

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 31, 2011
Start: 10:07 am
Recess: 2:05 pm

HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

B E F O R E:
MELISSA MARK-VIVERITO
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Council Member Gale A. Brewer
Council Member Elizabeth S. Crowley
Council Member Daniel Dromm
Council Member Julissa Ferreras
Council Member Vincent J. Gentile
Council Member Letitia James
Council Member James Vacca
Council Member James G. Van Bramer

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

Melissa Mark-Viverito
Opening Statement
Chairperson
Committee on Parks and Recreation

Adrian Benepe
Commissioner
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Larry Scott Blackmon
Deputy Commissioner
Community Outreach
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

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

Therese Braddick
Deputy Commissioner
Capital Projects
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Robert L. Garafola
Deputy Commissioner
Management and Budget Administration
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Annika Holder
Assistant Commissioner
Public Programs
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Michael Dockett
Assistant Commissioner
Urban Parks Services
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Susan Donoghue
Assistant Commissioner
Strategic Initiatives and Sustainability
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

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

Elizabeth W. Smith
Assistant Commissioner
Revenue, Marketing and Special Events
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

David L. Stark
Assistant Commissioner
Chief Fiscal Officer
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Joshua Laird
Assistant Commissioner
Planning
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Nancy Barthold
Assistant Commissioner
Recreation
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Keith T. Kerman
Assistant Commissioner
Citywide Services

Other members of the management team
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Kevin Jeffrey
Brooklyn Borough Commissioner
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Hector M. Aponte
The Bronx Borough Commissioner
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Dorothy Lewandowski
Queens Borough Commissioner
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

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

Kris Sartori
Committee Counsel
Committee on Parks and Recreation

Chi Malobochere
Committee Staff
Committee on Parks and Recreation

Patrick Mulvihill
Policy Analyst
Committee on Parks and Recreation

Letitia James acknowledges:
Ruth Goldstein
Fort Green Park Conservancy

Peter Stein
President
Local 508, NYC Lifeguard Supervisors
District Council 37

Franklin Page
President
Local 461, NYC Lifeguards
District Council 37

Javier Rodriguez
Vice President
Local 508, NYC Lifeguard Supervisors
District Council 37

Jackie Rowe Adams
President
Local 299, AFSCME
District Council 37

Called but did not testify:
Ruth Leonard Goldstein

Holly Light
Executive Director
New Yorkers for Parks

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

Jeffrey Croft
President and Founder
New York City Park Advocates

Eric Tomen
Community Gardener
Vice President
New York City Community Garden Coalition

Dilcy Benn
President Local 1505, NYC Attendants, Park Service
Workers, City Park Workers and Debris Removers
Chairperson
Parks Policy Committee
District Council 37

Sirra Crippen
President
Local 1507, NYC Department of Parks Gardeners
District Council 37

John Huber
President
Local 1506, Parks Department Climbers and Pruners
District Council 37

Joe Polie
Vice President
Local 93, City Seasonal Aides, Urban Park Rangers and
Associate Park Workers

Marielle Anzelone
Urban Ecologist
Executive Director
New York City Wildflower Week

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

Nicole Johnson
Direct of Government Relations
City Parks Foundation
Testifying on behalf of:
David Rivel
Executive Director
City Parks Foundation

Darryl Pleasant
Community Voices Heard

1
2 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: We're
3 going to begin the hearing. I thank everyone for
4 joining us and good morning and welcome the Parks
5 and Recreation Committee's hearing on the Fiscal
6 2012 Preliminary Budget and the Fiscal 2011
7 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report for the
8 Department of Parks and Recreation. I'm Council
9 Member Melissa Mark-Viverito and I chair this
10 Committee.

11 Today we're going to hear testimony
12 from Parks and Recreation about its Expense and
13 Capital Budgets and general agency operations.
14 However before we begin I want to emphasize my
15 concerns with the Department's Fiscal 2012
16 proposed budget particularly the proposal to
17 increase recreation fees. Also there's been a lot
18 of conversation about increasing permit fees that
19 have already occurred. To me this proposal
20 highlights a contradiction between the City's
21 intention to recover the costs of running Parks
22 and Recreation centers and providing equitable
23 access to recreational opportunities.

24 It is troubling that these fee
25 increases are being made at a time when every

1
2 indication clearly shows that supervised
3 recreational activities are crucial in fighting
4 obesity and lowering the risks of cardiovascular
5 illnesses that affect thousands in our communities
6 throughout the City of New York. Similarly I'm
7 equally concerned with a proposal to close pools
8 and cut back the pool season and the proposal to
9 cut more seasonal jobs. These are seasonal
10 workers who play vital roles in keeping our parks
11 clean and well-maintained and obviously the
12 importance of these critical jobs during these
13 challenging economic times.

14 The Department's proposed Fiscal
15 2012 Expense Budget totals \$290.2 million which is
16 \$28.5 million less than the Fiscal 2011 Adopted
17 Budget. And the Department's proposed Capital
18 Budget for Fiscal Years 2011 through 2014 totals
19 \$1.6 billion, a decrease of \$208 million or 11%
20 since the September Plan.

21 The Committee looks forward to
22 hearing from the Department about several
23 important issues including its PEG program for
24 Fiscal 2012 and the impact the recently announced
25 additional 4% cut will have on the Department, the

1
2 status of its PlaNYC initiatives, headcount
3 changes, the Park's Opportunity Program, and the
4 4-year Capital Plan. The year to date changes
5 include the \$13.9 million added to cover costs
6 increases, \$35.7 million in budget cuts and
7 funding shifts, and \$7.7 million added for other
8 adjustments. So we will be examining why the
9 budget decreased and other changes to the plan.

10 Lastly I'd like to state clearly
11 that the proposal to cut over \$19 million from
12 maintenance out of the total \$35.7 million in
13 reductions is quite troublesome. And as such I
14 hope the Administration will take the necessary
15 steps to ensure that our public parks and park
16 programs are adequately funded as we move to adopt
17 the Fiscal 2012 budget.

18 So with that I thank all that are
19 here. And thank you Commissioner for being with
20 us. And we look forward to your testimony.

21 COMMISSIONER ADRIAN BENEPE: Thank
22 you very much Chair Mark-Viverito, members of the
23 Park Committee. I just wanted to take a minute
24 before I get started to introduce some of the
25 Parks staff who are here. They may come up later

1
2 on to help me answer questions. We have sitting
3 next to me is our Deputy Commissioner for
4 Community Outreach, Larry Scott Blackmon.

5 Also here with us, if you'd just
6 raise your hand or stand up so that people can see
7 who you are, our First Deputy Commissioner Liam
8 Kavanagh; our Deputy Commissioner for Capital
9 Projects, Therese Braddick; Deputy Commissioner
10 for Management and Budget Administration, Bob
11 Garafola; Assistant Commissioner for Public
12 Programs, Annika Holder; Assistant Commissioner
13 for Urban Parks Service, Mike Dockett; Assistant
14 Commissioner for Strategic Initiatives and
15 Sustainability, Susan Donoghue; Assistant
16 Commissioner for Revenue, Marketing and Special
17 Events, Betsy Smith; Assistant Commissioner and
18 Chief Fiscal Officer, David Stark; Assistant
19 Commissioner for Planning, Joshua Laird. Actually
20 David Stark is on jury duty so he can't be here.
21 Assistant Commissioner for Recreation, Nancy
22 Barthold; and Assistant Commissioner for Citywide
23 Services, Keith Kerman. So that's part of the
24 Parks team. There are others here who will help
25 answer questions.

1
2 I want to thank you for this
3 opportunity to discuss the budget for our City's
4 Parks and Recreation facilities. As with many
5 other agencies we've been forced to make difficult
6 decisions because of the current fiscal climate.
7 We are operating with a reduced headcount. We are
8 facing continued cuts to our Capital Budget. Make
9 no mistake about it, things are difficult.

10 I recently was in Washington where
11 I met with the heads of major city, county and
12 state parks systems. We were meeting with the
13 Secretary of the Interior. And they were all
14 telling their war stories of parks and facilities
15 being shut down due to the global and national
16 fiscal crisis and dramatically reduced budgets and
17 closed facilities.

18 In New York City in addition to the
19 fiscal storm, we had tornados, macro bursts, and
20 blizzards thrown into the mix. And despite it
21 all, however, we continued to design, construct,
22 open and maintain world class parks and
23 playgrounds in every Borough of our City.

24 So last year's challenges raise an
25 important question. Are the gains that we have

1
2 made over the last decade sustainable? And will
3 they inform our next steps as we face additional
4 budget cuts in Fiscal Year 2012?

