



April 26, 2023

New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

Legislation: Intro. 760, Intro. 962 & Preconsidered Legislation #3294

Testimony by: Sue Donoghue, NYC Parks Commissioner

Good afternoon, Chair Krishnan, members of the Parks Committee, and other members of the City Council. I am Sue Donoghue, Commissioner for New York City Parks. I'm pleased to be joined today by our First Deputy Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa and other members of our senior staff. I want to start by noting our appreciation for the Council's support for our City parks and open spaces, including our pools and beaches, ensuring that New Yorkers from all boroughs can safely access these incredible amenities, both indoors and outdoors, and enjoy all of the programming opportunities that Parks is able to offer.

NYC Parks has long been committed to improving New Yorkers' quality of life through aquatic recreation, promoting health, fitness, and safety awareness at all our pools and beaches. Whether cooling off in the summer or getting fit in the winter, there is nothing like a refreshing swim in one of our indoor or outdoor pools, and as you all well know, our City beaches are the primary getaway summer destination for millions of New Yorkers when the temperatures start to rise. I'd like to begin today by offering a brief overview of the beaches and pools under our jurisdiction.

In addition to the 148 miles of waterfront parkland, our agency maintains over 14 miles of public beaches, which we manage as nine separate beach areas located at various points along New York City's shoreline, all of which are open to the public for swimming and other recreational activities, completely for free. Our beaches are open for swimming from Memorial Day weekend through the week after Labor Day.

NYC Parks also has a total of 65 public pool facilities under our jurisdiction, 45 of which – nearly 70% - are located in neighborhoods that have been declared Environmental Justice areas or Potential Environmental Justice areas, as defined by the EJNYC Report, which identified low-income and/or minority communities based on U.S. Census data. 53 of our 65 facilities host outdoor pools, ranging in size from the massive Olympic pools at Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx and McCarren Park in Brooklyn, which is 330 feet long and well over 4 feet deep, to our medium-sized Intermediate pools, down to the wonderful Mini Pools located in our playgrounds, where you'll see our littlest New Yorkers splashing and enjoying the cool water on a hot day. Many of our larger outdoor pool facilities offer smaller wading pools, primarily used by younger kids and their families, alongside the larger, deeper pools.

The remaining 12 of our 65 facilities host indoor pools, usually located within larger NYC Parks Recreation Centers, NYC Parks indoor pools are crucial in delivering swimming opportunities to New Yorkers year-round. Our indoor pools are nearly all Intermediate-sized, roughly 60 to 70 feet long, except for the larger Olympic pool at the Aquatic Center at Flushing Meadows Corona Park. With an NYC Recreation Center Membership, which is completely free for anyone 24 or younger, and available to adults and seniors for a very, very low cost, New Yorkers can enjoy our indoor pools and our robust offerings of aquatic programming for no additional cost whatsoever. This programming ranges from water exercise classes for adults and seniors to our Adaptive Swim program, which offers aquatic exercise therapy for people with disabilities, to water polo or water ballet, and of course, our beloved lap swim and open swim sessions.



Beyond the important benefits for health and fitness, tragic drowning accidents over the years have proved all too often that water safety and swim instruction can save lives. Accidental drowning is the second-leading cause of unintentional injury-related death among children under the age of 14, with a disproportionate impact on black and brown youth, which is why we are very proud to offer a wide variety of swim instruction classes, so that New Yorkers of any age can learn vital water safety skills, develop healthy fitness habits, and have fun in the water throughout their lives. This takes place primarily through our Learn To Swim program, as well as through Swim For Life, our targeted initiative conducted in partnership with the NYC Department of Education. Swim For Life focuses on 2nd grade students and provides them with top-certified swim instruction at our indoor pools during the school day, as a regular part of their weekly class schedule, reaching over 260 2nd grade classes so far this Fiscal Year. Our young Swim For Life students are eager to learn and literally jump right in to their classes with no fear or inhibitions. These young students are a true inspiration for us all and a reminder that it's never too late in life to learn how to swim, as we also offer swim classes tailored for adults and senior citizens. Nearly 8,500 New Yorkers of all ages have taken advantage of our swim instruction classes so far this Fiscal Year, joining hundreds of thousands of others that have benefitted from our swim instruction programs over the past decade. Additionally, we have begun to offer "dry-land" water safety instruction as part of our youth public programming, encouraging kids to "Be Water Safe" in different environments in and around water, including waterparks, oceans, lakes, and rivers.

Our beaches and pools play a special role in our present daily lives, but they have also had a fascinating history, many dating back to the New Deal era of the 1930s. Of course, like any public amenity, our pools have seen a lot of intense usage over the decades and experienced significant wear and tear, which is why we are dedicated to investing in the care and maintenance of our pools and the facilities that house them. We have active capital projects at 4 of our indoor pool facilities and 5 of our outdoor pools. In addition, last year, this Administration provided the agency with an additional \$67 million dollars in capital funding to bring over 20 additional pool facilities into a state of good repair. We are assessing the highest priority sites for these renovations and will seek to advance all of these capital projects as swiftly and efficiently as possible. Lastly, we are pleased to be working in partnership with NYC DDC to advance two new recreation center projects that will include indoor pools – the \$144 million-dollar Shirley Chisholm Recreation Center at Nostrand Playground in Brooklyn and a new \$131 million-dollar recreation center facility at Roy Wilkins Park in southeast Queens. These will be the first new NYC Parks pools in over 15 years, delivering access to state-of-the-art recreational and aquatic facilities to the communities that need them most.

