  
15 100 percent, I don't know if there is anything  
16 that's rat-proof, but the meshes are certainly not  
17 rat-proof, so generally across the City, obviously  
18 I'm interested in my District or Manhattan, are  
19 the baskets rat-proof? Is that something that you  
20 have funding for? Is it done? What's the status?

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We are  
22 absolutely looking to deploy rat-proof baskets  
23 wherever we can. In any new capital project,  
24 you'll be happy to know, we are testing new  
25

2 containerization for litter in our parks and  
3 making sure that we have (INAUDIBLE)

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What happens if  
5 you have old parks that are not getting the big  
6 capital renovations? Can we still get baskets that  
7 are rat-proof?

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, where and  
9 when we can, absolutely. We're looking (INAUDIBLE)

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I don't know  
11 what that means. We need those in Riverside Park,  
12 just so you know.

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Okay.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Because the  
15 rats, they leave the baskets in the park and they  
16 go into the neighborhoods so I don't know, despite  
17 this task force stuff, that you're coordinating  
18 between the neighborhood and the park, and if the  
19 only way to stop the rat coming into the  
20 neighborhood is not to have garbage in the park so  
21 we need those. In Riverside Park, we need 100  
22 percent. I already paid for a couple of them, but  
23 we need more rat-proof, I don't even know anymore  
24 whether it's the sun, solar, big belly, or  
25 whatever, whatever it is.

2           Second shift, does that exist also like  
3 on Broadway Malls up and down because one of the  
4 big issues is cleaning where there is a mall and a  
5 subway station. Obviously lots of traffic so does  
6 that second shift also apply to your land which is  
7 mall in addition to the parks? It is parks. It's  
8 just not a traditional park.

9           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. Thank you,  
10 Council Member. I appreciate the question. At this  
11 point, it does not. Our second shift right now  
12 involves 63 different park locations, 100  
13 different hotspot sites. Those sites were  
14 primarily chosen in areas where there is  
15 barbecuing, where there is busy activity  
16 throughout the day so it does not extend to, at  
17 this point, to the malls.

18           COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The reason I ask  
19 is there's nothing busier than a subway station,  
20 particularly where there are obviously locally and  
21 express so I would just suggest 77nd Street and  
22 96th. They try, but it's often overflowing.  
23 There's garbage everywhere I have to say, and I  
24 get complaints constantly so second shift there  
25 would be great.

2           The other thing, I don't know what  
3 plantings in locations on the malls, taken care  
4 mostly by Broadway Malls, I know, but then  
5 actually at the station. You need more  
6 horticulture. I know this is not the top priority.

7           Just finally, the lifeguards. I'm not a  
8 big Peter Stein fan. Everybody knows that. The  
9 whole world knows that. Since 1900 or something, I  
10 don't know, however long he's been there, I've  
11 been there just as long. The question is I know  
12 that you're trying to do more lifeguards, I got  
13 it, but what's the status of the election process  
14 and how did he end up being there for such a long  
15 time, and does that translate into not having as  
16 many lifeguards? It's a very controversial  
17 question, and DC37 will kill me, but this is a  
18 fact. Go ahead.

19           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
20 Council Member. I appreciate the question. I  
21 appreciate your focus on and recognition of the  
22 importance of lifeguards. We are actively working,  
23 as I said, to recruit and bring in as many as  
24 possible. I am not familiar with or aware of the  
25 election process. That's a union issue. That's not

2 something that I am part of or aware of, but we  
3 are working hard with the union, with returning  
4 lifeguards, recruiting new lifeguards to be able  
5 to make sure that we have as many as we possibly  
6 can for a successful beach and pool...

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Elections need  
8 to be during the summer when there are more  
9 participants. That's the answer to your question.  
10 Thank you.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, thank you.  
12 Council Member Dinowitz.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you,  
14 Chair Krishnan, Co-Chair Lee, although I resent  
15 having to follow up Gale's questions. She's very,  
16 very good, and I'm me so that's...

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm not good.  
18 I'm just always in trouble.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: That's why  
20 you're good.

21 Everything Gale said, I agree with. The  
22 trees, trying to get more trees in the community.  
23 I know we've brought that up at hearings, all of  
24 us have brought it up at hearings.

2 I want to ask first about playgrounds.  
3 I'm getting complaints in my community that  
4 playgrounds are closing early, that the bathrooms  
5 are closing early or the bathrooms are just closed  
6 at all times. Have you been hearing any of this  
7 from your workers? I see a lot of puzzled faces so  
8 it sounds like no.

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No, absolutely  
10 not, Council Member, and we would be more than  
11 happy if you gave us names and playground  
12 locations to look into it. That should not be the  
13 case. The bathrooms should not be closed, it  
14 shouldn't be closed early so we're happy to look  
15 into it.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: What I'm  
17 wondering, is bathrooms being closed during the  
18 day aside, if parks and playgrounds are closing  
19 early I'm wondering if that's a stress on the  
20 workers, if very few workers are being told to a  
21 significant number of playgrounds and if more  
22 workers wouldn't help ensure that our playgrounds  
23 are kept open to the time that they're supposed to  
24 be open.

2                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: There is no  
3 mandate or directive to be closing playgrounds,  
4 and so that shouldn't be happening. Again, we're  
5 absolutely happy to look into it if you give us  
6 specific sites and specific locations. They  
7 shouldn't be closed. They shouldn't be closing  
8 early.

9                   COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Okay. They  
10 are. It's happening in my District. I bet it's  
11 happening all over the Bronx.

12                   Separately, I would ask under what  
13 circumstances would a bathroom be closed, a  
14 comfort station, not that comfortable, I'm going  
15 to call it a bathroom.

16                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Public restroom.

17                   COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Sure. Public  
18 restroom. Why the public restrooms would be locked  
19 during the day?

20                   COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Again, there  
21 wouldn't be an explanation for that. That  
22 shouldn't be happening. It would only be if there  
23 was an instance of a maintenance problem, a leak,  
24 a water pipe broke, something overflowing. That  
25 does happen, absolutely. Our public restrooms are

2 well-utilized and at times, unfortunately,  
3 vandalized, and so the only that a public  
4 restroom, and so the only time that a public  
5 restroom should be closed during opening hours  
6 would be if there was some kind of a maintenance  
7 issue to be addressed or if there's been some kind  
8 of unfortunate incident, but other than that the  
9 bathrooms should be open absolutely.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: We'll get you  
11 the names of those, but if it's a common  
12 occurrence, it's more systemic than those one or  
13 two times, and I would request that if there is a  
14 maintenance issue that at the very least there be  
15 signage so people know why the bathrooms are  
16 closed.

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: The second  
19 thing that I want to ask is about your PEP  
20 commands. Do you know the breakdown of how many  
21 PEP commands there are per borough?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Not sure if we  
23 have that number hand, but we can absolutely  
24 follow up on that to get you that specific number  
25 of PEP commands by borough.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: There are  
3 certain parks that have their PEP command, for  
4 example?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah. Flushing  
6 Meadow, it really is based on the size of the  
7 park, the amount of activity in the park, and  
8 where there is a PEP command can vary. We look to,  
9 as we said, we have 300 PEP officers that are  
10 spread across the city, and so we're looking to  
11 deploy those officers where and when they're most  
12 needed.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: We have,  
14 hoping Council Member Velazquez is not listening,  
15 we have the third biggest park in my District but  
16 it's the first best park, it's really the best  
17 park. I don't want to hear from any other Council  
18 Member right now. You had your time. It is the  
19 third largest park in the city, and there's a ton  
20 of activity there for people of all age groups. I  
21 don't have to go through it now, I only have 53  
22 seconds, but we also have 24 percent of the 3-1-1  
23 complaints, its size, its activity, and then we in  
24 the Bronx see other parks throughout the city like  
25 Prospect Park which is very small, you said size

2 is a consideration, but compared to Van Cortlandt  
3 Park, it's not in your top 10. Van Cortlandt Park  
4 is in the top three. It's on your website. That's  
5 where I'm getting the sizes from. Van Cortlandt  
6 Park is bigger than Central Park. We had requested  
7 a PEP command there, and we were told  
8 respectively, it wasn't mean or anything, we were  
9 told no, and at this budget hearing I'm asking if  
10 you're telling me size and activity do determine  
11 where the PEP commands are, we have significant  
12 activity in that park and significant problems in  
13 the park, not just 3-1-1 complaints, but the NYPD  
14 has to be working in the park in a significant  
15 geographic area, and I want to just ask what the  
16 steps are and what steps can be made to actually  
17 ensure a PEP command is in the park that  
18 statistically according to 3-1-1 complaints needs  
19 its own PEP command, geographically according to  
20 you size needs its own PEP command, so what steps  
21 can we take to ensure that that happens?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
23 Council Member Dinowitz, for that question. It's  
24 something we're absolutely happy to take a look  
25 at. As I said, we have 300 PEP officers spread

2 over 30,000 acres so we are dealing with resources  
3 that need to be spread far and wide, but we're  
4 happy to look at Van Cortlandt and assess whether  
5 that's something that is feasible.

6 DIRECTOR DRURY: To clarify, there is a  
7 dedicated PEP presence to the park. There's just  
8 not a physical substation or command so just to  
9 make that, there is certainly both mounted and  
10 mobile within the park. There is a dedicated  
11 presence for sure.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: The mounted is  
13 what we were (INAUDIBLE) not the command itself.

14 DIRECTOR DRURY: Not a physical building  
15 or trailer or what have you so just to make that  
16 distinction, which we understand, we hear you, but  
17 just to be clear, there is a strong dedicated  
18 presence to the park because we recognize its  
19 importance to the community and its size and  
20 complexity, etc.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: It's  
22 importance to the entirety of New York City?

23 DIRECTOR DRURY: Of course. It's a  
24 signature park, a crown jewel in our portfolio for  
25 sure.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you.  
3 Thank you very much.

4 (INAUDIBLE)

5 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: She's not  
6 under oath so she's free to lie about Pelham Bay  
7 Park all she wants.

8 Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. I'm just  
10 going to finish up with a couple more lines of  
11 questions, and this is coming more so from Chair  
12 Krishnan. Since we lost quorum, I will be asking  
13 them.

14 The first round is with the contractor  
15 vetting process and the budget. Would you all be  
16 supportive of the inclusion of DPR site work in  
17 the City's project labor agreements just as other  
18 City, State, and Federal agencies have already  
19 done?

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
21 Council Member Lee and Council Member Krishnan,  
22 for the question. It is a complicated process,  
23 absolutely, requires State legislation so it's  
24 something that is above and beyond us, something

2 that we can talk further about, absolutely,  
3 offline.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Would you all  
5 be willing to do a feasibility study in 2023 to  
6 identify any and all cost savings to the agency?

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: By including  
8 that?

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Right, yes.

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I think we'd  
11 have to take a look at what it would involve and  
12 what we're looking at in terms of an end result.  
13 It bears further discussion.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Does Parks  
15 typically do business with contractors that have  
16 been debarred for felony acts?

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for  
18 the question. We don't typically. We look to  
19 obviously work with reputable organizations, but  
20 we also need to get work done and so we work  
21 closely with the appropriate vetting agencies  
22 within the City, with DOI, to make sure the  
23 contractors we're working with, the individual  
24 firms, are operating appropriately, and the work  
25 that we do and the contractors we work with are

2 thoroughly vetted and approved by the appropriate  
3 parties within the City.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Under what  
5 other situations would the Parks Department  
6 provide an exception for bad-acting contractors to  
7 be awarded work in the agency?

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I don't think  
9 that we would make exceptions for bad-acting  
10 contractors. I think that we work closely, as I  
11 said, with DOI to ensure that appropriate steps  
12 are taken with individual contractors if there are  
13 problems, if there is a history of problems, and  
14 make sure that we have the legal right to be  
15 moving forward and appropriate direction.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, thank you. If  
17 the vendor pool is limited, which I feel like it  
18 may be not just for your agency but several  
19 agencies, what will you do to expand the vendor  
20 pool instead of awarding that work to a debarred  
21 contractor whose felony acts helped drive out  
22 legitimate contractors in the first place? I'm  
23 sorry. I'm just reading.