5 Our Parks Inspection Program or PIP
6 has surveyed thousands of parks every year for
7 nearly two decades, rating park features as
8 acceptable or unacceptable. These ratings make us
9 accountable for keeping Park properties clean and
10 structurally sound and safe. Our inspection
11 program is so accurate that other cities across
12 the country and around the world regularly study
13 it and adapt it. And it has been favorably
14 audited by both the State and the City over the
15 years.

16 This year we conducted PIP ratings
17 every two weeks and we noticed a hopeful pattern.
18 Despite a reduced headcount our ratings remained
19 strong. Overall conditions, for example, improved
20 from 82% acceptable in Fiscal Year 2009 to 83%
21 acceptable in Fiscal Year 2010. Cleanliness rose
22 from 88% to 89%. And we made these gains despite
23 the major weather events that affected us
24 throughout the year.

25 We also conducted surveys at our

1 parks, pools, beaches and recreation centers
2 throughout the year to ensure that the public is
3 pleased with the services we are providing. In
4 our 2010 Park survey program we found that users
5 rate us higher than we rate ourselves. Customers
6 gave us an overall rating of about 91% acceptable
7 for park conditions. So these data prove that we
8 continue to provide a positive park experience for
9 the vast majority of our park users.
10

11 But we're never satisfied. And it
12 would be naïve to think that losing headcount has
13 no effect on our service. But we are
14 fundamentally changing the way we manage parks and
15 2010 indicates that it is working. We are
16 embracing new technologies. We have improved our
17 management structure. And as a result we have
18 become more efficient and more sustainable and the
19 public is benefiting and will continue to benefit
20 from these efforts.

21 In Fiscal Year 2012 we'll reduce
22 our Expense Budget by approximately 8% from the
23 Fiscal Year 2010 Adopted Budget which will save
24 the City \$28 million. The biggest reduction to
25 our budget will be to our personnel. We will be

1
2 in attrition mode for the fifth year in a row.
3 And our total agency headcount is scheduled to
4 drop by 402 full time equivalents. Moreover we'll
5 reduce seasonal staff 15% beyond last year's
6 reductions which the City Council eventually
7 restored on a 1-time basis for Fiscal Year 2011.

8 In total we anticipate about losing
9 217 full time equivalent positions from our
10 seasonal staff and 150 full time equivalent
11 positions in our Job Training Participants
12 Program. And we're currently negotiating with our
13 labor unions for additional voluntary work-year
14 reduction program to provide significant savings
15 to the City. I want to say I stopped by this
16 morning to see members of several of our locals
17 who are standing out in the rain and fighting for
18 our share of the City budget. I want to say how
19 much I appreciate their work. They're out in the
20 cold and the heat every day. And then they can
21 come in on a day off and advocate for this
22 agency's budget. I wanted to say how much I
23 appreciate that.

24 For most agencies, meeting
25 substantial budget reductions has meant layoffs.

1
2 And if we did not increase revenues we would also
3 be risking large numbers of layoffs, service
4 reductions and closed facilities. Last year the
5 City Council worked with the Administration to
6 restore funds for our outdoor pools and we thank
7 you for your partnership. This year however
8 without budget adjustments we will have to close 4
9 outdoor pools and shorten the pool season by 2
10 weeks for all of the pools in order to save about
11 \$1.5 million. We appreciate the support the
12 Council gave us last year and look forward to our
13 continued partnership.

14 Now we plan to offset some budget
15 reductions by increasing revenue, specifically by
16 raising fees for ball field and tennis permits as
17 well as for recreation center memberships. We
18 expect to achieve a total Fiscal Year 2012 revenue
19 increase of about \$6.3 million in this way. These
20 fees remain much lower than comparable private or
21 nonprofit fees for facilities.

22 And Parks continues to offer dozens
23 of free programs for New Yorkers. Recreation
24 center memberships continue to be free for all
25 children and extremely low cost for seniors. In

1
2 addition New Yorkers can still walk into one of
3 our recreation centers for free and take a free
4 fitness class through Shape Up NYC or join a
5 trained walk instructor and other walk enthusiasts
6 through Walk NYC. Kids can still come as a class
7 for free to use our pools to learn basic water
8 safety through our Swim for Life Program.

9 And our nonprofit partner the City
10 Parks Foundation continues to offer free tennis
11 lessons to adults 60 and older and children aged 5
12 to 16 along with their spectacular track and field
13 and golf programs. Despite the obstacles ahead of
14 us we remain focused on core services to ensure
15 that park users and New Yorkers continue to enjoy
16 great parks.

17 So how are we going to manage all
18 of this? I think 2010 offers guidance. And I
19 want to say hello, good morning, to Council Member
20 Vacca, welcome, good to see you.

21 [Off mic]

22 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Chuckling]
23 Always. Good. I'll try to keep it that way. I
24 was just in your District the other day poking
25 around, trying to make sure things are on the up

and up.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: We are.

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Good, glad to hear it. I know you'll let me know if they're not.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: I will.

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Thank you.

In 2010 our Capital Projects Division completed construction on 150 projects and this exceeded even our own goal of 145 projects. You know, we're continuing to be in the biggest period of park expansion and redevelopment since the 1930's. And many of these projects will bring New Yorkers to the waterfront. Riverwalk is linking the last part of Manhattan's West Side Greenway, providing cyclists and runners and skaters an uninterrupted stretch of Greenway from Battery Park to Inwood. In Queens and Brooklyn the restoration of almost 4,000 feet of boardwalk along the Rockaways and Coney Island with innovative sustainable materials will dramatically reduce our use of tropical hardwood which has been a concern for many environmentalists.

In 2010 we broke ground on 3 of the

1
2 8 regional PlaNYC park projects: the McCarren Pool
3 and Recreation Center which has been closed for 3
4 decades; Far Rockaway Park; and the world class
5 Ocean Breeze Track and Field Stadium, indoor
6 facility in Staten Island. We completed and
7 opened the majority of the Yankee Stadium parks
8 including Macombs Dam Rooftop Park and the River
9 Avenue Pocket Parks, the Skate Park and Mill Pond
10 Park and we broke ground on Heritage Field which
11 is moving right along.

12 We hired over 1,300 lifeguards last
13 summer, a record breaking number and a long-
14 standing goal of the Parks Department. This
15 allowed us to fully staff City beaches and pools
16 and open more beaches than ever in recent times.
17 Last summer, the hottest summer in the City's
18 history, beach attendance nearly tripled from the
19 previous year with almost 19 million people
20 visiting City beaches compared to fewer than 8
21 million in 2009.

22 Our public programs also saw a year
23 of growth, thank in part to our strong
24 public/private partnerships. We met with many
25 Council Members over the last month to discuss the

1 City's free Shape Up New York City and Swim for
2 Life Programs. And I appreciate your talking to
3 us. Since May of last year more than 5,300 Shape
4 Up NYC classes have been held with more than
5 91,000 visits by everyday New Yorkers who may not
6 have the time or the money to find private gyms or
7 instructors. These free fitness classes are
8 cosponsored by Equinox, and I want to thank them
9 for their generous donation, NYC Service and our
10 newest partner, Blue Cross, Blue Shield who
11 contributes significant amount of time, volunteer
12 time and money to help keep New Yorkers healthy.

14 More than 65% of Shape Up
15 participants are overweight or obese and the
16 instance of diabetes among participants is twice
17 the overall City rate. Statistics that tell us
18 that Shape Up is reaching the New Yorkers are most
19 in need.

20 Through the support of the
21 Heckscher Foundation for Children, the Department
22 of Education, Modell's Sporting Goods and half a
23 dozen other private partners that we have worked
24 with, New York City's other leading swim
25 providers, to launch a 3-year expansion for Swim

1
2 for Life. Swim for Life will provide 41,00 second
3 graders in New York City public schools with free
4 water safety instruction by 2014, helping to
5 prevent needless drowning and teaching an
6 essential recreation activity. One that will
7 provide holistic health and fitness benefits for
8 life. We host many other free programs throughout
9 the year thanks to the generosity of New York
10 companies, foundations and individuals.

11 But we have to do a lot more to
12 find greater efficiency. We will do that. From
13 Greenways to playgrounds, to landscape design, the
14 Parks Department has a centuries-old tradition of
15 innovation. Over the last 30 years we have
16 recruited talented managers and given them the
17 authority and wherewithal to make decisions and
18 answer directly to their local constituents. We
19 believe this approach has helped us stay
20 responsive to the public while making us capable
21 of generating and propagating big ideas. Let me
22 know when I talk about serving local constituents,
23 3 of our 5 Borough Commissioners are here
24 including Brooklyn Borough Commissioner Kevin
25 Jeffrey, in the front row there; Bronx Borough

1
2 Commissioner Hector Aponte who's guarding the back
3 door; and Queens Borough Commissioner Dottie
4 Lewandowski over here behind the pillar. Any
5 other Borough Commissioners I haven't seen? Okay.