In addition to keeping our beaches and pool facilities in the best condition possible, we are constantly seeking out new opportunities to offer a truly special experience for our visitors. In recent years, through our Cool Pools NYC initiative, we've upgraded 16 of our outdoor pools with fun summer-themed wall art, lounge chairs for sunbathing and relaxing poolside, cabana-style shade structures, new plantings and fun and free poolside activities, including games, sports, arts and crafts, and fitness classes. We were very proud to reinvigorate and reimagine these sites, most of which hadn't been renovated or improved since they were built decades ago and give New Yorkers the chance to experience an old neighborhood amenity in a completely new way. Keeping our beaches and pools clean, enjoyable and safe is our top priority, and to make it a reality, it takes an amazing team effort from our incredibly hard-working staff, including our Maintenance and Operations workers, Aquatics programming staff, Lifeguards and Parks Enforcement Patrol.



We are only a month away from the start of our beach season, and outdoor pools will open shortly after that, so the agency is gearing up – preparing our sites and facilities and bringing on thousands of seasonal employees that will work alongside our year-round staff to help keep our beaches and pools clean and safe for the public to enjoy. It is no secret that many sectors of the national economy have been impacted by the COVID pandemic and many employers are still facing hiring challenges, and it's been well documented that qualified lifeguards are in short supply. While many U.S. cities had to make the difficult choice in 2021 and 2022 to close their public beaches and pools or start charging attendance fees, we are proud that New York City was able to keep all of our public pools and beaches open for free public use, a testament to the City's commitment to equitable access. Many Council Members and other elected officials helped us get the word out as we launched our lifeguard recruitment efforts late last year, and we are well underway in our training and certification process to make the 2023 beach and pool season as successful as possible. I'm pleased to note that the City has reached an agreement with DC37 on a pay increase for new and second-year seasonal lifeguards as well as a retention bonus for all lifeguards working through mid-August, but the reality is that the entire nation is still facing a very challenging environment for lifeguard hiring. Despite these challenges, keeping our beachgoers safe will continue to be our top priority, and our incredible lifeguards will continue to be a core component of our beach and pool operations.

I'll now turn to the legislation being formally heard today, Intro. 760, Intro. 962 and Preconsidered Legislation #3294. Intro. 760, as currently drafted, would require NYC Parks to provide free swim instruction to any child between the ages of 1.5 years old and 13 years old, within a year of their application. Intro. 962 would compel the agency to conduct a survey of City property to identify potential sites for new public pools, develop a plan to provide public access to pools under the jurisdiction of the NYC Department of Education, and offer swimming lessons at a minimum of 3 days a week at each of NYC Parks' indoor pools for no additional cost to participants. Preconsidered 3294 would require the agency to submit an annual report including data on the number of lifeguards and other agency staff hired to work at beaches and pools, safety training provided to those hires, as well as information about emergency incidents at beaches and pools and the number of pools that are closed to the public for maintenance or other purposes.

As I hope we have made clear, NYC Parks is dedicated to making sure that New Yorkers can safely enjoy the most access possible to City beaches and pools, so they can stay cool, get healthy or just relax and have fun. Millions of New Yorkers enjoy these amenities every year, and we dedicate an incredible amount of time, energy and resources making these special places the best they can be. In particular, it should be noted that some of the mandates that would be instituted by the bills as currently drafted would be very challenging to implement, given the existing limitations of our physical infrastructure and existing staff. Having said that, we certainly share the Council's goals reflected in the legislation and look forward to discussing the bills further with the sponsors, so we can better understand the intended outcomes and work together to address any operational or policy concerns.

We'd like to thank the Council for their continued interest and advocacy regarding these subjects, as we know how important pools and swimming safety are to the constituents in your districts. If there are any questions on the legislative bills or related topics, we would be happy to answer those at this time.



OFFICE OF THE

MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

1 Centre Street, 19th floor, New York, NY 10007
(212) 669-8300 p (212) 669-4306 f

431 West 125th Street, New York, NY 10027
(212) 531-1609 p (212) 531-4615 f

www.manhattanbp.nyc.gov

Mark Levine, Borough President

MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT MARK LEVINE TESTIMONY BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION APRIL 26, 2023

Good afternoon, Chair Krishnan, and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Mark Levine, and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am proud to partner with Council Member Menin on Intro 760-2022, a bill that would provide life saving swimming lessons for free to all New York City children aged 13 and younger.

Summer is nearly here – and with it comes free time with loved ones, outside and in the water. Pools and beaches allow us a chance to cool down, to spend time with each other, to exercise, and to enjoy the waters. But [between 2008 and 2022](#), at least 58 people have drowned in New York City beaches or pools alone.

We know the solutions to prevent more of these deaths – well paid and trained lifeguards, public pools where people can practice swimming, and swimming lessons. Swimming lessons don't just teach people to swim, they help people stay safe in the water, and help ensure people understand when it's safe to enter the water in the first place. But according to a [2017 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene survey](#), over one in four New Yorkers aged 18 and under cannot swim. Further, over 30% of female students, nearly one in three Black and Asian students, and one in four Latino/a students cannot swim. We need to do better.