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for  
25 the question. As DC Greenfield spoke to, we are

2 doing a whole lot of work to expand the number of  
3 vendors that we work with. Everything from in-  
4 house tree planting efforts on our own part to  
5 also we have worked very, very hard to bring in  
6 M/WBE contractors specifically targeted towards  
7 expanding the pool of contractors. As DC Greenfeld  
8 mentioned, we've seen success in that effort, both  
9 with an expanded number of people bidding, people  
10 being able to graduate to larger contracts, so  
11 we're seeing the results of our work, we're really  
12 excited about that, and we're seeing that pool  
13 expand.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Just for  
15 background context, this is in relation to the  
16 tree contractors and (INAUDIBLE)

17 What can New York City Council do to  
18 help Parks increase the honest vendor pool for  
19 these projects which are including some of the  
20 things you just mentioned?

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I think it's  
22 supporting this work as we said. Council Member  
23 Holden referenced that he had talked about an in-  
24 house tree-planting crew a number of years ago. We  
25 took that idea to heart. We are bringing things

2 like that in-house. We are open to any and all  
3 creative ideas, suggestions for how we can expand  
4 the pool. We are very anxious, as you know, it's  
5 an important part of our mission to be planting  
6 trees. We want as many available contractors to  
7 help us to do that, and we're looking at many  
8 different avenues, and we're open to suggestions  
9 and other opportunities absolutely.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great. Just  
11 the last round of questions. I know that Chair  
12 Krishnan is very (INAUDIBLE) to the 1 percent of  
13 the budget campaign, and the Mayor had campaigned  
14 on the dedication of 1 percent to the budget to go  
15 to Parks and this has not happened yet, and so has  
16 the Department had any conversations with the  
17 Administration about the funding that was promised  
18 but not given yet?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for  
20 the question, and thank you, Chair Krishna. We so  
21 appreciate the work of New Yorkers for Parks and  
22 the Play Fair Coalition and the advocacy for  
23 supporting our parks and open spaces. It's very  
24 much aligned with the work that we do and our  
25 mission to make sure that we working hard to be

2 able to adequately maintain these amazing 30,000  
3 acres of parkland across the City. It's an ongoing  
4 and constant conversation with the Administration,  
5 and we've seen the results of that. As we said and  
6 as Chair Krishnan referenced, last year was the  
7 highest expense budget in our history so we are  
8 seeing the positive impact of that advocacy, of  
9 the commitment of this Administration to their  
10 parks and open space, and we really appreciate  
11 that good work and we are focused on continuing to  
12 work together with the Administration to make sure  
13 that we continue to have the resources that we  
14 need for the park system.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Awesome. If the  
16 Mayor decides to include the funds in the  
17 executive budget to have Parks reach the 1 percent  
18 goal, where would you allocate the money?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, and  
20 that's an excellent question. We would be well-  
21 prepared to allocate those dollars. We have worked  
22 hard internally on a plan for expanding where we  
23 could add resources. Our second shift is an  
24 example of that. That second shift right now is  
25 being deployed in 100 hotspots across the City.

2 With more funding, we could expand that to more  
3 locations, more parks, and so we would absolutely  
4 be adding to maintenance and operations.

5 Opportunity is a big bulk of where our funds are  
6 spent, but we also, as I spoke about in my  
7 testimony, we talked about we expanded hours at  
8 our rec centers to provide more opportunity for  
9 youth. We'd look to do things like that, make our  
10 parks and our facilities more accessible, more  
11 open for New Yorkers to enjoy.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. During  
13 the State of the City, the Mayor mentioned the  
14 inclusion of several million dollars to the  
15 Department, yay. Have you spoken with the Mayor  
16 about that money and when it is expected to be  
17 included in the budget?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, yes,  
19 for the question, and the Mayor did reference in  
20 his State of the City a large amount of funding  
21 for the public realm. Recognizing the importance  
22 of our public spaces, greening our public spaces,  
23 we are thrilled to see that and to see that be a  
24 priority of the administration. We're working  
25 closely with our sister agencies. A lot of those

2 dollars are going to expanding Open Streets, which  
3 I know is really important to Chair Krishnan with  
4 the 34th Avenue Open Street, and we are so excited  
5 about the opportunity. We're thinking about the  
6 public realm, thinking about open space and our  
7 streets to be able to add more greening so that  
8 funding is primarily going to be with DOT, and  
9 we're working closely with them as a sister agency  
10 to implement and see how we can continue to work  
11 together to enhance the public realm.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Do you know  
13 by any chance where the funding will come from for  
14 that?

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It was a Mayoral  
16 allocation out of the budget, yes.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. I don't know  
18 if you know this, but will this be baselined  
19 funding or one-shot?

20 DIRECTOR DRURY: I believe it's capital  
21 funding.

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It would be put  
23 in the budget, yes.

24

25

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. That was my  
3 next question so you answered that already,  
4 capital funding. Okay, awesome.

5 In terms of interagency coordination  
6 which I know is always an issue sometimes, parks  
7 groups talk about how difficult it is to  
8 coordinate projects with DEP, Parks, DOT inside  
9 the New York City parks, and also park group  
10 volunteers have to pick up many needles in some  
11 parks and need more support from DOHMH and public  
12 health resources so how is Parks going to  
13 coordinate with other agencies on these issues,  
14 and what thought has it given to them in the  
15 coordination?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for  
17 the question. This is an Administration that is  
18 keenly focused on interagency collaboration. The  
19 fact that Parks, DOT, DEP all report into the same  
20 Deputy Mayor allows for a great level of  
21 collaboration across the agencies. We meet  
22 regularly, and we work hard across my senior staff  
23 and the senior staff of sister agencies. We have  
24 regular meetings to discuss challenging issues.  
25 There is no doubt these are big complicated city

2 agencies, but this is an administration that has  
3 really prioritized and worked hard to make sure  
4 we're coming together to discuss difficult issues.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Is there a  
6 task force that meets regularly because I know for  
7 some of the agencies that have to do with either  
8 mental health, because there's multiple agencies,  
9 or for the non-profit sector there's multiple  
10 agencies there so is there sort of a regular  
11 meeting that you all have with the different  
12 agencies that sort of overlap?

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.  
14 Given, as I said, that we're all under the same  
15 Deputy Mayor, we all meet regularly.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. With our  
17 Parks Equity Initiative on the Council, it's  
18 great, but oftentimes small organizations have a  
19 difficult time fronting the insurance and  
20 liability funds for parks to be able to access the  
21 funding and host events. It seems like DYCD has a  
22 good model in their contracts so that small groups  
23 can meet this requirement through funding set  
24 aside in their contracts rather than having to  
25 obtain additional funding. Is this something that

2 you all have looked into and how can we make it  
3 easier on small parks groups to access Parks/PEI  
4 grant funding and host events?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
6 Council Member, for the question. We at Parks have  
7 a long history of working closely with all sizes  
8 of parks groups from grassroots organizations to  
9 Friends of groups to established conservancies. We  
10 are very proud of Partnerships for Parks division  
11 that works with hundreds of different  
12 organizations across the City and providing tools,  
13 helping with advocacy, and so the ability for our  
14 parks partners to work seamlessly in our parks is  
15 a huge priority. Having been on the parks partners  
16 side, it's a big priority of mine and of this  
17 administration.

18 I'm not specifically familiar with the  
19 DYCD program, but it's something we're absolutely  
20 open to taking a look at.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, that would be  
22 awesome because I know that DYCD has a great model  
23 and so if it's something, hopefully, that could be  
24 replicated, that would be awesome. Thank you.

2           Okay. Council Member Holden, you had a  
3 followup question?

4           COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah. Again on  
5 trees. I'm wondering if Parks can educate the  
6 public when a tree is planted how to care for it,  
7 in an email, it doesn't have to cost money, but I  
8 try to educate my constituents because the tree  
9 roots go where the water source is, and many times  
10 people water their gardens and there's a sidewalk  
11 and there's a little tree pit. It's not big enough  
12 many times, and, as a result, the roots go towards  
13 the house, it'll go toward the garden where the  
14 water source is and many times it'll pick up the  
15 sidewalk. I was able to not have it pick up my  
16 sidewalk, but the tree did die anyway because of  
17 possibly some, and I did water it regularly, I had  
18 two trees planted in the last 30, 40 years where  
19 my house is, but it just seems that there's a  
20 problem because what they did to both trees, and I  
21 mentioned this at a previous hearing, they put  
22 cobblestones all around the tree bed which was  
23 choking it so I had only a little space where I  
24 could water, and I know that you've gotten away  
25 from that thankfully and you are expanding the

2 tree bed. However, I think education is important  
3 and just educating the public on how to care for a  
4 tree. I also mentioned another thing, and I don't  
5 know if I mentioned it to you, Commissioner, that  
6 I have smaller tree beds because of the width of  
7 the sidewalk. We've planted trees over the years,  
8 and some have died, some did pretty well, that we  
9 plant a species of trees that are smaller, that  
10 could grow there. I never got an answer as to can  
11 we do that, can we identify, that we don't have to  
12 conform to a certain size, that we plant smaller  
13 trees or even, again, very small trees but at  
14 least it looks nicer on the block so have you  
15 thought about that?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. Thank you,  
17 Council Member, for the question and for really  
18 highlighting the importance of tree stewardship.  
19 As you know, that's something that's incredibly  
20 important to us as agency and we've invested a lot  
21 of time and resources for many years in our tree  
22 stewardship efforts.

23 In terms of the first part of your  
24 question, how do we educate New Yorkers, I  
25 referenced in my testimony we're really excited

2 about this new NYC Tree Map that we've put in  
3 place. It's available to New Yorkers on our  
4 website. You can go in by individual tree and look  
5 at what species it is, and there's a place for New  
6 Yorkers to be able to log the care that they're  
7 giving the trees so really pointing people to that  
8 website, to that NYC Tree Map. It's a wealth of  
9 information. It is fantastic.

10 In terms of your second part of your  
11 question about tree species, absolutely. That is  
12 something over the years that we've evolved, we've  
13 learned a lot through the Million Trees campaign.  
14 We have a huge variety of different tree species  
15 that we're planting in order to be really  
16 thoughtful about tree roots, impacts on sidewalks,  
17 so, yes, we're planting all different sizes..

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: But I keep  
19 getting turned down because I have entire blocks  
20 that have the smaller tree beds because, again, of  
21 the width of the sidewalks, but they had trees,  
22 and many are gone because, again, they had huge  
23 trees that were planted there that couldn't  
24 survive that smaller tree bed. I keep getting  
25 turned so have we turned that corner a little bit?

2 If you can give me a list of possible species that  
3 we could plant in the smaller beds?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. It's  
5 something we can take a look at, for sure.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay. Thanks so  
7 much. Thank you, Chair.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. I think  
9 that concludes our round of questions. Thank you  
10 so much. Thank you for being patient with me and  
11 all the back and forth. For any of my other  
12 Colleagues, if y'all need me to Chair your  
13 Committees, I take payment in the form of food so  
14 just let me know if you all have an illness. Just  
15 kidding.

16 Thank you so much, Commissioner and to  
17 the rest of your team, for being here and  
18 answering our questions, and we'll move on to  
19 public testimony. Thank you so much.

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
21 Council Member Lee.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Just wanted to  
23 add, thank you so much, Commissioner. Thank you so  
24 much for our Parks Department.