6 Our goal for our Fiscal Year '12 is
7 to keep our momentum, in a time of budget
8 reductions. And to accomplish this we undertook a
9 review of the entire agency. We really sort of
10 took it apart and sort of put it back together
11 again to figure out how best to target resources
12 that promote the needs of New Yorkers and the
13 City's goals. For the first time ever Parks has a
14 comprehensive strategic plan. This plan has
15 helped us to focus on 5 key project areas: our
16 planning process, our capital process, our
17 recreation mission, our partnerships, and most
18 important our operations.

19 We are already hard at work
20 implementing this plan. And those of you who have
21 allocated precious capital funding, as you well
22 know, completing a new project can be a long and
23 frustrating process. We are already working in
24 ways to streamline the design and construction
25 process. Once fully implemented we hope that it

1
2 will be shorted by as much as 203 days which is a
3 45% improvement from the normal process.

4 We're also taking a look in a
5 similar way at our concessions: how we issue RFPs
6 and how we award the concessions and to make those
7 more timely and more efficient. Perhaps the most
8 promising aspect of our strategic plan is our new
9 Asset Management Park System, also known by its
10 acronym, AMPS. AMPS will help us manage the
11 deployment of staff, work orders, and inventory in
12 a more integrated manner. AMPS will also help us
13 better analyze our data and provide valuable
14 feedback on outstanding work, staff deployment and
15 the allocation of resources.

16 For example, AMPS helps to
17 efficiently manage the work order process by
18 allowing people in the field to access and close
19 work order requests using handheld devices.
20 District Park Supervisors can now track the status
21 of work orders from start to finish wherever they
22 are. And thanks to AMPS, for example, Park
23 Supervisor John Flynn from District 3 in Queens
24 can now submit a work request from the field with
25 a handheld unit and attach a photo of the

1
2 condition that needs fixing, rather than spending
3 time filling out paper forms at the end of the day
4 in the office. We are effectively going from the
5 19th Century way of working to the 21st Century
6 overnight.

7 Borough management can more easily
8 review information in the system for trends and
9 resolve issues. And our previous storehouse
10 management system with over 4,200 different items
11 that we're tracking was in 11 locations of the
12 City but there was no ability to share
13 information. So you didn't know if you had 1
14 place had lots of toilet paper and the other place
15 had none, there was no way of sharing that
16 information. So AMPS allows us to look at an
17 inventory stock on a Citywide, Borough or District
18 level so that District Supervisors and managers
19 can plan better and track their most used items,
20 from the aforementioned toilet paper which is a
21 crucial item to garbage bags. We're like the
22 Army. We can't function without these basic
23 supplies.

24 Our system's key performance
25 indicators alert them when levels are low and

1
2 orders have to be placed. So AMPS is part of the
3 strategy plan's operation work stream and prior to
4 AMPS we relied upon an antiquated system to manage
5 our assets, tracking nearly 50,000 work orders a
6 year on paper with no central management and no
7 oversight. It became clear that we needed to
8 reevaluate the way we did business and figure out
9 a way to allocate our resources. And now we have.

10 AMPS began as a pilot program in
11 Queens in 2009. But this February we completed
12 citywide rollout. Our success has already been
13 honored with a Driving Digital Government
14 recognition at the 2010 Excellence in Technology
15 Awards. And over time this valuable data resource
16 will help keep the agency effective and help keep
17 the City sustainable.

18 Speaking of sustainable, parks are
19 essential to a greener, cleaner city and a
20 healthier city. Many of our projects are key
21 features of longstanding sustainability
22 initiatives such as PlaNYC and here, too, we are
23 an industry leader across the country and around
24 the world. Thinking about our current practices
25 in light of climate change and future budgets, not

1
2 only talking the talk but walking the walk when it
3 comes to sustainable practices. Our Sustainable
4 Parks Task Force under the leadership of Assistant
5 Commissioner Susan Donoghue was formed this past
6 fall with several goals: to advance green
7 initiatives related to 21st Century park design and
8 construction; innovative natural resource
9 management; and the strategic reduction of agency
10 fuel, energy and materials consumption.

11 We also want to create awareness
12 about our own impact on the environment and to
13 quantify and communicate sustainable efforts at
14 Parks to identify impacts and savings and to that
15 end the task force has formed 6 working groups.
16 It is making progress on each of these goals.
17 We've got a Metrics Working Group to develop the
18 indicators related to water and material
19 resources, fuel and green partnerships to measure
20 outcomes and to identify cost savings. The
21 Training and Education Working Group to train all
22 of our employees. A Public Recycling Group so
23 that we can expand public recycling to another 200
24 sites. And the Capital Working Group is analyzing
25 our capital process to identify obstacles and

1 solutions to implement sustainable design
2 practices. We have a Leaf Composting Working
3 Group which is installing an 0-2 composter in each
4 Borough and expanding the use of mulch decks.
5 And a Communications Working Group to communicate
6 what we do both internally and externally.
7

8 Our Sustainable Parks Division will
9 deliver a sustainability plan later this year. We
10 expect this plan to help guide our efforts as we
11 work to make New York are more livable community.

12 Perhaps most notable is the recent
13 publication of our High Performance Landscape
14 Guidelines, a comprehensive guide to building 21st
15 Century parks. This is something we published
16 with the help of the Design Trust for Public
17 Space, a nonprofit group which will help shape the
18 way New York City's parks are designed and built
19 and maintained in the future. There are hundreds
20 of best practices included in this manual from
21 capturing storm water to making the soil more
22 resilient. And we'll be putting these findings
23 into effect in our new designs. We already are.
24 These guidelines are already a model, not just for
25 us, but for all municipalities and landscape

1 architects. You can see them if you like.
2 They're on display at the Center for Architecture
3 on LaGuardia Place.
4

5 We're also continuing to build on
6 some of our greatest sustainable success stories.
7 Our green vehicle fleet is getting greener. About
8 70% of our fleet is currently operating on
9 alternative fuels. We expect that number to reach
10 75% by the end of 2011. As a result of our
11 progress we were recognized nationally with an Eye
12 on Biodiesel Award. I bet you didn't know there
13 was an Eye on Biodiesel Award.

14 We also got the Greenest Fleet in
15 the Country Award from the Fleet, what
16 Association? Fleet Managers Association? Fleet
17 Managers Association. Didn't know there was that
18 either. Yes there is.

19 Through our expanded green fleet,
20 we have managed to reduce fuel use by 17% from the
21 prior Fiscal Year which is very considerable. And
22 these cost savings will grow over time.

23 Similarly our green roof program is
24 already a source of innovation and cost savings.
25 It's been greatly expanded over the last Fiscal

1
2 Year. Today we've installed almost 30,000 square
3 feet of green roof. We have a living laboratory
4 on the roof of our technical services building on
5 Randall's Island where we are the only green roof
6 in the country to be testing 18 or more distinct
7 green roof systems side by side. Over the last
8 year we installed green roofs at 10 of our
9 recreation centers and on 2 new buildings, the
10 building at Mill Pond Park and we're installing
11 one in the new senior center and community center
12 at Marine Park.

13 This year we've added a new
14 computerized monitoring system with the help from
15 Columbia University's Earth Institute to track how
16 these green roofs are working. And we have our
17 innovative Weatherization Program where more than
18 100 Park buildings have been made more energy
19 efficient. The Weatherization Program is an
20 example of how we're not just greening the City
21 and becoming more efficient by working to create
22 and perpetuate green jobs.

23 Much of the work of our
24 Weatherization Program is done by the Parks
25 Opportunity Program or POP employees. POP is a

1
2 training our underserved workforce in cutting edge
3 fields, giving them the tools they need to get
4 ahead in this economy. At the same time the work
5 is benefiting Parks and the people of New York
6 City by reducing energy costs in cooling the City.
7 The skills these workers are developing today will
8 be desired by employers as evidenced by the jobs
9 our trainees have already found in the green
10 industry with employers such as the Wildlife
11 Conservation Society, the Randall's Island Sports
12 Foundation, the Prospect Park Alliance and the
13 Central Park Conservancy. And I should point out
14 that since its inception in 1994 the POP programs
15 helped nearly 12,000 New Yorkers transition from
16 welfare to work.