New York City currently [provides free swim lessons](#) with an NYC Parks Recreation Center membership. As of [2022](#), the city's free swim lessons program had 30,000 participants a year. But 30,000 in a city of nearly 1 million public school students isn't enough. That's why I'm proud to support Intro 760, which would require the Parks and Recreation Department to guarantee free swimming lessons are provided to New York children aged 13 and younger, within one year of their parent or guardian applying for lessons and regardless of whether their families have paid for a recreation center membership. I was also glad to see Speaker Adams and the City Council commit to prioritizing swimming lessons, lifeguard training, and public pool access in the Speaker's recent State of the City address.

Thank you again to the Chair and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today. Free swimming programs keep New Yorkers safer, support health and wellbeing, and help guarantee that we can have fun in the water. I fully believe that guaranteeing lessons like these will help save lives. I look forward to working with the Council, and the Mayor, to get this done.



New York City Council
Committee on Parks and Recreation
Council Member Shekar Krishnan, Chair

Dear Speaker Adams, Chair Krishnan, Council Members,

My name is Shanna Blanchard and I am here on behalf of the Water Safety Coalition, a group of concerned citizens and non-profit organizations working to make water safety education an essential right for all, to save lives and create a more inclusive recreation community, with a focus on the Rockaway peninsula in Queens, NY. We offer our full support to introduced local laws Int. 0760-2022, Int. 0962-2023, and T2023-3294, and hope that these bills can turn the tide in how the city prioritizes water safety and how citizens can equitably and safely interact with our city of water.

Much of our work has focused on the Rockaway peninsula, a bay and ocean facing community with Jamaica Bay on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other. While this seemingly offers a great opportunity for waterfront access and water-based recreation, there are many gaps in the city's infrastructure and education system that make for a deadly and dangerous summer year after year. In Rockaway, residents dread the sight of helicopters hovering over open water as that usually means that a near-death or drowning has occurred. While a coastal community, Rockaway has no city operated public pool with swim and water safety programs where residents can learn to swim and/or be trained to be a lifeguard. The unfortunate reality is that someone will likely drown off the coast of Rockaway in the coming months. As our climate continues to warm, and beach season extends far past the historically accepted dates of Memorial Day to Labor Day, it is critical that the City take preventative measures to deliver the life-saving skills, education, and infrastructure NYC residents need to positively and safely benefit from their waterfronts. We believe these bills are important steps in that direction.

There are various water safety education tools and programs available in New York City, largely from small nonprofits, but many young people do not have access to them. This inequity costs lives - according to the CDC, "one in five people who die from drowning are children 14 and younger. For every child who dies from drowning another five receive emergency department care for nonfatal submersion injuries. We believe that Int 0760, where the city would provide swimming lessons to children 13 and younger at no cost, can save lives and better connect young people to their local environment and introduce them to a range of opportunities including jobs, hobbies, and social and community connection. We know of course that NYC needs more pools to most equitably deliver swimming skills and access throughout NYC, which is why Int. 0962-2023 is so critical in building the swim and water safety infrastructure NYC needs, as well as better utilizing existing infrastructure such as Department of Education swimming pools for public use.



Finally, we know of the many mental, social, and physical health benefits of water-based recreation in our pools and beaches, and we know that we need appropriate staffing and facilities to deliver these benefits to New Yorkers. We strongly support T2023-3294, that would require reporting on staffing and training at NYC beaches and pools, and associated incidents requiring emergency assistance. We acknowledge the complexity in the hiring of seasonal staff to best safeguard our beaches and pools, and believe this legislation is one step in building out a broader network of lifeguards and the resources needed to maintain facilities and open spaces that can allow for equitable and safe access to water-based recreation.

We further acknowledge that there is substantial funding needed to create more equitable and inclusive access to waterfronts and water-based recreation. We support the Play Fair campaign and believe that 1% of the city budget for NYC Parks can help address the inequities in access and programming in NYC beaches and pools. Funding for this collective legislation should be prioritized and is critical to making it a reality.

We hope that this collective legislation is the beginning of further city investment in water safety and equitable waterfront access and water-based recreation. We strongly support the City Council in passing this legislation, and hope that the City will also consider additional life-saving measures such as incorporating water safety education in the classroom and assessing and extending the traditional beach season and lifeguard hours. Thank you for your time and please let us know how we can help.

Sincerely,

Shanna Blanchard
Water Safety Coalition
Candide717@gmail.com



**The New York
Academy of Sciences**

212.298.8600

nyas@nyas.org

www.nyas.org

115 Broadway, 8th floor, New York, NY 10006

April 27, 2023

To:

Committee on Parks and Recreation

NYC City Council

43 Park Row

New York, NY 10038

Re: Committee Meeting 4-26-23, Testimony

To the Council and Committee,

Entering the Zoom sphere as an alternative to in-classroom learning during the COVID 19 pandemic by default alienated many children from their teacher and their peers. This learning modus operandi greatly diminished the level to which many students were able to structure their school day. Statistical and anecdotal evidence suggest that finding reasons to stay motivated and focused on academics became difficult for many young students. Further, those who had difficulty expressing themselves in the classroom would struggle more in an environment hinging on a WiFi signal.

This ripple effect has greatly increased the need for alternative and supplemental learning environments that reengage the student population to convince children that their growth is something of value, and to encourage them to explore possibilities in the world around them. Since 2010, when the NYAS began its PreK-12 New York City STEAM Education Initiative, we have witnessed during our in-school and Afterschool STEAM mentoring programs that the direct impact of transporting a student outside of the classroom, either figuratively or literally, strengthens a child's interest and investment in schooling. In our Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) afterschool settings, STEAM activities take them outside - onto a playground, to the sidewalk, making cyanotype prints or planting seed balls. They have a place to go, something to do outside of school, where they can learn and ask the questions that they might otherwise be terrified to ask in the school day setting. In our day school Scientist-in-Residence program, students work in groups on their own ungraded research projects with real scientists that have them visiting real labs, collecting real data, like that on bird sounds in a nearby park, or on the root causes behind their neighborhood's food desert.