2 For the first time, I've been rendered  
3 speechless by the rules of the City Council and  
4 the State in terms of virtual testimony, but Chair  
5 Lee did an amazing job carrying the torch to even  
6 higher heights than I could so thank you, Chair  
7 Lee.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: First panel, we  
9 have Dilcy Benn, Fred Blakeney, sorry if I'm  
10 butchering your names, Joe Puleo, and Daniel Clay.  
11 Are you all here? If you could come up to the  
12 front, that would be great, at the table.

13 Okay, so you all can go in order. Just  
14 make sure if you could state your name and which  
15 organization you're affiliated with for the  
16 record. Thank you. Go ahead.

17 JOE PULEO: Hi. Good afternoon. My name  
18 is Joe Puleo. I am President of Local 93. I  
19 represent the Urban Park Rangers, the Parks  
20 Enforcement Officers, the City Seasonal Aides, and  
21 the Associate Park Service Workers in Parks.

22 I'd like to begin by saying that we  
23 have two groups that are in job jeopardy right  
24 now. The Urban Park Rangers that are funded  
25 seasonally are once again in job jeopardy come

2 this June and this new budget. Also included in  
3 that are 80 PEP officers. In the last few years at  
4 least, these groups were supposed to have been  
5 part of the regular budget but never were. We  
6 would like to see, number one, that they be fully  
7 restored and not be placed in job jeopardy. During  
8 the pandemic, we lost 50 Urban Park Rangers. They  
9 provide an essential service here in the city.  
10 They do animal rescues. I was told just recently  
11 in the Bronx on two separate occasions, one being  
12 Pelham, they put out fires there. Again, they do a  
13 lot of the educational tours in New York City  
14 parks. They're part of the Play Fair funding. We  
15 need to keep them. They shouldn't be put each year  
16 in this state where they're facing layoffs. These  
17 people were laid off during the pandemic. They got  
18 somehow confused as being part of the police  
19 funding. They're not police funded. They're  
20 separate. They do education. The people were put  
21 into place under the Gordon Davis administration.  
22 Ironically enough, they were put into place so  
23 that they would be more patron friendly, that they  
24 wouldn't be... Basically, I just want to say that we  
25 need the 1 percent for Parks. We need additional

2 funding. We need at least 1,000 additions. We're  
3 not getting federal funding anymore like we did  
4 during the pandemic so we need more people to do  
5 what they do best, keep our parks clean and safe.  
6 Thank you.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. I know  
8 the time does go by fast so just wanted to  
9 reiterated two points.

10 If you have not submitted public  
11 testimony, please do so because, believe me when I  
12 say that the staff read every single word and then  
13 put that back into consideration for us on the  
14 Council side so thank you so much.

15 JOE PULEO: I'd like to thank you all  
16 too. A lot of you have been very helpful in the  
17 past. I know Bob and Gale.

18 DILCY BENN: Okay, your one minute is  
19 up, Joe.

20 JOE PULEO: Okay, thank you.

21 DILCY BENN: Good afternoon, Chairman  
22 Krishnan, fellow Members of the City Council Parks  
23 and Recreation Committee. My name is Dilcy Benn,  
24 and I'm the President of Local 1505, DC37,  
25 representing close to 1,000 City Park workers,

2 also known as CPWs as well as the seasonal workers  
3 who primarily work in New York City Parks and  
4 Recreation Department in all five boroughs  
5 performing cleanup and conducting maintenance on  
6 all City parks. Last year, the administration  
7 restored funding for 100 CPWs lines and added  
8 thousands of seasonal workers, and the Mayor's  
9 Fiscal Budget for '24 preliminary budget, it does  
10 include funding for the hundreds of CPW lines as  
11 well as the seasonal lines that were funded  
12 through federal stimulus dollars. The parks need  
13 to be kept clean so New Yorkers as well as  
14 visitors can enjoy these New York gems. We needed  
15 dedicated Parks workers doing the work necessary  
16 to upkeep these open spaces. I'm here today not  
17 only to urge the City Council to request the Mayor  
18 to restore and baseline the 10 million to the  
19 Parks Department for 100 CBW staff positions, we  
20 wouldn't have to come back every year requesting  
21 these positions if the Parks Department were to  
22 fund the 1 percent of the City's total budget. In  
23 addition, these same workers would not have to  
24 worry about whether or not they will have a job on  
25 June 30th every year. No one should have to live

2 like that. Now that spring is here and many of us  
3 are utilizing the city parks, we need these City  
4 park workers and seasonal workers more than ever.  
5 There is plenty of work to be done to maintain and  
6 clean these parks day-in and day-out.

7           On behalf of my members, I want to  
8 thank our partners and Play Fair Coalition for  
9 standing with us and advocating alongside us for  
10 more funding for Parks and pushing for 1 percent  
11 for Parks. We will not stop until we get there.  
12 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I  
13 look forward to working to restore the baseline  
14 funding to the Parks Department, and I'll be happy  
15 to take any questions if you have any.

16           CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Council  
17 Member Holden, I know you had a question, but can  
18 we wait for the last panelists to speak?

19           COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: We have one  
20 more?

21           CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes. Go ahead.  
22 Sorry.

23           DANIEL CLAY: Hi there. I'm Daniel Clay,  
24 the President of the Gardeners Local and a good  
25 gardener too.

2           What I'd like to do is say thanks for  
3 all your care and concern to the Council, to New  
4 Yorkers for Parks, and Parks Staff and DC37, and  
5 I'd like to remind a couple of things too that we  
6 gardeners, maybe you think of us as kind of  
7 planting a few flowers and sprinkling water, but  
8 there's so much work to do. We clean and mitigate  
9 rat issues and even act as security in a lot of  
10 cases. Another thing I'd like to remind is that  
11 the work that we do and the potential career path  
12 for lots of positions in Parks is so important to  
13 those of us without college degrees and to keep  
14 that in mind too, please.

15           The other thing I'd like to remind is  
16 if you've seen any daffodils and tulips out there,  
17 you have to know that the weeds are coming up  
18 alongside them so, like I said, there's just so  
19 much work to do. I'll yield the rest of my time.  
20 Thank you.

21           CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.  
22 I know Council Member Holden and then Council  
23 Member Brewer both have questions.

24           COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you all,  
25 again, for doing so much for our parks and keeping

2 them nice. I know it's a tall task obviously, but  
3 I just want to ask each of you the starting  
4 salary, let's say for a gardener or for PEP and  
5 for just support staff because obviously with  
6 inflation, we have to keep up. Let me just hear  
7 from (INAUDIBLE)

8           JOE PULEO: Absolutely. We're losing a  
9 lot of our members. They're going outside. They  
10 basically come in, especially in the Rangers and  
11 in enforcement. They're getting their knowledge,  
12 their expertise, and as soon as they get there,  
13 they're out the door. We just lost 10 people in  
14 Parks Enforcement alone to go to the maintenance  
15 side. Even though they were supervisors, they make  
16 more money on a supervisory level in maintenance  
17 than they do...

18           COUNCIL MEMBER HODLEN: So they're  
19 trained and then we lose them?

20           JOE PULEO: Exactly, and that's just  
21 within. We lose them outside. A lot of them we  
22 lose to...

23           COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So what's the  
24 starting salary for a PEP officer?

25           JOE PULEO: A PEP officer is 50,000.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay, and living  
3 in New York City...

4 JOE PULEO: That's not a comparable  
5 salary.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And with  
7 inflation, so that's equivalent to a lot less...

8 JOE PULEO: And educational requirements  
9 and backgrounds and all that so it's difficult to  
10 retain these people. Hopefully, with this new  
11 raise, we're able to combat some of it, but we're  
12 definitely not close to the point where we will  
13 (INAUDIBLE)

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And like I  
15 mentioned, PEP officers do such a terrific job as  
16 all of your, obviously, your members do, but  
17 protecting our investments, and we have billions  
18 of dollars invested and that's what PEP officers  
19 and rangers do, and the PEP officers, again, we  
20 can't have our police patrol all of our parks. We  
21 need more PEP officers, and, like I said, 3,000  
22 would be a good figure. I know it's 300...

23 JOE PULEO: (INAUDIBLE) it's less than  
24 10 percent of what we have now, and, again, it's  
25 not only the 300 that we have on paper, it's the

2 attrition rate that brings them down to far less  
3 than that and the time it takes to train them to  
4 get them into the field is another rollover of  
5 months.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you.

7 DILCY BENN: I would like to add into  
8 that. I've been here almost 33 years. I make 21.86  
9 an hour. I made 46,000 dollars last year, and I've  
10 been here almost 33 years. My CPWs just went up to  
11 18 dollars an hour. That night crew you're talking  
12 about, that backup crew, the needle crew, that's  
13 the crew that my people are. This is what we do.  
14 We do the baseball fields, we do the lawns, we do  
15 the pools. These are the CPWs that you're talking  
16 about that just got up to 18 dollars an hour. I  
17 think it's sad that I have people that work for  
18 the City of New York that are homeless. I have a  
19 lot of my people that are homeless, and you figure  
20 I make 21.86 and I've been here 33 years.  
21 Obviously, we don't do it for the money, but I  
22 think it's really sad that this is what this has  
23 come to, that they won't give us equipment, we  
24 don't have the trucks, we don't have the  
25 workforce. My people are overworked. We don't have

2 the air conditioning in the trucks like he said.  
3 This is not easy when it comes to you're talking  
4 100-degree weather, when you're lawn mowing and  
5 weed whacking, like I say to anybody that talks  
6 about when you talk about the CPWs, until you get  
7 out there and do what my people do, you will never  
8 understand how that is in the heat and the snow.  
9 We're shoveling the driveways, the steps. This is  
10 all year round that we're doing this, that we  
11 don't have the people, but like I said we don't  
12 get paid a lot to do it so I have a lot of people  
13 that's been here that love what we do, and I'm one  
14 of them.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you. What  
16 does a gardener start with?

17 DANIEL CLAY: It's less than 50,000  
18 dollars a year.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: All right, and  
20 many times they have college education degrees,  
21 right?

22 DANIEL CLAY: Sometimes. I've worked and  
23 volunteered in parks for 40 years, working  
24 alongside people that working, and actually I got  
25 grants to take care of a field, I got State

2 grants, and I bought equipment. I had to loan my  
3 equipment to Parks workers because theirs went  
4 down so often. It's a shame that we can't even  
5 maintain equipment in Parks. You don't have the  
6 proper equipment, we don't have the proper PEP  
7 staff, and we don't have enough gardeners like the  
8 Chair mentioned in his, obviously, opening  
9 remarks, it is disgraceful that we pay our support  
10 workers and Parks workers so little and they do so  
11 much. Again, I want to thank you all for the great  
12 work obviously your members do.

13           DILCY BENN: I want to thank you for the  
14 support and especially the new Chair that we have  
15 that's doing an amazing job, that's always been  
16 there to back us up. That means everything to us,  
17 especially, like I said, the recognition that we  
18 get from anyone for things that we do. That makes  
19 my people feel so special. You have no idea how  
20 much the little things mean to them.

21           CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you, Dilcy.  
22 Actually, one comment that I know Chair Krishnan  
23 just texted me he just wanted to say thank you for  
24 your team's work every single day, we stand with  
25

2 you, and we're so grateful, and I echo that  
3 sentiment as well.

4           When it comes to your CPWs, we couldn't  
5 agree more about the importance of paying you all  
6 more for the sacrifice and work that you do every  
7 single day to take care of our green space, and  
8 the question was were your team members given  
9 permanent positions by any chances?

10           DILCY BENN: A lot of the permanent  
11 positions that came about went to the welfare  
12 workers, the JTPs, and I have seasonals that have  
13 been 16, 17, 18 years. I don't really think that's  
14 fair, I really appreciate the workers, but I think  
15 it should go to the people that's been dedicated,  
16 that's worked here, that's been here, that come  
17 back seasonal year and year after year instead of  
18 going to the welfare workers. I understand that it  
19 should be a certain amount that goes to them and a  
20 certain amount to go to people that's dedicated,  
21 that's been here for years, but yes I did get some  
22 of the permanent lines, yes I did, and this night  
23 crew that they're talking about are some of these  
24 lines, which I thought was an amazing idea because  
25 that's the picnic crew and, during the summertime,

2 a lot of people come out for picnics and the parks  
3 look even worse so we really need the people then  
4 so my seasonals are about to come out, but the  
5 more I get, the better it is.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Is that also the  
7 case for the gardeners as well?