17 We don't want to lose sight of the
18 millions of New Yorkers all ready looking to help
19 the City get greener. We have rolled out outdoor
20 recycling to nearly 200 sites. And we are
21 expanding the program. In 2010 we piloted a
22 program to Green Our Events where people running
23 events can get a green certification by following
24 the guidelines that reduce the environmental
25 impact of their events. We're continuing to

1
2 implement the goals of Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC
3 Green Print. We have transformed 175 part time
4 school yards into full time neighborhood
5 playgrounds. So more children are within a 10-
6 minute walk to the nearest park.

7 We have extended the hours to
8 fields. Sports fields can be used by installing
9 field lighting at 4 more locations. And the
10 number of seasons a year by transforming 13 hard,
11 nasty asphalt yards into new synthetic turf
12 fields. We have made progress in our 8 regional
13 parks projects. The first ribbon cutting at
14 Brooklyn's Calvert Vaux Park on the Coney Island
15 Creek will take place soon. Under Mayor
16 Bloomberg's leadership we will build on the
17 successes of PlaNYC with our new waterfront plan
18 which will include the development of more than 50
19 acres of new waterfront parks.

20 And finally we have continued our
21 commitment to Million Trees NYC which will plan 1
22 million new trees in New York City by 2017.
23 Already we have added more than 431,000 new trees.
24 And it's probably more than that by now. New
25 trees go in every day. Since October 2007 we're

1
2 nearly halfway to our goal in just 4 years. We've
3 already exceeded our planting goals at this point
4 on the project by 23%.

5 Now programs such as Million Trees
6 NYC would not be successful without the support of
7 so many dedicated New Yorkers who make this choice
8 and volunteer to be involved in their urban
9 environment. That's why earlier this month,
10 thanks to the leadership of Parks staff and the
11 City Parks Foundation; our Partnerships for Parks
12 Program hosted its first-ever citywide conference
13 by and for Parks volunteers, folks that are
14 building healthy and livable communities. This
15 conference at Hunter College focused on best
16 practices and success stories from everyday
17 volunteers and advocates bringing together more
18 than 200 volunteers, community group members and
19 activists.

20 In addition we have our Million
21 Tree Stewardship Corps which will continue to work
22 closely with thousands of stewards across the 5
23 Boroughs to help us maintain and care for newly
24 planted trees. In partnership with Botanical
25 Gardens and other nonprofits in each Borough as

1
2 well as Trees New York, we're able to provide free
3 workshops and toolkits to help support our
4 aggressive tree planting efforts.

5 I'm happy to announce our upcoming
6 Million Trees NYC Volunteer Planting Day which
7 will be on Saturday, April 30th. We already have
8 1,400 volunteers signed up. We expect, once
9 again, to plant 20,000 trees in a single day.
10 It's these kinds of outreach efforts that help
11 educate New Yorkers about the multiple benefits of
12 our greening programs while building community
13 engagement around green causes.

14 We've been an innovator in
15 public/private partnership for the last 3 decades.
16 I will take partnerships to a new level in 2011.
17 Parks did more with less in 2010 thanks to private
18 dollars from partner organizations and tens of
19 thousands of--actually 1.5 million hours of time
20 donated by volunteers across New York City. More
21 than 800 groups and 55,000 volunteers were
22 actively beautifying parks and raising more than
23 \$90 million in private donations to help build,
24 improve and manage parks and programs.

25 We will continue to seek private

1
2 partners to effectively address public problems.
3 For example, after those devastating tornados and
4 the macro burst that went through Brooklyn, Queens
5 and Staten Island this past September, Maria
6 Hernandez Park in Bushwick was devastated with
7 dozens of huge, fallen trees and smashed play
8 equipment. I'd like to thank the New York
9 Restoration Project which committed to raise
10 private funds to replace those trees. They've
11 already been replaced.

12 And the 34th Street Partnership
13 which has been working in that park which is
14 funding horticultural improvements and ongoing
15 maintenance and programs for new display gardens.
16 So the trees have been planted. This spring the
17 park will be more beautiful than ever thanks to
18 \$200,000 in private investment. It's
19 public/private partnerships that help us to get
20 through these tough times.

21 Now a basic and fundamental fact of
22 life. Last year we completed our 50,000th customer
23 survey which is a good benchmark for this program.
24 And the feedback we received from New Yorkers was
25 mostly positive but there's a recurring issue

1
2 which we really need to tackle head on and that's
3 litter, the basic bugaboo and problem we face
4 every day. The single largest reason for parks
5 being rated unacceptable in our PIP program is
6 litter.

7 And if park visitors would simply
8 walk to a litter basket with their trash and put
9 it in there, that would take away about half of
10 our work and leave our staff a lot more time to
11 plant flowers, to make more beautiful parks, to
12 paint benches, to make sure the parks are safe,
13 and to otherwise better serve the public. So
14 we'll be launching a major attack on litter in our
15 parks this season with both programs and
16 enforcement and education and public relations
17 work. And I will be reaching out to you to join
18 us in how we can do that.

19 So despite the obvious and painful
20 fiscal challenges, we're going to step up and
21 we're going to meet the adversity and continue to
22 deliver clean and safe and happy parks for New
23 Yorkers. We're doing more across the board.
24 We're happy to have established stronger working
25 relationships not just with this Committee but

1
2 with all the rest of the Council and the other
3 elected officials across the City. We thank you
4 for all you have done this past year and over the
5 decades for Parks. We're looking forward to your
6 continued support in Fiscal Year 2012. With your
7 help and other New Yorkers who care about parks,
8 despite the challenges, we will continue to
9 deliver a safer and greener and cleaner park
10 system. And I'd be happy to answer questions.

11 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
12 you Commissioner for your testimony. And I want
13 to thank you for the strong presence here of your
14 Department and all the work that you've done. And
15 a lot of questions that we want to delve into
16 obviously, a lot of challenges.

17 I first want to recognize
18 colleagues that have joined us here. We've been
19 joined by Jimmy Vacca, by Council Member Tish
20 James, by Council Member Liz Crowley. I also want
21 to just take a moment to quickly thank the staff
22 that have helped to put this together. We have
23 Kris Sartori, Chi Malobochere [phonetic] and
24 Patrick Mulvihill as the Committee staff.

25 One that that just--before I delve

1
2 into some of the details, details; one that had
3 emerged as a result of your testimony and just
4 looking over the budget, something that is
5 glaringly absent in your testimony is when it
6 comes to the Green Thumb Program. And the reason
7 I say that is because there are serious challenges
8 that we're seeing all over but there is serious
9 conversations happening that we may be suffering a
10 lot of loss of Community Block Grant money in the
11 City of New York. And my understanding is that
12 100% of Green Thumb's budget is picked up by the
13 Community Block Grant, is that not accurate?

14 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: That's
15 correct.

16 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.
17 So have there been any conversations happening
18 internally in your agency if that funding is to be
19 lost, what is going to happen to the Community
20 Garden Program that is supervised and overseen by
21 the Green Thumb Program?

22 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well we
23 certainly hope that the funding isn't lost. It's
24 been--

25 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

1 [Interposing] Understood.

2
3 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --it's been
4 crucial to this program over the years. We would
5 look to absorb the Green Thumb Program into the
6 Parks Department by hook or by crook. And also
7 we'll work with nonprofit partners to see how we
8 can continue that work. It's crucial work.

9 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So
10 because we're talking about a lot of community
11 gardens throughout the City of New York. It is a
12 small budget, probably needs more as any other
13 area of your budget does, but I think that, you
14 know, we don't want to be caught in a position
15 where we're scrambling to then figure out what is
16 going to happen, you know, with our community
17 gardens which are a vital aspect also of the work
18 that Parks oversees in the City--

19 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
20 Right. Well I think the good news is the
21 community gardeners are largely dependent on the
22 work of the gardeners themselves. And largely
23 speaking we provide technical assistance and some
24 assistance with tools and supplies, but largely
25 speaking it's the community gardens are there

1
2 because of the people who run them and manage them
3 and have set them up. But we will work to make
4 sure that the Green Thumb Program stays intact,
5 some how or other. And we've been successful
6 working in partnership with the corporate sector
7 and individual philanthropists to keep things
8 alive and not just alive but thriving despite
9 cutbacks in government funding at the Federal and
10 State and City levels.

11 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Well I
12 definitely would like to hear more of that
13 thinking process moving forward. We've also been
14 joined by Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer.

15 You talk a lot about--and that's
16 one thing of the increasing revenue that you want
17 to see coming out of Parks. And you talk about
18 some of the membership fees and recreation fees.
19 What is projected to be the revenue raised for
20 this Fiscal Year that we're currently in? And
21 what are you projecting to be the revenue raised
22 through our park system for Fiscal Year '12?

23 [Pause]

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: My
25 understanding is Fiscal Year '10; we had \$126.5

1 million generated to the general fund through our
2 park system. So what is that--

3 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
4 Are you talking about the revenue through the
5 revenue division? Or are we--

6 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
7 [Interposing] Revenue through our--

8 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --talking
9 about fees for?