We at the New York Academy of Sciences believe strongly that parks and pools are essential to help keep young minds engaged, stimulated and out of harm's way, especially during the summer months when schools and many afterschool programs are on break. Given the impact of COVID on both the behavior and mental health of New York City residents of all ages, coupled with the unprecedented effects climate change is having on our environment, including the growing disruptions to shoreline tides and increasing erosion of New York City's fragile coast, are made even more tenuous by unusual weather systems affecting outdoor public spaces. Children need a safe environment to engage with their peers, especially during these stressful times. It is critical to be

able to monitor what is happening in our beaches, pools, and parks through more consistent reporting on accidents, injuries, and abnormalities in operations, and maintain proper staffing of those armed with adequate medical training, sense of urgency, and ability to prevent distress before it occurs. As a network of researchers and scientists, we are a community (which is in fact your community, as well!) anchored in presenting the flaws and the hurdles in any process, as those elements are key in furthering progress for the public good.

Our NY Academy of Sciences Annals houses a research findings from our network. Please see [here](#) for NYAS peer-reviewed and published data on child mental health post-COVID.

Cordially,

Dr. Meghan Groome
Senior Vice President, K-12 Education
New York Academy of Sciences

+ POOL

25 Park Place, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10007

April 26, 2023

Dear Committee Members:

New York City Council
Committee on Parks &
Recreation
250 Broadway
New York, NY

On behalf of the Board of Directors, staff and tens of thousands of citizens in the Friends of + POOL community, I am writing to express our support for Bill 0962 to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to public swimming pool locations and swimming lessons offered by the Department of Parks and Recreation and Bill 0760 to provide children 13 and younger with swimming lessons at no cost. As one of NYC's only nonprofit swim providers offering swim lessons for youth at no cost, we are particularly interested in the Bill 0962's directive to assess sites for the construction of new swimming pools and open pools under the Department of Education's jurisdiction to the public when school is not in session.

CC:
City Council Speaker
Adrienne Adams
Councilmember Julie
Menin
Councilmember
Selvena
Brooks-Powers
Councilmember
Christopher Marte

Our nonprofit organization was born out of [+ POOL](#), an idea for a water-filtering, floating swimming pool with four pool arms (kids pool, lap pool, lounge pool and sports pool) forming a plus-shape. What started as a simple idea hatched by a small group of designers, has launched a movement to *take back NYC's rivers*. After years of advocacy, we are now working with the City to create regulatory pathways to support safe public access points in the rivers around NYC, joining [the many cities worldwide](#) that are reclaiming their urban waters for swimming after decades of work improving water quality in urban waters. There are 520 miles of waterfront across NYC, more than Boston, Miami and San Francisco combined. That is [520 miles of economic opportunity](#) and a whole lot of public water controlled by the City to identify suitable locations for additional public swimming pools!

Lack of Adequate Swim Facilities

NYC is incredibly diverse and yet, access to public recreational space--a tool for advancing health equity in urban environments--is not always equitable. As the Council is now well aware, NYC has the lowest number of public pools per capita of 25 major US cities surveyed, according to a study published by urban parks consultant Peter Harnik. There are only .7 NYC pools per 100,000 residents, compared with Chicago's 3.3 and Boston's 5.7. The lack of adequate swim facilities directly impacts equitable access to swim education. It also means the aquatics field within NYC does not reflect the diversity of our city. The effects of inequities in swimming education are profound, and affect children of color most. USA Swimming Foundation reports that 69% of Black children and 58% of Hispanic children have little to no swimming ability. Black children drown at almost triple the overall national

Supporting Bill 0962 & 0760

rate according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Furthermore, 79% of children in households with incomes less than \$50,000 have little-to-no swimming ability. For these reasons, we applaud the bill's prioritization of Environmental Justice communities.

About our Programs

At Friends of + POOL, we see swim education as a necessary precondition to our vision for the future. That is, where the people that represent the full diversity of NYC are swimming safely in the river. Since launching our programs, we have provided more than 500 low-income youth with a series of free swim lessons, working to [first make them comfortable in the water](#), and then teaching them skills to be safe in the water.

We thank City Council Speaker Adams and Councilmember Marte for supporting our learn-to-swim programs this fiscal year, which allowed us to teach 150 youth how to swim for free. In addition, this fiscal year, we have also provided opportunities for hundreds of families to enjoy water based exercise together through our free family events, and taught 95 adults how to swim, giving them skills that could one day save their life. Last month, we offered an all day camp at John Jay College that merged our STEM and swim curriculum, teaching students about water safety, water quality, the environmental issues affecting our water, and basic swimming techniques. All of our learn-to-swim programs follow USA Swimming standards for teaching youth and adults to swim, including working with experienced instructors in groups of no more than five, and ensuring all beginners have a minimum of six hours in the pool to practice their skills over the course of the program. In our programs, experienced instructors teach students safe ways to enter and exit the pool; how to float, kick, and tread water; breathing techniques; body positioning; and leg movement. Our programs are also part of the Make a Splash initiative, a nationwide initiative to ensure every child in the U.S. has the opportunity to learn to swim.