8 DANIEL CLAY: It is. It's unfair,  
9 discombobulated in a lot of cases, and it could  
10 use some more concern.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay. Council  
12 Member Brewer, you had a question also.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I certainly want  
14 to echo Council Member Holden, Council Member  
15 Krishnan, and our Chair today because you are  
16 beloved as a Department and certainly you need to  
17 have the salaries to go with the beloved and so I  
18 support that.

19 I have a question on the gardening  
20 front. How do you decide, I'm obviously focused  
21 not only on the parks but also on the Broadway  
22 Malls or just malls in general, and I have these  
23 two subway stations, one of which at 42nd Street  
24 you transformed completely. Verdi Park is  
25 beautiful thanks to the new plants that you put in

2 and so on. How is the budget allocated to do new  
3 plantings, etc.? How does that come about and then  
4 how do you get allocated to make that transition  
5 if it's needed because a lot of these places, I  
6 don't know if it's in the parks as much, but  
7 certainly on some of these sort of out of the way  
8 parks for lack of a better word don't get the kind  
9 of horticulture that I would like to see. Thank  
10 you.

11 DANIEL CLAY: You're right. We just do  
12 the best we can do. In a lot of cases, these very,  
13 very busy areas that are dirty a lot of times,  
14 they're not nice looking at all because we have to  
15 use the tough plants that aren't as pretty, right,  
16 and so it's not easy.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. You  
18 did a great job on Verdi Park, and we'll just try  
19 to work on 96th Street. Thank you very much.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. I know  
21 Chair Krishnan and I both feel very strongly that  
22 any of the Parks workers on any and all lines,  
23 we're going to try to fight and advocate for more  
24 permanent lines and positions, and I think that's  
25 something that we need to continue to fight for,

2 and we're just so grateful for all of you, for all  
3 the work that you do and so thank you so much for  
4 being here today.

5 DILCY BENN: Thank you. I appreciate you  
6 always.

7 JOE PULEO: Thank you.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: By the way, if  
9 anyone is here that hasn't filled out one of these  
10 slips in the back, if you could fill these out  
11 because this is how we're keeping record of who's  
12 giving testimony today.

13 Next, we have Chris Loscalzo, am I  
14 saying that correctly, and Eve Brooks, and if Fred  
15 Blakeney is here, if you would also come up, I  
16 don't know if he's here.

17 Okay, Chris, go ahead whenever you're  
18 ready.

19 CHRIS LOSCALZO: Good afternoon. My name  
20 is Chris Loscalzo. I'm a member of Local 1010 and  
21 a Field Rep for Laborers Local 1010 LECIT. I will  
22 be providing today's testimony on behalf of Lowell  
23 Barton, Vice President and Organizing Director for  
24 Laborers Local 1010.

2 Today, we'd like to focus our testimony  
3 on procurement issues at the City's Department of  
4 Parks and Recreation. We would like to the City  
5 Council Members present at this hearing,  
6 especially Parks and Recreation Chair, Shekar  
7 Krishnan, for holding this important hearing on  
8 how NYC DPR and their budget impacts delivery of  
9 infrastructure for city residents.

10 One problem we see in DPR procurement  
11 is site work is excluded from City project labor  
12 agreements. We believe this is an oversight that  
13 should be corrected. We are unaware of any  
14 rational basis for why this portion of DPR work is  
15 excluded from citywide PLAs. Project labor  
16 agreements are a benefit to working men, women,  
17 their families, communities, and contractors as  
18 these agreements help ensure projects are  
19 completed on time, on budget. They require  
20 employee training to protect workers' safety and  
21 health while ensuring they receive the proper  
22 wages and benefits.

23 We would also like to discuss the use  
24 of design build procurement method for DPR  
25 projects. Design build is a proven method that has

2 reduced the delivery time on projects. This is  
3 imperative for public parks and in urban setting  
4 where years' long projects remove valuable park  
5 resources from the communities they are supposed  
6 to serve. DDC's current design build projects are  
7 expected to cut years off a typical  
8 design/bid/build timeline and progressive design  
9 build will allow the City to see comparable time  
10 savings for a broader range of projects such as  
11 infrastructure projects with complex existing site  
12 conditions.

13           Finally, we ask that DPR do business  
14 with responsible vendors. Recently, DPR agreed to  
15 do business with a contractor that was debarred  
16 for felony acts involving a massive insurance and  
17 workers' compensation fraud scheme. While the  
18 company was debarred from City work, there was an  
19 exception made for this one contractor to perform  
20 DPR work. There is no rational basis for the City  
21 to do business with such a company, especially  
22 when other City agencies refuse to do so. Thank  
23 you.

24           CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much,  
25 Chris.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Chair, could I?

3 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Yes, go ahead.

4 Sorry.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Just a question  
6 and thank you for your testimony. I wish you could  
7 actually do the whole testimony because this is  
8 good reading because it kind of describes what  
9 we're dealing with, and people who love to use  
10 Parks and how projects are delayed. Would you say,  
11 the design build, I'm all for, I know they have  
12 regulations based on how much the project is, it  
13 has to be a building that they're putting up for  
14 design build, they can't do landscape, that means  
15 they couldn't build a baseball field in design  
16 build, and that seems to be too restrictive, but  
17 what have you found when the Parks Department  
18 designs the project, what typical problems do you  
19 see?

20 CHRIS LOSCALZO: We've found that  
21 compared to other agencies it typically takes a  
22 longer amount of time. Like I said, it shuts down  
23 parks for a lot longer...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Bingo. That's  
25 what I've experienced where because of a design

2 flaw, they do take a year at least and then, if  
3 there are any problems that they find it takes  
4 longer. I had every project in my District,  
5 capital, that we've seen, most of the projects are  
6 delayed for some reason, a design flaw or some  
7 unforeseen issue. Any other things that we should  
8 know about because I do want to talk to you more  
9 about this. Any other things that you've seen when  
10 Parks designs, you have any horror stories because  
11 I know there's plenty out there?

12 CHRIS LOSCALZO: How long have you got?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Give me one that  
14 was a design flaw and that you guys were working  
15 on.

16 CHRIS LOSCALZO: For example, up in Van  
17 Cortlandt Park, they're doing the pathways. That  
18 job has been in construction for a year and a  
19 half, two years. There's no movement on it.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: No movement.  
21 This is what we've seen over and over again.  
22 That's why I'm a big fan of design build, but,  
23 again, there are too many restrictions which I  
24 think this Council should look at. Thank you so  
25 much.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Thank  
3 you so much.

4 Next up we have Lynn Kelly, Alia  
5 Soomro, and we also have online Sherrise Palomino.

6 Whenever you guys are ready, just state  
7 your name for the record and which organization  
8 you're with. Thank you so much.

9 LYNN KELLY: Hi. I'm Lynn Kelly, and I'm  
10 the Executive Director of New York Restoration  
11 Project. Thank you, Chair and to the rest of the  
12 Parks Council, for having us here today.

13 NYRP is a 30-year-old greening and  
14 environmental justice organization. We care for  
15 two parks in Upper Manhattan, 80 acres' worth in  
16 Sherman Creek and Highbridge, we have 52 community  
17 gardens, and we've planted well over 350 green  
18 spaces throughout the City. Our genesis as an  
19 organization is in direct reaction to the City's  
20 unfortunate decades' long disinvestment in green  
21 spaces. You'll hear from my colleagues today that  
22 we're at a tipping point with the park system.  
23 Sadly, we agree. Yet, continually citing parks as  
24 critical city infrastructure for public health,  
25 safety, and social equity but funding it with an

2 austerity budget for 40 years makes no sense. We  
3 are, as a society, talking out both sides of our  
4 mouth. Thanks to a (INAUDIBLE) from NYRP, we  
5 actually know now what cities are better than New  
6 York. Chicago, Minneapolis. New York City has  
7 twice the amount of parkland, and yet they're  
8 funding their systems which have substantially  
9 less with a lot more money to the tune of anywhere  
10 from 4 to 5 percent of the city budget. Both of  
11 those cities also have established funding  
12 authorities. What does that mean? That means when  
13 the park system knows where the funding is coming  
14 from, they can plan for budgets, for maintenance,  
15 workers have job security, they don't have to  
16 worry if their positions are going to get renewed  
17 every year, and we don't have to do this budget  
18 dance year after year after year.

19 I want to give you a very simple and  
20 direct fact. In New York City, we have one  
21 gardener for 114 acres. We're in City Hall Park.  
22 That's 13 City Hall Parks for one gardener. That's  
23 unacceptable. We're not Chicago. We're not  
24 Minneapolis. We have to get better.

2 In addition, other major cities have  
3 more amenities, and that's because we have  
4 unfortunately over time accepted that the lowest  
5 common denominator for maintenance and for design  
6 is what we're going to live with, and that's  
7 unfortunate because the Parks Department and the  
8 workers from DC37 are talented, dedicated public  
9 servants. They are not magicians. They are not  
10 miracle workers. We need to work together to fund  
11 1 percent of the City's budget. Thank you.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Alia.

13 ALIA SOOMRO: Good afternoon. My name is  
14 Alia Soomro, and I'm the Deputy Director for New  
15 York City Policy at the New York League of  
16 Conservation Voters. Thank you, Chair Krishnan,  
17 Council Member Lee, Council Member Holden, and the  
18 rest of the Committee on Parks and Recreation  
19 Members, for the opportunity to testify.

20 New York City's parks, green spaces,  
21 and tree canopy absorb harmful pollutants and help  
22 mitigate climate change by fighting the urban heat  
23 island effect, absorbing stormwater, and providing  
24 clean air and habitats for native wildlife. Parks  
25 and open space have also proven to be essential

2 places to connect with one another as well as  
3 improve the physical and mental health of the  
4 community. Despite these benefits, due to historic  
5 disinvestment and systemic racism in our past  
6 policy decisions, parks and our trees and our open  
7 spaces are not distributed equitably throughout  
8 the City. Access to parks and tree coverage is on  
9 average much lower in environmental justice  
10 neighborhoods that are already plagued by adverse  
11 health problems and high levels of pollution. Poor  
12 neighborhoods and neighborhoods populated by  
13 people of color have access to 21 percent and 33  
14 percent less park space respectively. With these  
15 numerous environmental and public health benefits  
16 that parks provide, it is imperative that the City  
17 equitably invest in the health and sustainability  
18 of our parks, open spaces, and playgrounds.

19           As co-founders of the Play Fair for  
20 Parks Coalition, we stand with New Yorkers for  
21 Parks, DC37, and the rest of the Coalition members  
22 to demand a City budget that gives Parks the fair  
23 funding that they deserve. Allocating 1 percent is  
24 a necessary and reasonable ask, especially

2 considering other major cities consistently commit  
3 between 2 to 5 percent to Parks each year.

4           Therefore, the City must adequately  
5 fund the following: Restoration of hundreds of DPR  
6 staff positions such as park workers, gardeners,  
7 urban park rangers, and PEP officers. Funding  
8 these positions, as have already been said, are  
9 essential to living in this City and to maintain  
10 clean and safe parks; protection, maintenance, and  
11 expansion of the New York City urban forests as  
12 emphasized by the Forest For All Coalition; and  
13 investing in natural and nature-based solutions to  
14 protect our coastal wetlands.

15           Lastly, the City must seize the once-  
16 in-a-lifetime opportunity to leverage funding from  
17 the New York State Bond Act which requires  
18 disadvantaged communities receive at least 35 to  
19 40 percent.