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: No.
11 Revenue total for parks, that is going to be
12 generated through Parks. What are you projecting
13 that to be as of June 30th of this year? My
14 understanding, last year, Fiscal Year '10, \$126.5
15 million was generated through the park system.
16 What is the projection for June 30th of this year?
17 And what are you projecting for Fiscal Year '12?

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: In terms of
19 the concession revenue we're projecting about \$60
20 million.

21 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.
22 But in total, between fees and all the revenue
23 that you're going to generate. If you did \$126.5
24 million in Fiscal Year '10, is that what you're
25

1
2 projecting to raise this year, more, less?

3 [Pause]

4 COMMISSIONER LIAM KAVANAGH: Good
5 morning--

6 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

7 [Interposing] Good morning.

8 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --this is
9 Liam Kavanagh, Commissioner of Parks and
10 Recreation. The \$126 million represents the high
11 watermark for the Parks revenue. It included the
12 last payments associated with Yankee and Shea
13 Stadiums. We no longer receive revenue from those
14 sources. And the parking lots that were also a
15 part of the whole complex that we managed on
16 behalf of the City. So there is a substantial
17 reduction in the amount of revenue that's coming
18 through the Parks Department through the general
19 fund. And we're projecting that it will be a
20 total of about \$60 million this Fiscal Year--

21 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

22 [Interposing] As of June 30th of 2011.

23 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --from the
24 other sources. Yes.

25 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.

1
2 Then what are you projecting for 2012 to generate
3 revenue?

4 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Around those
5 numbers. It may be \$60 million to \$65 million or
6 so.

7 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.
8 And I'll have more questions about that as well.
9 I want to just allow, you know, I'll have my
10 colleagues that have been waiting to ask some
11 questions and then we'll delve into some of the
12 details of the seasonalization of staff and the
13 reductions in some of the numbers in that end.
14 But I know Jimmy Vacca had a question.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Thank you
16 Madam Chair and thank you Commissioner. First,
17 Commissioner, of course you know, I think, you
18 know, that many of us on the Council are going to
19 be supportive of you in trying to get restorations
20 to your budget. And I very much appreciate that
21 you stopped by and said hello to the people here
22 from DC 37 who feel that the cuts go too far.

23 You know, I prefaced my remarks by
24 saying of course that the Council always tries to
25 restore cuts and we realize that to every cut and

1
2 to every fee increase, there's going to be a
3 constituency that will be opposed. I do want to
4 say that we in the City have the mandate to make
5 sure that agencies do more with less. And I do
6 want to say that your agency has proven that you
7 can do more with less.

8 I do think in terms of green
9 streets, we continue to have more green streets in
10 our City. And every time we have another green
11 street, it's under Parks Department jurisdiction
12 to make sure that those green streets are kept
13 cleaned and trimmed. So I thank you for that.
14 And I thank you for other things that you're
15 doing, I know, under very difficult circumstances.

16 Now I have to bring up my list. I
17 had to say thank you but now I have to give you
18 the list of things. First of all you mentioned
19 the beaches on page 3. I do want to say that
20 after starting a fight in 1993, we finally have
21 gotten sand replenishment at Orchard Beach. The
22 Bronx Riviera was disappearing. And the Federal
23 government after many years, thanks to Congressman
24 Crowley and Congressman Serrano, did get Federal
25 money to replenish the sand.

1
2 Now Commissioner, I have to tell
3 you, I went there to Orchard Beach. It is much
4 bigger than last year, much bigger. The sand
5 replenishment has given us a beach back. But I
6 know you said beach attendance increased
7 dramatically because the weather was much warmer
8 last year. Beach attendance, I think your figures
9 showed more than doubled.

10 So now with Orchard Beach in that
11 new condition which is wonderful, I just want you
12 to know that we anticipate increased population
13 and therefore an increased demand on your agency.
14 So my question is have you made preparations
15 insomuch as an allocation of manpower to
16 accommodate what I think we can reasonably
17 anticipate will be an increased use of Orchard
18 Beach this summer?

19 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Every cloud
20 has a silver lining, Council Member, and the
21 silver lining of the economy is that we had great
22 difficulty over the year attracting people to be
23 lifeguards. We could never hire as many
24 lifeguards as we wanted to hire. The last few
25 years that has not been an issue. We hired the

1
2 most lifeguards ever last year. And this year we
3 had one of the largest training classes ever. So
4 in terms of lifeguards, I think we're going to be
5 fine at Orchard Beach.

6 You know, it's hard to say, you
7 know, with the cuts to our seasonal budget whether
8 we'll be able to, you know, we just don't know,
9 it's all weather-dependent but our plan is to make
10 sure that that beach is clean. We have done some
11 innovative programs at some of our other beaches
12 in terms of litter collection by placing litter
13 stations, rather than having litter baskets every
14 10 feet we have litter stations where we ask
15 people to sort of meet us halfway, to walk with
16 their garbage as they're coming out and bring it
17 to a litter station so it's easier for us to clean
18 when we have multiple baskets in one location.

19 But the general experience is the
20 beaches are quite clean. Orchard Beach luckily is
21 a relatively contained 1-mile semicircle where
22 it's much easier to clean at the end of the day.
23 So I anticipate a great year at Orchard Beach
24 particularly with the beautiful new sand.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Do you

1
2 intend to post signage there which alerts everyone
3 to the newly passed Council legislation dealing
4 with smoking on public--

5 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
6 Yes. We've already put up some preliminary
7 signage but we're going to put up thousands of new
8 signs. Having no smoking at the beaches will be a
9 real boon because one of the biggest banes of our
10 existence is cigarette butts in the sand, very
11 difficult to pick up, even--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA:
13 [Interposing] Yes.

14 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --the sifting
15 machines don't pick them up and the kids pick them
16 up and put them in their mouths. And we hope that
17 the smoking ban will alleviate that source of
18 pollution at the beaches.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Okay. Going
20 through quickly, Ferry Point Golf Course in my
21 District, this golf course was originally
22 conceived in 1977. And I was around at that time.
23 I was--

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
25 I hadn't been born yet.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: I--well.

3 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Just kidding.

4 [Laughter]

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: All right,
6 don't get smart here. I was Chairman of a
7 Community Board in 1979 but I know in 1977 is when
8 this idea was conceived by community people. Now
9 we're working on it. But do you have an idea when
10 we're going to finish this project? And then I
11 have a follow-up question. But where are we with
12 this golf course? When--

13 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
14 It's under construction as--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA:
16 [Interposing] I know.

17 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --you know
18 because of the fact that it's a former landfill,
19 everything that we do is closely monitored by and
20 we do it in partnership with the State DEC. I
21 participate in weekly phone meetings with the
22 Regional Director of the State DEC to advance
23 matters and make sure it's all being done
24 according to Hoyle.

25 The construction is going on. I

1
2 believe spring of 2012 the first 9 holes will be
3 done and by the fall of 2012 the final 9 holes
4 will be done. There's a growing-in period. When
5 do we expect it to open? [Off mic discussion] The
6 following year, so 2013 it will open. So
7 construction will be largely done by the end of
8 2012. And then it'll open the following spring.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: When you
10 look at Ferry Point Park and we recently had a
11 waterfront survey done regarding ferry service,
12 I've always advocated ferry service for the Bronx.
13 We are not included in the waterfront survey and
14 yet when I look at Ferry Point Park and then when
15 I look at Sound View Park, and I look at the
16 waterfront study we just finished.

17 We in the Bronx have good rates of
18 accessibility. The time that would be involved
19 with getting from Ferry Point and Sound View Park
20 to Manhattan, those time rates are probably the
21 best in the City. Yet we have no plans for ferry
22 service. We want to get people out of our cars to
23 make sure we have a greener New York as you
24 indicated. Ferry service is another alternative
25 to car use.

1
2 Now can you look at Ferry Point
3 Park because of course now would be a good time,
4 you're doing the golf course, but could you look
5 at Ferry Point Park vis a vis a pier? We would
6 need a pier for the ferry. And we would need
7 parking. And we have 300 acres almost in Ferry
8 Point Park. What are we doing? And then I would
9 ask the same question in Sound View Park.

10 Do you think this is feasible? Do
11 you think this is something that you can look for
12 capital dollars to advance? And certainly I think
13 the Bronx Delegation and the Council would want to
14 be helpful. But tell me if this is part of your
15 plan.