Challenges for Nonprofit Swim Providers

As we work to realize our own unique state-of-the-art facility, we lease pool time across the five boroughs to produce our learn-to-swim programs. Frankly, due to that lack of adequate swim facilities in our city, that means anywhere we can get pool time. This fluctuates every year and creates burdensome administrative work identifying pools and negotiating prices. Pool time can reach rates as high as \$600/hour, meaning facility costs for our programs that offer eight hours in the pool (over a series of eight classes) can reach nearly \$5,000 per group/session, without factoring in instructor costs, lifeguards, equipment, administrative and other staffing costs. Given so many of our city's swim providers are nonprofit organizations that do not own their pool facilities, this means that basic principles of supply and demand are no longer at play and swim programs become too expensive to produce and scale.

Supporting Bill 0962 & 0760

Proposed Bill Amendments

Identifying public pool facilities that can be made available to the private sector; and working with the city to identify underutilized spaces (like the river!) where we can design and build more aquatic facilities is no longer a desire, but a basic need for our city. Once identified and open, we also believe it is critical to mandate that nonprofit swim providers offering free swim lessons to low-income families should be provided free or reduced cost space. Otherwise, operators of the city's pools will charge rates that continue to make scaling these free programs for those who need it most impossible. Unfortunately, [this is what has happened](#) with the City's most recent investments in increasing the pool supply in the neighborhood of Crown Heights. We recommend that Council take lessons learned and that the bill be amended to consider this and/or subsequent bills incorporate a mandate for free or affordable space rental for those offering free swim lessons.

Need for Free Swim Lessons

Equally important to increasing the pool supply in NYC is the need to teach children to swim. According to the CDC, fatal drowning is the leading cause of death for children 1-4 and the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for children 5-14, behind motor vehicles. This is disturbing because it is preventable through education. Research shows that formal swimming lessons can reduce the likelihood of childhood drowning by 88%. Just as we teach children to safely cross the street, we must prioritize teaching students how to be safe around water and offer [free swim lessons to all](#). This should be a combination of in-class water safety that teaches students when to avoid the water and what to do in an emergency (low cost), as well as in-water instruction that teaches students how to breath, float, and move in the water. With proper facilities, we can start this in our universal pre-K programs. Given the breadth of our waterfront, and the increase of water-related emergencies and extreme heat caused by climate change, it is simply irresponsible not to do so. The city can and should leverage the private sector to make this goal affordable.

Addressing the Lifeguard Shortage

In addition to providing swim education for youth, we must provide opportunities for adults young and old interested in careers in aquatics to access swim facilities to hone their skills and prepare for lifeguard exams. As the City Council is well aware, we have been suffering a lifeguard shortage, a direct result of pool closures and reduced swim training during the pandemic, which has been exacerbated in NYC by our already limited supply of pool facilities. Since 2022, we have been working with Henry Street Settlement to co-design a workforce development program that will train local community members to support the operations of + POOL, including water quality sampling, maintenance of our unique facility, and lifeguarding. As part of the design of this program, this past January, we produced an information session for community members, attracting about 70 participants to discuss

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career opportunities in the field of aquatics and gather feedback about training needs related to lifeguarding. We asked participants if they knew how to swim, were interested in practicing their skills to prepare for the lifeguard exam, or if they were ready to take the exam and find a job. 56% of our survey respondents said they were interested in increased training to prepare for the lifeguard certification exam. Incentives for the private sector and increased funding for nonprofit groups to provide this advanced pre-training will greatly support the city's needs for quality lifeguards.

We believe that a well designed partnership between the private and public sectors to open up access to existing public facilities and share resources can reduce costs for swim instruction, increase swim safety across the city and bring greater equity to swim education. At Friends of + POOL, we have leveraged the private sector and built an organization that operates with 24% of its expenses donated in-kind or provided pro-bono. Let's collaborate to ensure every child in NYC knows how to swim, that our public swim facilities are accessible to all, and that we capitalize on the many benefits that come from providing safe access to the water that surrounds us.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Kara Meyer
Managing Director
kara@pluspool.org

Good afternoon Speaker Adams, Chair Krishnan, Council Members, and Colleagues,

I am Clare Hilger, a resident of Rockaway Beach, Queens, Secretary of Rockaway Beach Civic Association, a participating member of the Water Safety Coalition and a swimmer. I am here today to testify my strong support of legislation Int. 0760-2022, Int. 0962-2023, and T2023-3294.

First and foremost we need free swim lessons because currently there are multiple barriers keeping all children from learning to swim and learning to be safe around water in NYC. I live in a community surrounded by water. There is not only the factor of proximity to Jamaica Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, but also the effects of Climate Change, severe storms and flooding. We need to educate our young people on water safety and learning to swim so that they can thrive on a changing planet. With education and training this is possible.

What comes as the most shocking barrier is that there is not a public pool outside of 2 high schools, (one of which is smaller than competition size) on the Rockaway Peninsula. How is it that an ocean facing community has no public place where young people can learn to swim? There are private pools in Rockaway, but that would mean you would have to pay. And we do not just need free swimming lessons from NYC Parks and Rec but we need a pool where these lessons could be held. Free lessons in Rockaway now would be extremely limited or would require traveling off the peninsula, yet another barrier.