20           Thank you for the opportunity to  
21 testify.

22           CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you, Alia.  
23 Sorry for mispronouncing your name.

2 Sharrise, online, if you could go  
3 ahead, whenever you're ready. Sorry, wait for the  
4 Sergeant-at-Arms to cue you. Hold on one second.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

6 SHERRISE PALOMINO: Thank you. Good  
7 afternoon. My name is Sherrise Palomino, and I'm  
8 the Director of Advocacy and Programs at New  
9 Yorkers for Parks. We are a founding member of the  
10 Play Fair Coalition which includes over 400  
11 organizations from across the City, many of which  
12 were at a rally this morning and are testifying  
13 today. Thank you to Chair Krishnan and the  
14 Committee on Parks and Recreation for the  
15 opportunity to testify about our City's need to  
16 invest in Parks, and thank you to the amazing  
17 student advocates who testified earlier.

18 New Yorkers for Parks recently released  
19 our 1 percent for Parks Impact Report that details  
20 the decades of disinvestment in our City's parks.  
21 The report outlines how New York City invests less  
22 in our parks per capita and less as a percentage  
23 than other competing cities and the negative  
24 impact that has had on New Yorkers and the agency.  
25 In addition, our report outlines how this historic

2 divestment in our parks has left our  
3 neighborhoods, especially those in lower-income  
4 and communities of color, with chronically  
5 understaffed and underfunded parks.

6           Since 1980, the City budget has grown  
7 by 127 percent. The NYPD's budget has grown by 127  
8 percent as well, and the Department of Correction  
9 has grown by 165 percent. Parks has grown by just  
10 72 percent. It's time to reverse this trend. The  
11 preliminary budget proposed by the administration  
12 cuts the Department by more than 40 percent,  
13 reversing gains we made in the FY23 budget.  
14 Further, in the last year, the agency has lost 109  
15 Parks staff through PEG cuts and an additional  
16 1,300 Parks workers that were part of the Cleaning  
17 Corps which had been federally funded until last  
18 year. Volunteers love our parks and invest time in  
19 cleaning and maintaining our parks. However, there  
20 shouldn't be a stopgap for an understaffed agency.  
21 New York City has continued to deprioritize Parks  
22 funding, leaving the agency's resources stagnant  
23 while understaffed and overworked Parks employees  
24 are working tirelessly to meet increasing demands.

2 Additionally, the lack of operations funding has  
3 led to...

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

5 SHERRISE PALOMINO: Has led to  
6 ballooning capital costs for the Department.

7 New Yorkers for Parks and the Play Fair  
8 Coalition are asking for 1,056 critical  
9 maintenance positions to be baselined in this  
10 year's City budget, and we are requesting the City  
11 Council to recommit to its support of the 280  
12 essential Play Fair Parks positions that were not  
13 funded last year.

14 We are overdue for transformative  
15 investment in our Parks system. It's time to  
16 allocate 1 percent of the City's budget to Parks.  
17 We look forward to working with the Mayor, the  
18 Administration, and the Council to fulfill those  
19 commitments. Thank you for your time.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.  
21 Council Member Holden, quick questions.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Quickly, I'll do  
23 it quickly. I just wanted to say I worked with New  
24 Yorkers for Parks for many years. I've worked with  
25 a number of other groups. Thank you for the work.

2 This is the year we should accept nothing less  
3 than 1 percent. If we do, we're fools. That means,  
4 as a Council, we have to finally do this because  
5 if we accept less than 1 percent, we're part and  
6 parcel to every administration, and they  
7 continually do this, they just cut Parks first, as  
8 much as 25 percent. When they're already  
9 underfunding, it's criminal. Our parks, by the  
10 way, are important to everyone, every  
11 neighborhood, and so important, and my  
12 constituents love it, where thousands use it per  
13 day. I have some of the greatest parks, like  
14 Forest Park, Juniper Valley Park, Elmhurst Park  
15 which I helped create. There's no better feeling,  
16 way before I became a Council Member, we created a  
17 park where it would've been, if we didn't get  
18 involved, a Home Depot. If you go to Elmhurst  
19 Park, it's a wonderful oasis, and I can look back  
20 at that and say I made a difference on this  
21 planet, like you are doing, so we all have to  
22 stand firm and not accept anything less. We have  
23 to get 1 percent for our Parks, the least we  
24 should get, and thank you. Thanks so much for your  
25 advocacy.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much  
3 and, yes, I agree. We will continue to fight for  
4 that.

5 Thank you.

6 Next up we have Heather Lubov, Morgan  
7 Monaco, and Sarah Powers.

8 Okay, great. Whenever you guys are  
9 ready.

10 HEATHER LUBOV: Hi. I'm Heather Lubov.  
11 Good afternoon, Chairs Krishnan and Lee and  
12 Council Member Holden. I'm the Executive Director  
13 of the City Parks Foundation. We reach more than  
14 270,000 people each year by providing free  
15 programming in parks, and we also support  
16 grassroots efforts in parks through Partnerships  
17 for Parks, which is a community engagement program  
18 that we manage jointly with NYC Parks. You may or  
19 may not know, but NYC Parks is one of the only  
20 city agencies that has thousands of New Yorkers  
21 who supplement City funds with their own sweat  
22 equity by cleaning, beautifying, and activating  
23 green spaces and addressing local needs. Last  
24 year, Partnership for Parks managed more than  
25 1,400 individual service projects with 30,000

2 volunteer participants. Many of these volunteers  
3 are simply everyday New Yorkers who come together  
4 with their neighbors on their own time to improve  
5 their communities, and we now work with more than  
6 500 such groups.

7           The Parks Equity Initiative and the  
8 funding that is distributed by each Council Member  
9 is critical to these groups providing some of, if  
10 not the only, funding that these grassroots groups  
11 receive. Most of the groups are not registered  
12 501(c)3s. They're just informal networks, and  
13 there are lots of barriers to access. First and  
14 foremost, how are they going to get that money.  
15 They can't manage a contract with the Parks  
16 Department and all that that entails. They're  
17 expected to pay expenses upfront and wait for  
18 reimbursement, if they're even eligible to enter  
19 into a contract. Most don't have bank accounts,  
20 let alone budgets, but they're not eligible to use  
21 City Parks Foundation as a fiscal sponsor because  
22 of contracting rules. If they get a contract and  
23 want to plan a program, they're required to secure  
24 event insurance which is prohibitively expensive.  
25 We will not achieve parks equity until these

2 barriers which cut across city agencies are  
3 addressed. The Parks Equity Initiative also  
4 provides support to Partnerships for Parks  
5 directly for training, coaching, guidance, and  
6 fiscal sponsorship that supports all of these  
7 groups and ensures that their volunteer efforts  
8 are successful and sustainable in the long-term.  
9 An increase in funding for the Initiative is  
10 needed to support greater outreach to marginalized  
11 communities and especially those speaking  
12 languages other than English. CPF, during the  
13 pandemic, served as an administrator for a  
14 temporary recovery fund, but that was a bridge. We  
15 believe that it's the City's responsibility to  
16 provide adequate funding for Parks in the long-  
17 term and call upon the City to reverse the  
18 proposed cuts and dedicate 1 percent of its budget  
19 to Parks. Thank you.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Next.

21 MORGAN MONACO: Hi. Good afternoon. I'm  
22 Morgan Monaco, and I have to insist that once you  
23 leave these Chambers, you go sit on a park bench  
24 because there's a beautiful spring day happening  
25 outside while we're all here inside advocating for

2 our parks and open spaces. I'm Morgan Monaco,  
3 President of the Prospect Park Alliance, the non-  
4 profit organization that, in partnership with the  
5 City, stewards Prospect Park. I'm here today to  
6 support the efforts of the Play Fair Campaign to  
7 advocate for critical funding for the upcoming  
8 budget and for the City to fulfill the Mayor's  
9 commitment, campaign promise of 1 percent of the  
10 City budget for Parks. The pandemic made it  
11 resoundingly clear that parks and open spaces are  
12 essential to the well-being of our communities.  
13 Prospect Park is truly Brooklyn's backyard and  
14 welcomes more than 10 million visitors from every  
15 ZIP code in Brooklyn and beyond. As a community  
16 park, Prospect Park is a critical gathering space  
17 for family reunions, birthday parties, and all  
18 manners of picnics and barbecues. Its 585 acres  
19 provide fresh air and respite to Brooklyn  
20 residents, and the borough includes neighborhoods  
21 that have some of the lowest amounts of green  
22 space per capita. Making Prospect Park a welcoming  
23 and accessible space for the diverse communities  
24 of Brooklyn is a key part of our mission and,  
25 without the support of the City and elected

officials, our work would not be possible. Since the pandemic, we've seen a record number of visitors to the Park throughout the year, and the resulting impact in terms of the significant wear and tear in the park. At the same time, the City has not kept up with its record use in its funding of Parks in the City budget, and Prospect Park Alliance relies on its partnership with the City Parks Department for essential maintenance, trash management, and general upkeep. NYC Parks have been operating with an austerity budget for more than 40 years with historically only 5 percent of the City budget allocated to Parks despite the fact that parks comprise 14 percent of City land. This chronic underfunding with additional loss of staff and staff vacancies in recent years has been devastating for our parks. We are concerned about the preliminary budget cuts of 46 million to NYC Parks, which would eliminate hundreds of essential jobs that are already scarce such as City Park Workers, Urban Park Rangers, and Parks Enforcement Patrol officers to care for our parks.

We're asking for funding to baseline more than 1,000 Parks positions in the City budget

2 including City Park Workers, Rangers, and Green  
3 Thumb positions. We're also asking the Council to  
4 fund 280 Play Fair positions including Park  
5 Workers, Gardeners, Rangers, Parks Enforcement  
6 Patrol officers as well as park equity and natural  
7 areas programming. We applaud the Council for  
8 considering the critical need to increase funding  
9 for Parks in the upcoming cycle and recognize our  
10 parks are essential infrastructure by not only  
11 restoring budget cuts but moving beyond a cycle-  
12 to-cycle funding model. 1 percent of our budget  
13 must be for Parks. Parks saved our City during the  
14 pandemic. Now it's time to make sure they get  
15 their fair share of the budget. Thank you.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Next.

17 EMILY WALKER: Hello. My name is Emily  
18 Walker, and I am the Senior Manager of External  
19 Affairs at the Natural Areas Conservancy, and I'll  
20 be testifying on behalf of our Executive Director,  
21 Sarah Charlop-Powers.

22 Thank you to Council Member Krishnan  
23 and Council Member Lee and the Members of the  
24 Parks Committee for the opportunity to provide

2 testimony today and thank you to our Colleagues at  
3 NYC Parks for the work that they do.

4           The NAC was formed with the goal of  
5 increasing the capacity of NYC Parks and its  
6 partners to restore and manage the 10,000 acres of  
7 forest and wetlands under the agency's  
8 jurisdiction, which comprise 1/3 of the City's  
9 entire park system, and they're the only places,  
10 we'd like to note, where over 50 percent of New  
11 Yorkers go to experience nature exclusively.

12 During the pandemic, we found that visitation to  
13 our natural areas increased by 65 percent,  
14 highlighting the importance of these spaces for  
15 respite and recreation. Today, we support the call  
16 to dedicate 1 percent of the City budget for Parks  
17 and ask that the City Council and the Mayor commit  
18 full funding for the Play Fair budget platform.

19           I specifically would like to highlight  
20 the ask of 3.5 million dollars in expense funding  
21 in the FY24 budget to support the care of our  
22 city's natural areas. In FY23, NYC Parks received  
23 2.5 million dollars which supported 44 seasonal  
24 staff lines, which we'd like to note were not  
25 included in the baseline funding. The allocation

2 of 3.5 million in FY24 would support the retention  
3 of these critical 44 staff lines as well as the  
4 addition of five seasonal staff to support public  
5 access improvements and the care of our wetlands.  
6 This allocation would also provide vitally needed  
7 funding to support the purchase of native trees  
8 and for non-capital contract costs.