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well we can
17 certainly take a look at it. I'll ask Joshua
18 Laird, our Assistant Commissioner for Planning, to
19 work with the City Planning Department and DOT to
20 see if that's something we can do. One of the
21 difficulties I would anticipate is that it's often
22 difficult to get the State DEC permission to build
23 new piers. But we can take a look at that. I
24 think it would be a terrific thing, particularly
25 once we have a world class gold course there.

1
2 People will want to be able to travel there
3 efficiently and not get stuck in traffic. So
4 we'll take a look at it. We'll see what the
5 likelihood is and we'll get back to you on that.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Thank you
7 Commissioner. When I speak about the cigarette
8 issue, and I touch on this quickly, I know the
9 Chair wants to move on, the whole issue of Parks
10 enforcement is in the back of my mind because we
11 don't want the cigarette law to be a punitive law.
12 We want this to be a voluntary compliance law and
13 public awareness as part of that.

14 The same issue revolves around
15 barbecuing in our parks. I had a problem this
16 year on Bronx Park East and Liteg [phonetic]
17 Avenue and Pelham Parkway. And when the Speaker
18 came to my District to a Community Board meeting,
19 this was specifically brought up to her about
20 barbecuing at Bronx Park East which basically I do
21 not think Parks addressed last year and I need
22 your help this year in addressing it It's a litter
23 problem. It's a quality of life problem. And we
24 need Parks enforcement at that location, Bronx
25 Park East and Liteg and I know Commissioner Aponte

1
2 is aware of it.

3 My last thing is again with Pelham
4 Parkway and the big issue that we had with tree
5 protection as part of the sewer project. And I
6 need you to keep a watch. We want to lose a few
7 trees as possible as part of that sewer project.
8 You've been very good in protecting trees that we
9 have. We have the wood stanchions built all
10 around many trees. But we need your continuing
11 cooperation regarding the trees. So where can we
12 work together on those two issues?

13 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: You have our
14 promise to continue to work on the barbecuing
15 issue in Bronx Park East. I know I've been
16 talking about that with Hector. And our First
17 Deputy Commissioner Liam Kavanagh and I have been
18 closely involved with all of the work on the
19 Parkway. And we'll continue to be there. We're
20 fighting for every tree there.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Lastly, I'm
22 sorry Madam Chair, but I'm looking at all the
23 health variables for the Bronx. In today's Post,
24 yesterday's news, the census figures are starting
25 to come out. And I think that you have to look at

1
2 my Borough in so much as the rate of obesity going
3 much higher than anywhere else in the City of New
4 York. The health variables in my Borough, we
5 stand out far beyond any other place in the City.

6 And I know you have all these
7 programs but I think we have to have something
8 concentrated in the Bronx because we can't hit and
9 miss. We can't have this and we can't have that.
10 There's got to be something concentrated in my
11 Borough to reach out to people who perhaps we're
12 not reaching because these census statistics are
13 absolutely alarming in the Bronx. Alarming.
14 Unacceptable. And we need your help to have a
15 focus here.

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I will tell
17 you Council Member that in planning our Shape Up
18 programs we worked directly with the Health
19 Department and their Public Health Division,
20 specifically to target neighborhoods where their
21 surveys had indicated high rates of obesity and
22 obesity-related diseases such as diabetes. And so
23 the Shape Up, the Step Out, the Walk New York City
24 programs are all targeted specifically at those
25 neighborhoods.

1
2 And we'll continue to do that. And
3 we've been lucky that when we lost some of the
4 public funding for these programs we were able to
5 fill the hole with private funding. So we're
6 going to continue to offer those programs in those
7 specific neighborhoods. And if you like we can
8 provide a list of every place we have a Shape Up
9 program or Walk NYC program. Okay.

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
11 you Council Member Vacca. Just we've been joined
12 by Council Member Julissa Ferreras and Council
13 Member Danny Dromm. Just to delve a little bit
14 deeper into that because I mean this issue of
15 raising the recreation center fees I think is,
16 again, very troublesome. And particularly when
17 you raise the issue of the health disparities and
18 the challenges that some of our communities raise.

19 I think it's been historically
20 demonstrated that when Parks has raised fees in
21 the past, although it has been some time, that
22 there has been quite a drop-off in terms of the
23 number of people that have membership. Although
24 you do project a decline in recreation center
25 membership fees with the raising of these fees,

1
2 what has been, when you look at historically the
3 last time, that Parks has raised recreation fees,
4 center fees? How much has been the decline in
5 membership? And is that 5% an accurate
6 assumption?

7 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It's hard to
8 say. I mean I think the proof of the pudding will
9 be in the tasting. We have seen some declines
10 initially when we've raised fees in the past and
11 it's always rebounded. And we've seen upward
12 trends in our recreation center membership with
13 some decline not because of people not joining but
14 because we had some unusual circumstances.

15 We had our single large recreation
16 center in Staten Island literally fall into the
17 harbor after a big nor'easter. So we had to shut
18 down our largest recreation center in Staten
19 Island. We had two recreation centers closed for
20 renovations. So any drop-off that we've had
21 recently has been attributed mostly to having to
22 close recreation centers either because of natural
23 disasters or because of good news which is
24 renovations.

25 Here's what I would say about the

1 fees. We had some very stark choices. If we
2 didn't raise fees, we'd have to lay people off.
3 Laying people off would likely mean reducing hours
4 or perhaps even closing centers which would have
5 had the same or perhaps a worse effect. At the
6 recreation centers it remains free for kids up to
7 18. It always has been free. It will be \$25 a
8 year for seniors.
9

10 And only for the highest level
11 membership which is for adults if you want to use
12 any center that has a pool, it will be \$150 a
13 year. That translates to about, you know, \$.40
14 or, you know, \$.50 or \$.60 a day if you use them
15 on a regular basis. You know, I've checked on the
16 rates of the nonprofits, the Y's and the health
17 clubs and the JCC's and so on. We're way cheaper.
18 And we're talking about literally \$.50 or \$.60 a
19 day to have a full service center.

20 And in addition to all of that if
21 you can't afford that and I understand that some
22 people can't, we have all the free programs, the
23 Shape Up and many, many free programs. All of our
24 outdoor tracks, our outdoor pools are free. And
25 when we look at history, yesterday we celebrated

1
2 the 60th anniversary of the St. Mary's Recreation
3 Center in the Bronx, at our pools and our
4 recreation centers; we used to have a \$.10 or \$.20
5 a day entrance fee which in today's dollars is
6 \$1.00 to \$2.00 a day. So even historically we are
7 charging less than was charged in the 1940's and
8 50's for these public facilities. And our outdoor
9 pools are now free compared to when they were \$.25
10 a day several decades ago.

11 So I think even with the fees which
12 we did very reluctantly because it was the
13 alternative to laying people off, it's still a
14 great bargain and we're still delivering a large
15 amount of free services and then some very low
16 cost services. And it's the less painful
17 alternative to reducing hours and closing
18 facilities.

19 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Well
20 let me just say, you know, I appreciate your
21 response but, you know, again we love to hear,
22 right, our Mayor and our Governor talking about no
23 new taxes. But these kinds of increases are
24 taxing those who have the least ability to pay.
25 We have upside down priorities in this country and

1
2 in this City and when we talk about having some
3 level of parity and equity with how taxes are paid
4 and who pays what, that message goes to deaf ears
5 when it comes to this Mayor and to this Governor.

6 Those that have the greatest
7 ability to pay are walking away with having to pay
8 the least, percentage wise and proportionately
9 than those who have the lesser ability to do so.
10 So these membership fees as minimal as you may say
11 they are Commissioner disproportionately impact my
12 community, my constituency, as many others in the
13 City of New York.

14 The other thing is that when you
15 raise these fees, some of the concerns that we
16 hear from people in recreation centers is that the
17 equipment may not be up to speed or that the
18 repairs on equipment may not happen as quickly as
19 it should, that the state of repair of the
20 equipment, etcetera, and the fact that these fee
21 increases are going to the general fund and not
22 coming back to be invested in upgrading recreation
23 centers is another slap in the face, I think, of
24 people that are being asked to pay more.

25 So these are real serious concerns

1
2 and challenges. Of course, you know, we will work
3 aggressively here to see how we can try to ensure
4 that this doesn't happen or to develop a more
5 proportional and maybe fair way of doing it. But,
6 you know, I hear what you're saying but I very
7 much beg to differ.

8 We continue to nickel and dime our
9 way through this fiscal crisis. And again the
10 ones that bear the burden of it are the ones who
11 have the least ability to do so. So I appreciate
12 that.

13 I just wanted to touch on it
14 because you did raise it, Council Member Vacca,
15 with regards to the lifeguards in terms of
16 recruitment and having enough, is that area of
17 your budget being impacted? Do you feel we're
18 going to have enough lifeguards--I mean we're
19 closing pools, that's one of the other proposals,
20 so we may not need as many at the end of the day?
21 But where are we with that line item in your
22 budget?