What makes a community great? What makes it thrive? We need quality schools, places to shop, local businesses, arts, culture, safe neighborhoods, parks, and with parks we need pools! Currently Rockaway is experiencing a boom in large scale residential building. All we hear in the news is that NYC needs affordable housing, but housing and what else, especially if you are surrounded by water! Bringing a large, competition-size pool to Rockaway could benefit the community beyond measure—swimming lessons, education on water safety, lifeguard training, we've been experiencing a lifeguard shortage for many years, athletics, we could have youth and adult swim teams, competitions, events, and lastly recreation, a fun and safe place to cool off on a summer day. It does not seem like a huge ask. NYC Parks and Rec have neglected many areas of Queens, not just Rockaway. Having a pool could provide education, recreation and employment, building a community of water people. If you are knowledgeable of how to stay safe in the water that will then open the doors to other activities on or in the water, surfing, kayaking, sailing, fishing and so on.

This legislation needs to be passed because it will not only usher in a culture of respect and knowledge of the water, but it can save lives. Every year there are drownings in Rockaway. I have watched someone drown. If I thought I could manage the water's conditions I would have gone in after him. But I know my limits and the water was rough and the rip current was strong. Had this person known these were unsafe conditions, then he would have never entered the water. When someone goes missing in the ocean in Rockaway, there is a large and costly response. I have seen Helicopters, Police, Fire, EMS and other first responders come to the scene. If we had the pools, with lessons, water safety education and experience in the water, these drownings could have been prevented.

Lastly there needs to be more transparency and reporting of data from the NYC Parks Lifeguards. In support of legislation T2023-3294, we need data from lifeguard operations. Obviously there is a problem since we have a shortage, let's all work together to solve the problem. There is such a missed opportunity in that an ocean facing community such as Rockaway can NOT have an open dialogue with its own lifeguards. If we had a pool to start training, we could even have a junior lifeguard program.

Every New Yorker should have the opportunity to enjoy and exercise safely in a pool or the ocean. We need pools. We need swim lessons, our communities will thrive because of them.



City Council Testimony re INT 962 April 26, 2023

Greetings Esteemed Speaker Adams, Council Members, Concerned Citizens, Friends

As you know NYC is a city of water, but for decades we have been an aquatic desert. We are under a triple threat of rising water levels; increase in storm strength and frequency; and developing waterfront areas. The New York City Panel on Climate Change anticipates by end of century that New York will experience 25% more annual rainfall than it does today. The intensity of rainfall is increasing and more water is falling in shorter periods of time. These “cloudburst” events can and do exceed capacity of the New York City sewer system. Bottom line, we can no longer “avoid” water. Therefore, at this time we must take advantage of this opportunity to create and realize a vision of climate resiliency and adaptation that centers on climate justice, the principal that ALL people should live, learn, work and play in a safe, healthy, resilient, sustainable environment, even as our climate changes.

Standards for determining if a community has adequate swimming pool facilities are difficult to come by. The National Park and Recreation Association has published a recommendation for communities to have one pool per 20,000 people. [The Pools Factor: Does Your Community Have Enough Space? \(niu.edu\)](#) We look at our Parks Department which has 58 facilities of which only 12 are actual swimming pools and only six are potentially available year round. In no way does this come anywhere near the recommendation of a pool for every 20,000 people! The recent map drawn up by CM Selvena Brooks Powers is a strong visual of the lack of infrastructure in this regard in the Council districts across the city with 16 of 32 districts not having any public facility at all. This is unconscionable when you consider that teaching water safety and swimming skills are a public safety imperative in a city surrounded by water and now increasingly threatened by more severe water situations brought by climate change.

Swim Strong Foundation is grateful to finally see some acknowledgement of this gap in addressing our public safety. Building multiuse aquatic facilities is not only important for the teaching of water competency, but the development of skills for use in first responder professions such as life guards, EMTs, specialized services in NYPD and FDNY as well as careers in the Coast Guard, Marines, Navy and Maritime industry.

Developing swimming skills is not only important for safety, but for our physical and mental health. There is no better total body workout than swimming. It is the only activity we can do from womb to tomb. It should be embraced as part of everybody’s exercise regime. From a mental health p.o.v, there have been studies which show the calming effects of water, even just to be near it, not necessarily in it.



https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/swimmers/health_benefits_water_exercise.html

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I not only ask support of this current legislation but ask that you broaden it to include situational knowledge of water education to be taught in our schools. Water safety training is NOT a conversation we have only in the summer or around recreational events. In the fall, we have hurricane season making our rip currents much more lethal, even from storms happening hundreds of miles away! Every winter, we rescue several people who have fallen through ice. In the spring, we have flooding and the need to understand when it is not safe to cross water on our roads and streets. We even have a new phenomenon, “sunny day flooding” which has nothing to do with rainfall, but everything to do with super moons creating super tides that far exceed the normal high tide levels. Those waters have nowhere to go but up on to the roadways and streets, causing flooding in areas which had always been dry before. We need to learn new skill sets to prepare ourselves for the way water impacts our lives. Our families need to understand that water safety and swimming skills are as important as buckling up your seatbelt when you get into an automobile or understanding what do during a fire.

I would like to thank the following for providing funding for our educational programming: Speaker Adams; CMS Ariola, Brooks-Powers, Krishnan, Lee, Osse and Palladino. I ask that you all follow their leadership in the next budget season to ensure your schools receive this training as well.

In closing, no one goes to the water and expects a bad outcome. In conjunction with building infrastructure that protects our land and buildings from higher water levels, let us also build the aquatic infrastructure and IQ, water education, and swimming skills for every New Yorker.