9           The NAC is proud to have co-created  
10 management frameworks for forests, wetlands, and  
11 trails with NYC Parks, which each set a long-term  
12 vision and detailed roadmap for the care of this  
13 critical public infrastructure. However, the City  
14 has failed to fully invest in these plans. Our  
15 increasing reliance on inconsistent and unassured  
16 levels of single-year funding is making it  
17 impossible for our colleagues at NYC Parks to  
18 effectively move these complex multi-year projects  
19 forward. Unlike other features of our park  
20 systems, our natural areas cannot afford to be  
21 subject to continually deferred maintenance.  
22 Natural forests make up 24 percent of New York  
23 City's parkland portfolio, and yet in FY22  
24 received only .0042 percent of the entire City  
25 budget to maintain them. For our City's wetlands,

2 deferred maintenance can mean the crucial assets  
3 are at risk of disappearing entirely. We are  
4 losing six acres of wetland each year in NYC.

5 I know I'm out of time so I would just  
6 like to say today we stand in full support of the  
7 call for allocating 1 percent of the City budget  
8 for Parks, and we thank you for giving us the  
9 chance to testify today.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much  
11 for all the work you guys do and for advocating. I  
12 also found out we're getting kicked out of the  
13 room before 2 so I want to make sure we are able  
14 to hear from everyone so if you have not, please  
15 make sure to submit your testimonies to the email  
16 address. If folks are not here that you know of,  
17 you can submit testimony up to 72 hours after the  
18 hearing so they still have time to submit it.

19 Next up, we have Tali Cantor, Brad  
20 Taylor, Giulietta Fiore, and Kelsey Brow so if you  
21 guys can come up.

22 Go ahead and start whenever y'all are  
23 ready.

24 TALI CANTOR: Thank you, Chair Krishnan  
25 and Committee Members. My name is Tali Cantor, and

2 I'm Director of Planning for the Union Square  
3 Partnership. We are in the non-profit Building  
4 Improvement District working to create a clean,  
5 safe, and vibrant neighborhood for Union Square's  
6 residents, businesses, and visitors. At our  
7 neighborhood core is Union Square Park where we  
8 provide supplement services including cleaning,  
9 trash collection, landscaping, and free public  
10 programming. Union Square Park is a critical open  
11 space amenity and an important civic gathering  
12 space for the entire city. It's not only a green  
13 oasis in a bustling mixed-use district but a site  
14 for free expression and the chosen venue for  
15 hundreds of demonstrations, performances, and  
16 public events each year and the City's flagship  
17 green market operating four days a week. As a  
18 consequence of this intensive use, the  
19 infrastructure beneath our beautiful park is aging  
20 and failing. It's been nearly 40 years since the  
21 park's interior was renovated, and the result is  
22 deteriorating plumbing and drainage systems that  
23 have caused sinkholes and eroding pathways. With  
24 failing irrigation, the park plantings rely on  
25 makeshift and expensive workarounds that have

2 caused the landscaping to deteriorate. The current  
3 conditions in the park are not only a detriment to  
4 plant and tree health but create unsafe conditions  
5 for pedestrians. Furthermore, this park is located  
6 above the fourth busiest subway station in New  
7 York City. Rather than waiting for a disaster when  
8 water pipes break, we're calling for our City  
9 leaders to be proactive and fund these repairs  
10 before it's too late.

11 We're here today to advocate for  
12 funding to repair Union Square Park's plumbing and  
13 drainage systems and pathway reconstruction, the  
14 full 8.5 million requested by the Parks Department  
15 to complete this project. Our parks are essential  
16 public spaces for our City's health and  
17 sustainability and so we urge the Council and the  
18 City to ensure funding is secured for Parks in  
19 FY24 and beyond, including the 1 percent call for  
20 partners like New Yorkers for Parks and the Trust  
21 for Public Land. WE look forward to the Council  
22 support and working with Commissioner Donoghue on  
23 this effort. Thank you.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Right on time. Go  
25 ahead.

2 BRAD TAYLOR: Thank you. My name is Brad  
3 Taylor. I'm the President of the Friends of  
4 Morningside Park. Friends of Morningside Park have  
5 been a park advocate for over 40 years for  
6 Morningside Park, one of the historic Harlem  
7 parks.

8 I'm just here to emphasize that we need  
9 this 1 percent for Parks. I wanted to say to the  
10 Council Member, you're absolutely right. This has  
11 got to be the last year. I've been coming here for  
12 decades. Heather's been coming here for decades.  
13 Emily's been coming here for decades. It's enough  
14 already, you know what I mean. We can't keep doing  
15 this. As of today, we're a long way from getting  
16 the commitment we need. When the Parks budget was  
17 cut in 2020, parks were in their worst condition  
18 in two decades. Given that this chronic  
19 underfunding continues to this day, parks across  
20 the city don't have nearly enough maintenance  
21 workers, PEP officers, and gardeners to keep their  
22 parks clean and safe. Our NYC scenic landmark park  
23 is a steep and rugged park through which many  
24 residents of Harlem and Morningside Heights  
25 commute every day. The upper level of the park is

2 overgrown and has poor sightlines, even in the  
3 best of times. It doesn't have a fighting chance  
4 when it had to rely on a skeletal citywide  
5 forestry crew and one gardener for its 30 acres.  
6 In December 2019, I'm sure we all remember, the  
7 City and the word were horrified by the murder of  
8 Tessa Majors in a secluded area of Morningside  
9 Park. We demand adequate staffing levels and PEP  
10 presence to be provided so that park users can  
11 feel and be safe in all of our parks. Users of New  
12 York City's parks deserve no less. Thank you.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.

14 GIULIETTA FIORE: Thank you so much,  
15 everybody. My name is Giulietta Fiore, and I'm  
16 testifying today as the Associate Director of  
17 External Affairs for the Historic House Trust of  
18 New York City.

19 First, we applaud Chair Krishnan for  
20 supporting the need to dedicate 1 percent of the  
21 City's budget to the New York City Parks  
22 Department. As a proud member of the Play Fair  
23 Coalition, the Historic House Trust calls upon the  
24 City to recognize parks as critical infrastructure  
25 by allocating 1 percent of the City's budget to

2 Parks. This investment is essential in ensuring  
3 that our City's parks and their diverse resources  
4 including the Public Historic House Museums that  
5 we help steward are properly maintained and  
6 protected for the future. The Historic House Trust  
7 works to preserve 23 Historic Houses that tell the  
8 inclusive stories of those who have enriched our  
9 City's past. These sites flourish today as  
10 historic landmarks, museums, educational centers,  
11 cultural beacons, and public green spaces thanks  
12 to our non-profit partners, some of whom are  
13 sitting over there and will be testifying right  
14 after me, and in collaboration with New York City  
15 Parks. Integrated into communities across all five  
16 boroughs of New York City, we believe that these  
17 publicly owned historic sites are critical to a  
18 dynamic cityscape. They keep the past alive for  
19 hundreds of thousands of visitors annually and  
20 provide programs for schoolchildren and residents  
21 to address specialized community needs at the  
22 intersection of history, culture, and the arts.  
23 From literacy workshops to urban farming, the  
24 programs our partners offer are drivers of equity  
25 and community. Our vision is simple, a collection

2 of well-maintained historic properties operating  
3 effectively and sustainably and engaging visitors  
4 and neighbors to celebrate New York City and its  
5 history. Increased funding for NYC Parks is  
6 critical to realizing our vision. Years of an  
7 austerity budget has eroded our collective ability  
8 to preserve these important places. Above all, NYC  
9 Parks needs more staff and funding to address our  
10 greatest concern, deferred maintenance, which  
11 causes structural deterioration to the museums,  
12 hinders their ability to serve their communities,  
13 and challenges their working relationships. Our  
14 non-profit partners want to help and are dedicated  
15 to these places and their communities, but they  
16 cannot do it alone. We urge the City Council to  
17 support an increase in funding for NYC Parks for  
18 the benefit of all New Yorkers, past, present, and  
19 future.

20 Thank you for this opportunity to voice  
21 our needs and for hearing our call to help sustain  
22 the places that help make New York City our home,  
23 and I urge you to listen to our partners who are  
24 testifying right after us. They have really unique  
25

2 needs in each of our neighborhoods, and they do  
3 really great work.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.

5 KELSEY BROW: All right. Good afternoon,  
6 Chair Krishnan and Members of the Parks Committee.  
7 My name is Kelsey Brow. I'm the Executive Director  
8 of the King Manor Museum in Jamaica, New York. I'm  
9 joined behind me by my colleagues, Alison McKay,  
10 Executive Director of the Bartow-Pell Museum in  
11 the Bronx and Catherine Hughes, Executive Director  
12 of the Morris-Jumel Mansion in Upper Manhattan.

13 We are happy to be delivering testimony  
14 on behalf of our three sites as well as a number  
15 of others in the Historic House Network so we  
16 include Bartow-Pell in the Bronx, Lott House, Old  
17 Stone House, Wyckoff House Museum in Brooklyn,  
18 Merchants House Museum, Morris-Jumel Mansion in  
19 Manhattan, Bowne House, King Manor, Kingsland  
20 Homestead, Lewis Latimer House, and Queens County  
21 Farm Museum in Queens, and Alice Austen House and  
22 Historic Richmond Town in Staten Island so there's  
23 a lot of us.

24 In our testimony on November 18, 2020,  
25 Parks Committee hearing on the state of the

2 Historic Houses under the jurisdiction of the  
3 Parks Department, we highlighted some of the  
4 funding issues that our private non-profits which  
5 operate these historic sites face. Today, we'd  
6 like to expand upon those issues as they still  
7 stand. Our non-profits need guaranteed direct  
8 support so that we can effectively fulfill our  
9 missions and respond to the needs of our  
10 surrounding communities. Investments in our  
11 organizations through both capital and operational  
12 support is an investment in New York City. Our  
13 mission-critical work is not possible without  
14 ensuring the stability and actual maintenance of  
15 the historic structures that house our non-  
16 profits. Members of the public and elected  
17 officials frequently express concerns about the  
18 frankly shabby building conditions of our historic  
19 sites and have commented on the lack of attention  
20 that the structures receive from the City and the  
21 Parks Department. Currently, between the 23  
22 historic sites in the Historic House Trust  
23 Network, there is over 50 million dollars in  
24 capital funding allocated to these sites for as-  
25 yet-unbuilt projects, many of which have been

2 pending for over two decades, further exacerbating  
3 the deterioration of these structures' condition.  
4 Sadly, and typical of the neglect shown to these  
5 sites, in this year's 2020 Preliminary Mayor's  
6 Management Report discussing DPR, no mention is  
7 made of capital allocation for us.

8           With 23 sites, there's a lot more to  
9 speak about than we can in two minutes, but we  
10 need the resources of both the Parks Department  
11 and Department of Cultural Affairs for the  
12 maintenance and operation of our sites, and we are  
13 looking to be included as true Parks partners that  
14 we truly are, more site control, and an actually  
15 utilized regular maintenance schedule to protect  
16 these historic assets that are very fragile and  
17 frankly can't withstand the extended timeframes  
18 for their repair.

19           CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.  
20 Council Member Holden, you have a question?

21           COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you. Just  
22 a quick, I was on that hearing in '20, and has  
23 anything improved since then? I mean that's a  
24 question that I really want to feel that something  
25 improved, but did anything improve?