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We're doing
24 fine. There's not impact on the lifeguards.
25 We're having a very strong recruitment period. We

1
2 expect to hire at least as many as we hired last
3 year or over 1,300 and be able to fully open the
4 beaches, the pools. With regard, just a final
5 point to the recreation centers, on the equipment
6 we are spending, I think, \$250,000 Annika?
7 \$250,000 to buy a whole bunch of new equipment.
8 You know, the equipment has a lot of wear and
9 tear. It--

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

11 [Interposing] Mm-hmm.

12 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --gets very
13 heavily used. I go to some of these gyms on my
14 own just to work out and see how things are doing.
15 Annika knows 'cause I let her know right away when
16 some equipment is broken. And so we are investing
17 a quarter of a million dollars in buying new
18 equipment for recreation centers across the City
19 including some of that is City money and some of
20 it is private money that we got from the City
21 Parks Foundation. I want to thank the city Parks
22 Foundation for that.

23 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.

24 And obviously I have more questions but I will now
25 turn to Council Member Tish James.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: First let me
3 thank the Commissioner and in Brooklyn we miss
4 Julie Spiegel but we've been blessed to have a new
5 Commissioner, Commissioner Kevin Jeffrey and I am
6 glad to see that he is here. So all is well in
7 the Borough of Brooklyn but we do have our issues
8 which I will get to. And I recognize,
9 Commissioner, and I share your sentiment that
10 parks serve as basically urban oases in a concrete
11 jungle.

12 But I also want to echo the
13 sentiments of my Chair; the fact is that the State
14 did not provide us a millionaire's tax which would
15 have alleviated all of these cuts. And all of
16 these service increases are really going to have a
17 disparate impact on those who can least afford it.

18 That being said I'm going to ask
19 some general questions and then I want to get to
20 some local issues in my District. I just came
21 from a press conference with DC 37. and DC 37
22 argues that this proposed budget with all of its
23 layoffs, layoffs of Parks Job Training
24 Participants, playground associates, seasonal
25 reduction, the closing of 4 pools, and shortening

1
2 the outdoor pool season, etcetera, parallels an
3 increase in management within the Parks
4 Department. They argued that within and over the
5 last 5 years, despite the fact that there have
6 been some reductions in low wage workers, there's
7 been a major increase in management. Is that a
8 true statement?

9 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: There has
10 been some increase in management largely because
11 people who were already in there had their civil
12 service titles changed. So it's not like we added
13 a lot of new people from outside. But mostly it's
14 people in technical areas, people overseeing
15 forestry, horticulture, construction had their job
16 titles changed. In fact we've lost a big chunk of
17 senior management. We have 4 Assistant
18 Commissioners leave and not be replaced. And
19 they're not going to be replaced.

20 In our Districts we are having Park
21 and Recreation Managers who are the line managers
22 for maintenance and operations take on more
23 sectors rather than adding new managers who leave.
24 So we've actually seen some losses at our highest
25 levels of management. So the growth that they're

1
2 talking about which is not nearly what they say it
3 is, has been largely just changes in titles.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: So it's been
5 largely changes in titles. Have there been any
6 additional hires with respect to senior managers
7 and/or management and if so, how many?

8 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We've
9 probably, again, mostly through changes of titles
10 are about 45 additional managers. But looking at
11 it in perspective, we have about 250 management
12 staff compared to a high season total of about
13 10,000 employees so it's about 2.5%. I would say
14 that compared favorably with most agencies. It's
15 very light at the top in the Parks Department.
16 We're largely a field staff. And relatively few
17 managers compared to the size of the agency.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And in the
19 City of New York there's been a major issue with
20 respect to outsourcing. Does your agency
21 outsource any of its IT contracts or any other
22 contracts? And if so how much of your budget is
23 outsourced?

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Historically
25 the contract services have included for many

1 years, 15 or 20 years, some automobile repair
 2 which gets outsourced. How long has that been
 3 going on? [Off mic discussion] 15 years. We hire
 4 consultants to design parks, for engineering
 5 services and things like that but that's been
 6 going on forever. We don't do a lot of other
 7 outsourcing. We purchase materials and supplies
 8 from vendors. But--

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

11 [Interposing] How about your pruning contracts?
 12 Is that--

13 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

14 Pruning contracts, tree planting and tree pruning
 15 is something that we've historically done with
 16 contractors.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Okay. But

18 we've also added significantly to our planters and
 19 pruners over the last few years so there's City
 20 employees. We've added City architects and
 21 engineers. So as we've grown those two programs
 22 it's been through a combination of City employees
 23 and contracted services.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: At some

25 point in time, Madam Chair, I'd like for a hearing

1
2 with respect to these issues. But that's an
3 aside. With regards to the PEG, what is the--in
4 November the Department proposed reducing the work
5 year by 3 months for select full time positions
6 for an annual savings of \$17.5 million. With
7 regards to the PEG what is the current status of
8 your discussions with labor?

9 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well we're in
10 negotiation with the various locals. And I
11 stopped by to say hello to the City Park Workers
12 locals and some of the other locals who are out
13 there in the rain. I want to thank them, you
14 know, not just for the fact that they're out there
15 today but they're out there in the rain and the
16 cold and the heat, you know like the mail carriers
17 every day and they're a terrific group of people--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:

19 [Interposing] Yes, they stood in the rain during
20 the press conference and it humbled us.

21 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It's the
22 hardest working group of people in the City I
23 think. They, you know, the Sanitation and the
24 Police and Fire receive recognition about the
25 strongest and the bravest and so on. I haven't

1
2 come up with exactly the right adjective. But
3 they certainly work hard. They're tested through
4 storms and they were shoveling snow and they're a
5 very hard-working group.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: That's a
7 true statement. And they keep our parks very,
8 very safe.

9 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: And they do.
10 And, you know, it's the type of work which I
11 understand 'cause I started as a seasonal park
12 worker doing that kind of work. It's the kind of
13 work that nobody else wants to do and we have to
14 get it done. So this is--first of all I want to
15 say this is a voluntary program.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Mm-hmm.

17 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: And again
18 it's our effort to avoid layoffs. And despite 3
19 or 4 years of contracted and very serious fiscal
20 problems, internationally and here locally and
21 across the country, we have not laid anybody off
22 and we don't plan any layoffs. So this is a
23 voluntary program where people could sort of
24 retire and then work for 6 months and then have a
25 combination of their pension and some income which

1
2 would be probably equal to what they would have
3 had, had they stayed on working.

4 So it's not a forced program. It's
5 a voluntary program. We hope it will ultimately
6 lead to roughly 400 positions that would become
7 seasonalized but this, again, is our preferred
8 alternative to layoffs. And if the unions don't
9 want to do it then we'll have to look for other
10 savings and hopefully that won't be layoffs.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: How many
12 positions do you anticipate would be affected by
13 this proposal?

14 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It could be
15 as many as 400 but again it's voluntary and it's
16 subject to negotiations that are ongoing with the
17 unions.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: As an aside,
19 Commissioner, let me just say that I issued a
20 statement yesterday urging the Mayor to consider
21 an early retirement incentive program as one way
22 to achieve some savings in the City of New York.
23 He has been opposed to that. And I would hope
24 that the Mayor of the City of New York would
25 really consider an early incentive retirement

1
2 program as they've done on the State level.

3 That's just an aside for the media.

4 With respect to the closure of 4
5 pools. Last year I joined with my colleagues in
6 Cobble Hill, opposing the closure of Degraw Pool.
7 And so can you tell the Committee what criteria or
8 analysis was used by the Department in selecting
9 the 4 pools for closure?

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: What we
11 looked at was the level of use and proximity to
12 other alternative pools. And so we would seek to
13 close the pools that have the least use and also
14 have an alternative.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And what is
16 the alternative for Degraw Pool, the closing of
17 Degraw?

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We haven't
19 decided whether it's Degraw Pool or whatever pool.
20 So, you know, we'll, as soon as--if, you know,
21 once the budget is finally adopted and if we're
22 forced to close the pools, we'll make those
23 decisions then.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: So the 4
25 pools, Degraw Pool, Wagner Pool in Manhattan, Fort

1
2 Totten Pool in Queens and West Brighton Pool in
3 Staten Island are not the 4 that are slated to
4 close--?

5 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
6 We haven't decided yet. Those are what we were
7 discussing last year. And fortunately, thanks to
8 your help, we didn't have to close them.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Okay. And I
10 would hope; I'm confident that the City Council
11 will restore some funds with respect to the
12 playground associates, the seasonal--the
13 playground associates and other types of
14 associates that clean and maintain our parks in
15 the City of New York and obviously keep our parks
16 safe.