Thank you

Shawn Slevin

To: Committee on Parks and Recreation
From: Tara Eisenberg
Date: 26 April, 2023
Subject: Testimony in support of Int 0760-2022, 0962-2023, and T2023-3294

Good afternoon. I am Tara Eisenberg, a student at CUNY Law school and I've been studying our policies around pools. I am grateful to see the Council prioritizing this issue. The proposed legislation is a step in the right direction, but I urge us to think more broadly about how to fix our broken system of pools.

Two suggestions I am offering: 1. We undertake a full evaluation of our existing aquatic infrastructure to inform a comprehensive citywide aquatic master plan that acknowledges and leverages our existing strengths and weaknesses in addition to identifying sites for new facilities. 2. Hire an Aquatics Czar to get this done. That person can coordinate the multiple agencies behind these resources to marshal our collective energy toward designing and enacting the plan which will balance safety and equity concerns with usability and visitor experience.

Lack of swimming education is a huge issue in our City of islands. However, as the committee report suggests, this is not the sole reason pools demand more attention and resources. Properly maintained and well-programmed pools provide athletic opportunities, serve as cooling centers, act as child care spaces, and they can be fun, essential to building community bonds. They can provide year-round civic gathering and educational spaces, such as outdoor classrooms, especially in our communities that are sorely lacking. The report leaves out that many of our pools were originally sited in parks where discriminatory housing practices led to slum clearance projects, so uplifting them as positive community resources also offers opportunities to repair historic and ongoing racial harms. As already noted, it has been over half a century since any administration assessed the need for new or better pools. Reviewing our pools as a network will uncover where change is warranted.

The Covid pandemic reminded us how essential our access to outdoor community spaces are. I was pleased to see the City respond with creative solutions including Open Streets and Open Restaurants. But where were Open Pools? This was not just due to a lifeguard or resource shortage. Pools have long been seen by Parks as risk management headaches, plagued with a myriad system of confusing and unfriendly rules and designs that intentionally deter lingering and enjoyment. Tellingly, even in recent years, NYPD presence at the pools remained a priority despite other cost-cutting measures. My local pool, Kosciusko or K Pool in Bed-Stuy, consistently opened over a half hour late twice daily, citing the need to wait for NYPD. We have our priorities inverted if we are more willing to spend money on letting children suffer for 30 or more minutes in the hot sun waiting for police, than we are to find resources to make the pool function during a time where outdoor spaces are scarce and critical. This is emblematic of Parks' primary view of the pools as a liability and underscores the need for an Aquatics Czar to assess our pools' needs with fresh eyes.

Let's invest strategically in our pools as the essential resource they are and the economic driver they can be. The committee report opens with the assumption that "Public pools help provide vacations and recreation for some people who do not have the ability to leave New York City during the summer months." It is true that many of our neighbors take their dollars elsewhere in the summer, but I don't think the pools are only for those who cannot afford to leave. What if our City provided enough equitably sited world-class swimming and cooling community facilities right here that actually encouraged people to stay? What if all who visited our pools felt welcome and safe? What if everyone who enjoyed our beautiful beaches were confident swimmers because they had access to lessons at regulated facilities?

An Aquatics Czar working from a pools master plan can go a long way toward realizing this vision. I thank you for considering this testimony.

NY City Council Testimony-April 26, 2023, 1:00 PM

My name is Ebony Beaty, a Rockaway resident and Executive Director of Ocean Bay Community Development Corporation, a Social Service Organization that has served the Rockaway Community for over 20 years. I am pleased to be here to support Bill 962, to address public swimming pool locations and swimming lessons offered by the Department of Parks and Recreation. Swimming is an essential skill in the Rockaways given the proximity to the bay and ocean.

The Rockaways

The Rockaways, Community District 14, is an 11 miles long peninsula and at most one mile wide, surrounded by water on three sides: Jamaica Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. It is a Majority-Minority community and has endured the brunt of decades-long degradation and disenfranchisement. We want to thank you for recognizing that change is needed in how decisions are made and the time is now.

Today, our focus is on the youth of the Rockaway Peninsula, and the urgent need to plan today for our children's future by incorporating into the Arverne East Phase 3 Plan, a youth lead economic engine that includes an Aquatic Center with an Olympic sized pool, a Medical Academy and a Theater for the Arts.

The Urban Renewal Plan

The Arverne Urban Renewal clearance and plan began in the 60's under Robert Moses. Since his departure, the Department of Housing, Preservation and Development, "HPD" has led the efforts to rebuild these 308 acres. Phase 1, in 2003, was the approval of the first over 4,000 units of housing when completed over 10,000 residents were added to the Community District in the 2020 census.

Phase 2, recently completed, focused on important sustainable elements along the waterfront that have improved drainage and public access from the street and to the boardwalk among other elements that are vital for the sustainability of the community. During this phase a YMCA was built with a pool. This was a welcomed addition to the community. Unfortunately, the cost is prohibitive to most families.

Phase 3, the last phase of the Arverne Urban Renewal area is 116 acres. Phase 3 will begin this year, which seems to be in the planning stages. We have requested a site plan with details including a street layout and have yet to receive it. Although the recent ULURP report for the approval of the MX zone did specify 1,650 additional housing units (30% affordable) and square footage for commercial/retail/office and community facility uses, and a boutique hotel. To date, we have not been able to find the plan/supporting materials that would typically be presented to the Community Board and to the City Planning Commission in conjunction with the ULURP review. Thus, there is no clear vision or plan as to what is to be built.