2           KELSEY BROW: Things, I believe, are  
3 slightly looking up. There's been an  
4 administration change within the Historic House  
5 Trust, and we have a much more collegial  
6 relationship with them and some more clarity from  
7 them from what we need from them. However, that  
8 was maybe last month that that happened so nothing  
9 has really been able to occur, and, of course, the  
10 Historic House Trust is chronically underfunded as  
11 are we, and there has been no legislative change  
12 as to whether we can access our own money instead  
13 of waiting for decades and decades for it to go  
14 through the Department of Parks and Recreation  
15 Capital Division for us to get this work done and  
16 maintenance schedules, we've been ensured will  
17 happen but, once again, if you look at the budget,  
18 there's just not enough to maintain all 23 sites  
19 with the limited personnel that the Historic House  
20 Trust staff has and, since we don't have full site  
21 control or really a pathway for autonomy with, of  
22 course, Parks Department and Landmarks approval to  
23 make our own maintenance schedules and to have  
24 those followed. I'm here today because frankly not  
25 enough has happened.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Let's meet and  
3 let's go over a couple of points. I'd like to hear  
4 how we could fast track this and finally turn the  
5 corner because I know all the houses are  
6 complaining about the deterioration so I know we  
7 have to correct this issue with future funding and  
8 maybe public/private partnerships to bring that in  
9 to help this. Thank you, Chair.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. Coming  
11 from the non-profit sector and being a former ED  
12 that went through a capital project, painful  
13 process, so I think there's a lot there in general  
14 we need to work on to streamline. Queens County  
15 Farm is in my District so shoutout to them.

16 KELSEY BROW: Thank you.

17 GIULIETTA FIORE: Can I just really  
18 quick add something, because I'm the Historic  
19 House Trust. We have 94 million dollars in capital  
20 work at the 23 Historic Houses right now, but the  
21 problem with capital work, which everybody knows,  
22 is that the Houses have to close for long periods  
23 of time, and that does reduce their ability to  
24 actually provide public programming which is a  
25 necessary service that they are really well-versed

2 in so deferred maintenance really is something  
3 that we need. We haven't our OTPS budget from  
4 107,000 dollars for 23 historic sites in 20 years,  
5 and that's for boilers, it's for pest control,  
6 it's for fire extinguishers, I mean it's for a lot  
7 of different types of things so we really need  
8 additional support for the maintenance, and we are  
9 working a lot more closely with the capital team  
10 to make sure that those move faster as well.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Awesome. Thank you.  
12 Thank you so much everyone.

13 Next panel we have Chantal Phaire,  
14 Sarah Williams, Brian Hedden, and Erik Berg. If  
15 any of you all is here, if you guys could please  
16 come up, Chantal, Sarah Williams, Brian Hedden,  
17 and Erik.

18 Special shoutout to the folks up in the  
19 balcony from Middlebury College. Welcome and  
20 thanks for participating and observing on the  
21 civic process.

22 Okay, go ahead whenever you're ready.

23 BRIAN HEDDEN: Thank you, Council  
24 Members. I'm Brian Hedden, and today I'm  
25 representing Brooklyn Greenway Initiative. BGI has

2 been an advocate for a complete Brooklyn  
3 waterfront greenway which now stands at 21 miles  
4 built out of 26 total. For the last two years, BGI  
5 has been the coordinating organization of the New  
6 York City Greenways Coalition which is campaigning  
7 for a fully built, fully connected, and truly  
8 five-borough greenway system.

9           The City has made considerable strides  
10 in the past two years to expand the greenway  
11 system to parts of New York that have been left  
12 out of previous expansion efforts. With that said,  
13 the time has come for the City to make strides  
14 towards another critical undertaking which the  
15 proper upkeep of the existing system. Earlier this  
16 month, BGI and 19 other groups wrote to Deputy  
17 Mayor Joshi to raise awareness of several issues  
18 impacting the day-to-day management and the  
19 investment in greenways citywide, and some of  
20 these issues are directly related to the chronic  
21 underfunding of the Parks Department over the past  
22 several decades, and that's why we're here today  
23 to speak in favor of the Play Fair 1 percent  
24 platform for its impact on greenways across New  
25 York City.

2           Greenways blend the characteristics of  
3 neighborhood-level open spaces with citywide  
4 active transportation networks. Individual  
5 components are managed by several different  
6 agencies, and the differences in resources given  
7 to those agencies is stark. As one example, a  
8 number of older Parks Department greenways feature  
9 walking and riding surfaces that have not been  
10 resurfaced in decades largely owing to a lack of  
11 dedicated budget for surface upkeep. That funding  
12 needs to be secured on an ad hoc basis. It's  
13 usually done years after greenways have fallen  
14 into disrepair, and the consequences of this model  
15 are clearly apparent on greenways as users again  
16 move from parks to non-park segments within  
17 minutes, but, of course, this has the same  
18 consequences on non-greenway Parks projects as  
19 well. Like other challenges facing the maintenance  
20 of our Parks infrastructure, much of this needed  
21 relief begins with the budget and adequate funding  
22 for maintaining our open spaces. Thank you so  
23 much.

24           CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

2 SARAH MCCOLLUM WILLIAMS: Thank you. I'm  
3 Sarah McCollum Williams, and I'm the Executive  
4 Director of Green Guerillas, a non-profit that  
5 supports community gardens and activates youth  
6 engaged in food and environmental justice across  
7 the city. Special thanks to all the Council  
8 Members present at this hearing, and thanks also  
9 to the Parks Committee Chair Krishnan and to all  
10 the Council Members who have provided particularly  
11 deep support to community gardens including Deputy  
12 Speaker Ayala, Council Members Osse, Nurse,  
13 Rivera, Won, Sanchez, Stevens, Feliz, and many  
14 others.

15 In a 2018 study published in the  
16 Journal of the American Medical Association,  
17 researchers found that for people living near  
18 green spaces, feeling depressed significantly  
19 decreased by 41 percent, and self-reported poor  
20 mental health showed a reduction of 62 percent.  
21 These are powerful numbers. They concluded that  
22 the neighborhood physical conditions have been  
23 associated with mental illness and may partially  
24 explain persistent socioeconomic disparities and  
25 the prevalence of poor mental health. Green spaces

2 then provided by community gardens don't just  
3 beautify neighborhoods; they have the radical  
4 potential to create health, wealth, and resilience  
5 within them. Community gardens provide some of the  
6 same benefits as parks, recreation, environment  
7 services like absorbing heat and stormwater, but  
8 beyond that they provide additional strong  
9 benefits in the form of neighborhood food  
10 sovereignty and education around healthy eating.  
11 Despite these powerful benefits, communities  
12 gardens and the essential work undertaken within  
13 them are often underfunded and their potential as  
14 centers for powerful systems transformation are  
15 often overlooked. On behalf of community gardeners  
16 across the City, I urge you to protect, preserve,  
17 expand, and properly maintain community gardens,  
18 to uplift community gardens as sites of food and  
19 environmental justice and activators of solidarity  
20 economies, and to structure green thumb with  
21 equity as its core. I'll skip ahead. Just to ask  
22 that community gardens along with NYC Parks be  
23 funded as needed. As has been stated earlier  
24 today, NYC Parks has been operating with an  
25 austerity budget for 40+ years. We join with our

2 colleagues in the Play Fair Coalition to urge  
3 Mayor Adams and the City to make good on his  
4 commitment to fund NYC Parks with 1 percent of the  
5 City budget. Our health depends on it. Thank you.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.  
7 Yes, community gardens are definitely very  
8 important so thank you.

9 Next up we have Scott Daly, Catherine  
10 Hughes, if I'm reading this correctly, and then  
11 Scott Kearney.

12 If anyone is present and would like to  
13 testify and has not filled out a card, please let  
14 us know.

15 Feel free to go ahead and start  
16 whenever you're ready.

17 SCOTT KEARNEY: I'm going to be speaking  
18 everyone's favorite subject, our Capital Projects  
19 Division, which I spent 33 years at. I applaud  
20 that your Initiative 842 wants to streamline  
21 capital projects. I don't appreciate that you're  
22 giving them a year whereas at DDC the streamlining  
23 occurred years ago, and you don't have to do  
24 anything but copy DDC. Eight years ago, I came  
25 here and presented the District Council Technical

2 Guild's proposal, the Landscape Architects,  
3 Architects, and Civil Engineers, and if anybody  
4 knows how to streamline the system, it's them. The  
5 answers that you need are in Flushing Meadows at  
6 the Olmsted Center. The answers that you're going  
7 to get from the arsenal are never, ever going to  
8 give you any answers. What we have here is a City  
9 budget of over 400 million dollars, and if you  
10 believe that the delays are 25 percent and I can  
11 tell you that the general inflation rate for  
12 general construction materials and labor is over  
13 10 percent but our asphalt and concrete inflation  
14 is skyrocketing, if you allow this delay to go  
15 another year, you will cost 12 million dollars.  
16 That's about one playground apiece so what I'm  
17 here to suggest rather than reinventing the wheel  
18 that you use the fact that you should give up one  
19 of your playgrounds each if you don't save that 12  
20 million dollars by starting the reforms today. You  
21 can go to the Comptroller's Office and ask him if  
22 my estimations are correct. Thank you.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you.

24

25

2 SCOTT KEARNEY: Please do something  
3 right away. Giving them a year, why would you do  
4 that? (INAUDIBLE)

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.  
6 Since Scott is not here yet, we're going to move  
7 to our online testimonies. We have K Webster  
8 followed by Kathy Nizzari. Once the Sergeant-at-  
9 Arms cues you, feel free to start.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: K., are you there?

12 K WEBSTER: Yes, I'm here.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Okay, great.

14 K WEBSTER: Thank you to the Play Fair  
15 Coalition, to Council Members Lee and Krishnan. My  
16 name is K Webster. I'm the President of the Sara  
17 Roosevelt Park Community Coalition. I've lived in  
18 and around this park since 1978. Our Coalition has  
19 been here since the early '80s. Out of a very hard  
20 beginning, we built and keep rebuilding this  
21 unique park with residents, non-profits, small  
22 businesses, housed and unhoused volunteers, our  
23 local precinct, and a dedicated park staff led by  
24 Manager Jamil Phillips, and our new Manhattan  
25 Parks Commissioner Perez who immediately

2 implemented the solutions he could to keep us  
3 safer, but I am here to testify about the impacts  
4 of a future without dedicated and long-promised  
5 funding for parks like mine. We lived, and some of  
6 us died, the reality of a New York City parks  
7 system that has been operating with an austerity  
8 budget for 40+ years, which is when we started and  
9 why we started. Funding that isn't baked into our  
10 City's DNA sabotages the present and undermines  
11 the future. Climate disasters won't wait, decades  
12 of inequality can't wait, retaining Parks staff  
13 that is able to care for parks because we made it  
14 clear that we care about them and their families  
15 can't wait, and a City that now relies on a ZIP  
16 code to ensure a decent life shouldn't wait. Parks  
17 are not an amenity. They are the lifeblood of the  
18 City, our collective backyards, our democratic  
19 meeting spaces, our City's lungs, and most  
20 children's only experience with nature's  
21 complexity and beauty. They also literally save  
22 lives. Honestly and personally, my park, we can't  
23 afford another year like these past years have  
24 left us. Thank you so much.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.

3 Next, we have Kathy Nizzari.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

5 KATHY NIZZARI: Good afternoon, Chair  
6 Krishnan and Parks Committee Members. I'm Kathy  
7 Nizzari of Lights Out, a diverse coalition of 50  
8 organizations dedicated to protecting New York's  
9 wildlife.

10 We urge you to allocate 1 percent of  
11 the City's budget to the Parks Department. Smaller  
12 cities commit larger budgets to community spaces.  
13 New York considers itself a progressive leader,  
14 yet our parks operate with an austerity budget and  
15 are in the worst condition in decades. These  
16 problems jeopardize our park safety and  
17 cleanliness for everyone. The City must take park  
18 trash as seriously as street trash. We deserve  
19 better.

20 Parks serve a vital role in climate  
21 mitigation, social equity, and provide mental  
22 health oases. While Central and Prospect Parks  
23 have private partners that help fund maintenance,  
24 those in lower-income and minority neighborhoods  
25 suffer the most, pointing to the environmental

2 injustice of Parks' operations. Birdwatching alone  
3 generates 2 billion dollars in eco-tourism  
4 annually. A particular concern is derelict fishing  
5 wire and hooks that cause harm and death to birds  
6 and other animals including dogs. Children and  
7 adults also risk injury. One rescuer reported over  
8 250 animals seriously injured from derelict  
9 fishing gear per year in one park. As 150 parks  
10 have bodies of water, the total number can easily  
11 be in the tens of thousands. Of that, roughly two-  
12 thirds are fatal. The Parks Department's stringent  
13 laws regarding fishing are mostly ignored.  
14 Additionally, harming, stealing, and dumping  
15 animals, often resulting in death, are also  
16 prohibited by Parks and New York State animal  
17 cruelty laws. All of these violations come with  
18 fines up to 1,500 dollars and/or jail time up to  
19 20 days per offense. With criminal justice reform  
20 a priority, prevention is preferable. To avoid  
21 harm to thousands of animals and possibly humans,  
22 we suggest adequate signage in multiple languages  
23 throughout the parks, increased trash receptacles,  
24 surveillance cameras in vulnerable areas, cameras  
25 reduce speeding on city streets by 72 percent so

2 we know that's effective, empower employees with  
3 enforcement, enforce fines for illegal release of  
4 animals, relocate these animals to wildlife  
5 rehabilitation centers or shelters.

6           The Council should also take steps to  
7 avoid the emotional and financial toll of  
8 volunteer rescuers. The gravity of the problem  
9 cannot be overstated. Abandoned guinea pigs are  
10 just the tip of the iceberg. With warmer weather  
11 now upon us...

12           SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired. Thank  
13 you.

14           KATHY NIZZARI: If I could just say one  
15 quick thing.

16           CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: You can go ahead  
17 and summarize. Sorry, yeah.

18           KATHY NIZZARI: Thank you. Our digital  
19 testimony provides details and photos, and Lights  
20 Out is ready to work with you on these  
21 initiatives.

22           If I could quickly echo the necessity  
23 of tree inspections, I was conked on the head by a  
24 falling tree branch last year and still suffer

2 cognitive issues a whole year later so this is  
3 vital for public health. Thank you for your time.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.  
5 Scott Daly, New York Junior Tennis League. I've  
6 seen you quite a bit this week so feel free to go  
7 ahead and give your testimony when ready.

8 SCOTT DALY: Thank you very much,  
9 Council Member. Hello, Council Member Holden.  
10 Thank you very much for having me here. I'm sorry  
11 I was across the hall to start.

12 My name is Scott Daly. I'm the Senior  
13 Director of NYJTL, New York Junior Tennis and  
14 Learning. We provide tennis in all 51 Council  
15 Districts throughout the City of New York. We're  
16 funded under the Physical Education and Fitness  
17 Initiative. This year, we are seeking an increase  
18 of 200,000 dollars, up to 1 million dollars. We  
19 (INAUDIBLE) the same number for the last 15 years.  
20 I'm sure I don't have to tell anybody what has  
21 happened to costs in the last 15 years, and yet  
22 we're still able to provide all these services.  
23 Throughout the year, we're going to serve over  
24 85,000 children in City parks, in schools, in  
25 community centers. Look at the demographics part

2 of the chart on the testimony that's submitted, 75  
3 percent are black, Latino, or Asian, 2/3 of the  
4 people we serve are 10 years old or younger. These  
5 are the target populations that we want to hit. We  
6 are an opportunity. That's what we get to give  
7 these kids because of the City Council, access and  
8 opportunity, which they otherwise would never have  
9 without the funding support that we get from the  
10 City Council. Right now, I want you to know we are  
11 in 23 separate parks throughout the City of New  
12 York in all five boroughs. We service every single  
13 park that we can possibly get into. During the  
14 summer of 2020, the first year of COVID, we were  
15 able to go out into eight different parks, we had  
16 programming, physical fitness activities, getting  
17 the kids out of the house. We firmly believe in  
18 our founder, Arthur Ashe, who said that lives can  
19 be transformed through tennis and activity on the  
20 courts.

21 I want to thank everybody here. We  
22 could not do this without the strong funding  
23 support of the New York City Council. On behalf of  
24 the youngsters and parents served by NYJTL, I  
25 personally want to thank the Council for its

2 commitment to youth and the City of New York.

3 Thank you very much. It's great seeing everybody.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.

5 Great seeing you, Scott.

6 SCOTT DALY: Thank you.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Finally, we have

8 our last two online folks giving testimony.

9 Merritt Birnbaum followed by Kevin O'Keefe.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

11 MERRITT BIRNBAUM: Thank you and good

12 afternoon. My name is Merritt Birnbaum, and I'm

13 the President and CEO of Riverside Park

14 Conservancy. I just want to start by thanking the

15 Administration for the capital funding to restore

16 the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. This act will

17 save one of our city's most unique architectural

18 treasures from literally falling down so thank

19 you.

20 Riverside Park Conservancy works in

21 partnership with the Parks Department to care for

22 400 acres of parkland spread over six miles from

23 59th Street to 181st Street in Manhattan. With an

24 estimated 3 million annual visitors, our core

25 users are residents from the Upper West Side, West

2 Harlem, and Washington Heights. I'm here to  
3 emphatically support the Play Fair advocacy  
4 efforts and to urge the City to fulfill the  
5 Mayor's campaign promise of 1 percent of the  
6 budget for Parks. After 40 years of austerity, the  
7 time is now to recognize Parks as essential  
8 infrastructure and a critical determinate of  
9 health, safety, and social equity. Our Conservancy  
10 is fortunate to be able to leverage private  
11 donations to supplement and enhance the work of  
12 the Parks Department. We currently employ a staff  
13 of 60 park professionals, including 24 full-time  
14 gardeners, and we oversee nearly 40,000 hours of  
15 annual volunteer time in the community. Despite  
16 these accomplishments, I'm here today to  
17 underscore the challenges that we and our  
18 counterparts at smaller parks face every day. As  
19 an aging waterfront park with complex parkscape  
20 and landscape, our park's very survival is  
21 threatened by a crumbling infrastructure and the  
22 reality of climate change. We rely on our partners  
23 at the Parks Department for essential maintenance,  
24 trash management, and safety. At current funding  
25 levels, there are simply not enough DPR staff to

2 proactively address the basic issues before they  
3 become crises. I want to underscore that having  
4 fewer Parks workers actually costs the City more  
5 in the long run. When basic park needs go  
6 unaddressed, they become bigger and more expensive  
7 such as the major drainage issues we are fighting  
8 in Riverside when every rainfall causes massive  
9 flooding, erosion...

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired. Thank  
11 you.

12 MERRITT BIRNBAUM: Just to summarize,  
13 we're by no means alone. We are well-loved by our  
14 neighbors, but it's very indicative of the major  
15 imbalances and inequities present in our city. The  
16 bottom line is we need to stop divesting our  
17 capital budget from our operational budget and  
18 start adequately maintaining public spaces. It's  
19 criminal, the taxpayers are being burdened with  
20 the ballooning cost of deferred maintenance that  
21 could've been averted. Thank you.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.  
23 Kevin O'Keefe.

24 KEVIN O'KEEFE: Thank you. My name is  
25 Kevin O'Keefe. I am testifying in my role as

2 Founder and Executive Director of St. Vartan Park  
3 Conservancy. Our 501(c)3 is one of the partners of  
4 the Partnership for Parks program that the  
5 Executive Director of City Parks Foundation,  
6 Heather, eloquently spoke about earlier, and one  
7 of the many reasons for the need for a much  
8 greater Parks budget is mental health. One of the  
9 catalysts behind the Conservancy's launch was that  
10 the Parks Department was convinced that it needed  
11 to open to the public a Midtown Manhattan garden  
12 off 1st Avenue in St. Vartan Park that had locked  
13 out the general public for decades. Since it's  
14 been open, many of the garden visitors have told  
15 Conservancy team members that the green space has  
16 become a mental health oasis for them in crowded  
17 Midtown. Depression and anxiety are lessened by  
18 access to open, clean, stewarded park spaces. As  
19 the Conservancy combs through the well-over a  
20 billion dollars the City has spent on mental  
21 health programs, we don't find any ROI for Parks  
22 designated mental health programs. We think about  
23 what could have been. An example of many objective  
24 studies that support the mental health of benefits  
25 of city nature is one that actually just dropped

2 two weeks ago by the Lancet Regional Health  
3 Network. It studied more than 400,000 new mothers  
4 and shows that those in urban areas with more tree  
5 coverage have a significant reduced risk of being  
6 diagnosed with postpartum depression. As the City  
7 looks to raise its budget to at least 1 percent,  
8 we thank you for considering the power of parks on  
9 the improvement of mental health.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you. I'm  
11 Chair of the Mental Health Committee so this is  
12 perfect. It's a perfect merging of the two  
13 Committees so thank you for that.

14 KEVIN O'KEEFE: You're welcome.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Finally, we  
16 actually have one more in person. Terri, you're  
17 going to be closing us out so go ahead.

18 TERRI CARTA: I'll do my best. Good  
19 afternoon, Chair Krishnan, Co-Chair Lee, and Parks  
20 Committee Members. Thank you so much for the  
21 opportunity to testify this afternoon on the  
22 City's Fiscal Year '24 budget and the need for at  
23 least 1 percent of the budget to be allocated to  
24 New York City Parks.

2 My name is Terri Carta, and I'm the  
3 Executive Director of Jamaica Bay Rockaway Parks  
4 Conservancy. We're a public/private partnership  
5 dedicated to improving more than 10,000 acres of  
6 public parklands, wetlands, and natural areas  
7 around Jamaica Bay and the Rockaway Peninsula with  
8 our partners at New York City Parks as well as  
9 State Parks and the National Park Service.

10 I'm here today as part of the Play Fair  
11 Coalition calling for at least 1 percent of the  
12 budget to be allocated to the Parks Department.  
13 This minimum level of funding is vital in order to  
14 provide equitable access to well-maintained,  
15 resilient, safe green space, beaches, natural  
16 areas, and connective greenways. In addition to  
17 sufficiently funding the Parks Department overall,  
18 I want to highlight the need for increased funding  
19 that will support the Natural Resources Group, or  
20 NRG, within the Parks Department. This very small,  
21 too small team is focused on protection and  
22 restoration of our most vulnerable landscapes,  
23 forests, woodlands, freshwater wetland, and salt  
24 marsh ecosystems. For instance, NRG is restoring  
25 lost wetland habitat in Rockaway Community Park

2 which is literally on the front doorsteps of the  
3 Ocean Bay NYCHA Campus in Far Rockaway where we  
4 co-lead birding programs and education programs  
5 for example. NRG is also replacing eroded sediment  
6 and planting grasses at Four Sparrow Marsh which  
7 is in the District of Council Member Narcisse,  
8 helping to remove large marine debris and derelict  
9 boats as well. NRG at the Greenbelt Native Plant  
10 Nursery in Floyd Bennett Field collect and  
11 propagate local seeds from native species and then  
12 grow them for restoration projects in the parks  
13 that I just mentioned and parks across all five  
14 boroughs. This is really cool stuff, and it's  
15 climate-forward, locally focused, and exactly the  
16 kind of initiative that New York City needs to  
17 invest more in, not cut budget from. 1 percent of  
18 the City budget for Parks is a barebones minimum.  
19 We need to at least meet this threshold within the  
20 Fiscal '24 budget. Thank you so much for your  
21 attention to this need and for the opportunity to  
22 testify today.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON LEE: Thank you so much.

24 I know that all of us here will definitely help to

25

2 continue to fight for that 1 percent so thank you  
3 all for staying.

4 I think that's it. I don't believe  
5 there's anyone else that is here to sign up or to  
6 testify.

7 With that, I believe we are finished.  
8 That concludes our FY24 Parks hearing so thank you  
9 so much. [GAVEL]

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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 April 9, 2023