The Community

In addition, to the impact of the 1960s Urban Renewal clearance, the Rockaways received 5 NYCHA developments built from 1950s through the 1960s. With these developments came families with a concentration of children. Today, Community District 14 houses the seventh largest concentration of youth with over 30,000 children under the age of 18, comprising 27% of the peninsula's population.

The Community Board District Needs Statement for years has asked HPD for a moratorium on additional development. This request was based on the increase in population which triggered the need for additional services, such as schools, supportive services and medical facilities and better transportation access, among other things. Attention must be given to the concerns that have resulted from the additional 10,000 people in the Queens District 14.

Arverne East – Phase 3 – Future Development

We are requesting that Phase 3 adopt a youth lead economic focus. Building on the obvious natural resources of the area, we are interested in an Aquatic Center incorporating an Olympic- size pool with all the supportive components that come with a pool designed to train lifeguards, provide water safety classes, and train athletes from across the city, and future Olympians.

We believe the community would be better served with a plan that addresses the needs of our Rockaway youth. Creating a Youth-lead economic engine with an Olympic-sized Swimming Pool as part of an Aquatic Center, a Theater of the Arts, and a Medical Technology Academy for Pre-K to High School. These elements would provide good permanent employment opportunities consistent with our natural resources and supportive of the current population's needs. Given that the Rockaways is the farthest Community District from Manhattan with the longest commute times of any CD, increasing local employment opportunities in Community District is a high priority. (Joke: In CD14, the saying goes: one can get to Miami faster than one gets to Manhattan.)

Conclusion

We believe in a City with over 500 miles of coastline that the need for swimming facilities is not only needed, swimming should be a requirement for graduation. The Arverne Urban Renewal Area – Arverne East Phase 3 is an opportunity to provide an Aquatic Center with an Olympic-sized Swimming Pool, a Theater of the Arts, and a Medical Technology Academy for Pre-K to High School with its own pool.

Each element of the Youth-lead economic engine contributes to a future we all wish to see. The Aquatic Center provides future Olympiads, very needed swimming skills to the City's population with the hope to save lives and enrich lives. The Theater of the Arts

builds on one of the City's healthiest industries. Providing opportunities to train youth in the skills needed to operate a Broadway Show, lighting, costume design, stage management, set design and other skills is a win for all. With supporting arts ancillary uses contributing to a virtuoso's community. The Medical Technology Academy would train future doctors, nurses, medical technicians for employment in a field that needs more people of color with these skills. This is the American Dream in Action, providing for and building futures that we all can be proud to be a part of together.

As a final point, it must be made clear that swimming as a sport has been a predominately white person's sport. Recently, Howard University in Atlanta was on the cover of Sports Illustrated with its entirely Black swim team pursuing a Northeast Conference championship. It is estimated that less than 1.5% of the country's over quarter million competitive swimmers are Black. The lack of access to this sport has failed the BICOP population, and we plan to change that in New York City, in particular, in the Rockaways.

Lastly to finish, providing for the needs of our children should be non-negotiable given the most recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report. CDC reported in February 2023, in 30 years of collecting similar data, "we've never seen this kind of devastating, consistent findings," said Kathleen Ethier, director of CDC's adolescent and school health division. "There's no question young people are telling us they are in crisis. The data really call on us to act." Thus, providing youth structured, safe, supportive, environments to hang out is essential to their health and happiness and our future.

I appreciate your time and effort and look forward to your feedback.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kaitlin Krause

Address: Dean St

I represent: Rising Tide Effect

Address: _____

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I represent: _____

Address: _____

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 in favor in opposition

Date: 4/26/23

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Name: BRIDGET KLAPINSKI

Address: Beach 91st Street 11693

I represent: self

Address: _____

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0962:0760 Res. No. 0760

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/26/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kara Meyer

Address: 25 Park Place

I represent: + POOL

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: 4/26/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RITTA IKONEN

Address: BEACH 91ST STREET. ROCKAWAY

BEACH

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: 4.26.23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Junda Xu

Address: jundaxu@worldjournal.com

I represent: World Journal

Address: _____

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 962,760 Res. No. 3294

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/26/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shanna Blanchard

Address: State St, Brooklyn, NY

I represent: Water Safety Coalition

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: 4/26/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Clare Hilger

Address: 321 Beach 92nd St, Rockaway Beach

I represent: Rockaway Beach Civic Assoc. + 11693

Address: Water Safety Coalition

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Name: Shawn Steum

Address: 47th Ave Woodside

I represent: Swim Strong Foundation 11371

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: 4-26-23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeremy Jones

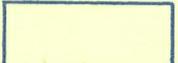
Address: [Redacted] Beach 92nd St. Rockaway Beach, NY

I represent: [Redacted] 11693

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: 4/26/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mark Fachtuff Park

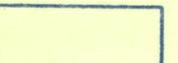
Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks, Deputy Commissioner

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: 4/26/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Iris Rodriguez Rosa

Address: [Redacted]

I represent: NYC Parks, First Deputy Commissioner

Address: _____

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Date: 4/14/23

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Name: Emily Chase

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks Assistant Commissioner

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: 4/26/23

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Name: Margaret Nelson

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks Deputy Commissioner

Address: _____

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Date: 4/26/22

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Name: Sue Donoghue

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks Commissioner

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: 4/26/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matt Drury

Address: Sue Donoghue

I represent: NYC Parks Dir. of Gov Affairs

Address: _____

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