17 Let me get to some local issues.
18 Let me start with indicating to you as well as to
19 Commissioner Jeffrey that in the next room I have
20 5 volunteers from Fort Green Park Conservancy.
21 They have some questions with respect to how to,
22 again, how your administration can work with them
23 in supporting their conservancy. But they're also
24 here because they are leaders and protectors of
25 Fort Green Park which as you know stands on sacred

1
2 ground.

3 It is the country's largest
4 Revolutionary park burial site. It's the
5 spiritual father of the park was the great
6 American poet Walt Whitman. As you know there's a
7 monument there. And it was designed by legendary
8 architects. And it's on the National Register for
9 Historic Parks. And as you know, unfortunately,
10 the park has never received any or has not
11 received recently any Federal funding for its
12 maintenance.

13 I want to talk to you a little bit
14 about safety. Safety has increased. Obviously in
15 Fort Green but unfortunately the reduction in park
16 crime paralleled the increase in staffing in the
17 park that occurred from 1998 through 2010. With
18 the removal of the park's gardener and the related
19 staff reductions, crime will most certainly return
20 and/or increase. I'm glad to see Commissioner
21 Jeffrey is joining the panel.

22 What steps is the Parks Department
23 taking to prevent this from happening? Can we get
24 our gardener back? Can we get back our staff
25 reductions? As you know, Fort Green Park is the

1
2 most used park in my District. As you know,
3 during the summer I have to have meetings with
4 respect to the permits. As you know, the number
5 of permits that have been submitted to your office
6 exceed the number of days in the year. And we,
7 unfortunately, have to engage in this process of
8 declining a lot of permits.

9 So my question to you, what steps
10 is the Parks Department taking to prevent, again,
11 the reduction of staff and keeping the park safe?

12 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I'll just
13 speak generically about safety in parks. First I
14 want to thank the NYPD which has done a
15 spectacular job reducing crime across the City
16 including parks and just highlight the fact that
17 responsibility for preventing crime and dealing
18 with crime largely rests with the Police
19 Department. Our Park Enforcement Patrol which is
20 relatively recent in the picture didn't exist
21 before 1980 or '81 is largely focused on quality
22 of life issues. Dogs off the leash, people
23 picnicking where they shouldn't or, you know,
24 making loud noise.

25 So we're going to continue to focus

1
2 on quality of life. We have had larger reductions
3 in the PEP force than the rest of the workforce
4 through attrition primarily because they're quite
5 mobile. They move on to jobs with the Police
6 Department or the Correction Department. So we've
7 had about a 40% attrition rate in our PEP force
8 and because of the hiring freeze we haven't been
9 able to replace them.

10 Fortunately we are able to add
11 seasonal staff and we will have seasonal PEP
12 officers and security trainees working. But the
13 main reasons parks stay safe is because of
14 heightened use. And when lots of people come out
15 to the park and enjoy the park in appropriate
16 ways, it tends to drive away the inappropriate
17 uses. And I anticipate that will continue to be
18 the case in Fort Green Park. And Fort Green Park
19 that's--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:

21 [Interposing] Commissioner before you go on, I
22 know they're next door. Can Ruth Goldstein, et
23 al, and other sin the next room please come into
24 the main room so that they can be acknowledged?
25 I'm sorry.

2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: They're
3 terrific; the Fort Green Conservancy is one of
4 dozens of groups that helps us with our parks.
5 And Fort Green Park has the Prison Ship Martyrs
6 Monument that you referenced has been beautifully
7 restored thanks--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:
9 [Interposing] Yes.

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --to a
11 tremendous investment. You have invested in the
12 park with your capital dollars. And there's work
13 going on at one of the entrances there. And I'd
14 like to ask Kevin to speak about, you know, the
15 gardener again is something we did. We ramped up
16 and hired many more gardeners than we used to have
17 in the past.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Mm-hmm.
19 They can stand right there. They can just stand.
20 Stand, that's it, right there. In the back. Just
21 for two minutes Papou [phonetic]. Thank you.
22 Sorry. Papou gets nervous when we get
23 overcrowded. Thank you.

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: As well he
25 should. He's got--

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:

[Interposing] Yes. These are the--

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --to maintain the safety.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: --

individuals that maintain Fort Green Park which is the oldest Revolutionary Park in the City. And Ms. Goldstein, obviously, is the mother of Fort Green Park and all things in Fort Green. And I love her dearly.

So these individuals, Commissioner Jeffrey, I would love to introduce you to and urge you to have a meeting with. And obviously who are going to stand here to hear about the issues related to their beloved park and my beloved park, Fort Green Park. I apologize. Thank you. Commissioner, safety? And the reduction in staff in Fort Green Park.

COMMISSIONER KEVIN JEFFREY: Thank you very much Council Member and thank you very much Madam Chair. As you know I certainly feel and agree with you that Fort Green is a gem in our system. What has happened with the gardeners is actually a bittersweet story here. We ended up in

1
2 the Borough six gardeners to the position of
3 supervisor. So they weren't laid off, they were
4 promoted. It's a wonderful thing for them
5 individually and hopefully they'll bring their
6 talents in gardening and horticulture to their new
7 jobs. Unfortunately we're then driven to take and
8 look at how we handle gardening in the different
9 Districts.

10 We to assign a gentleman by the
11 name of John Vey [phonetic] who's absolutely
12 terrific. He's a gardener par excellence. And we
13 will assign him to a mobile crew supported by JTPs
14 who will be trained. And that's bittersweet as
15 well because what will happen to these individuals
16 is they will get a set of skills that they
17 wouldn't have been able to before and hopefully
18 prepare them for jobs in the private sector. So
19 we're very confident that we can maintain the
20 level of horticultural expertise that we've
21 enjoyed in the past in Fort Green and in fact
22 trains some other individuals.

23 In terms of safety and the park,
24 you know that's one of my big concerns as well.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Mm-hmm.

2 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY: I've had a
3 number of conversations with Chief Nelson, Borough
4 North, and he's given a commitment to work with us
5 and work with Park Enforcement Patrol. So I'm
6 very confident that we will be able to maintain
7 safety in the park.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: So the
9 gardener, the salary of the gardener, from what I
10 understand it's a part time position if I' not
11 mistaken. So the question is what can the agency
12 do with respect to compensating this individual or
13 individuals to continue to maintain Fort Green
14 Park in every respect?

15 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY: I'm sorry, I
16 don't understand the question.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: The gardener
18 is part time--

19 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY:
20 [Interposing] Mm-hmm.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: --can we
22 make him full time and will you pay for it?

23 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY: Yes. We
24 will pay for it.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Okay.

1
2 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY: But he'll be
3 full time but not just working in the park. He's
4 going to serve as a District but with additional
5 resources, additional personnel.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: So my
7 question is can I have a dedicated gardener for
8 Fort Green Park?

9 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY: At this
10 point we don't have funding in place for a
11 dedicated gardener in Fort Green Park--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:
13 [Interposing] How much would it cost to dedicate
14 someone full time to Fort Green Park?

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well
16 something that you might consider and we could
17 look at is maybe something where we get a
18 combination of public and private funds--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:
20 [Interposing] Okay.

21 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --which we've
22 done in other parks where we can allocate say a
23 portion of the salary and we could seek to raise
24 the balance and create a grant line and then--

25 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:

1 [Interposing] Okay.

2
3 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --hire
4 somebody. It could be a 9-month line, you know,
5 there's not a lot of work for gardeners in the
6 dead of winter so you could hire a 9-month
7 seasonal assistant gardener for maybe \$30,000 or
8 \$40,000--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:
10 [Interposing] Okay. So we'll have that discussion
11 offline. The restrooms. Restrooms in Fort Green
12 Park, the Visitors Center has been closed for two
13 years. What is it? Is the Visitors Center in
14 your capital budget? Do we plan on getting it
15 open soon? We've got thousands of visitors to
16 Fort Green Park. There's no facilities. What are
17 we doing to get that Visitors Center open? We
18 used to have meetings there. I can no longer have
19 meetings there. You know there's concerts there.
20 There's dancing. There's whatever.

21 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY: You know,
22 we're currently in design and actually I have to
23 thank you for funding that you made available for
24 capital projects. So we're currently in design.
25 And hopefully we'll be breaking ground next summer

1
2 on Fort Green Park. We'll have to make sure that
3 some of that work is involved and included in the
4 scope.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: So my last
6 question and I'm going to make it cover all of the
7 issues that I really wanted to discuss but I know
8 that the Chair, there also some of my other
9 colleagues who have questions, lighting in Fort
10 Green Park. Obviously the Fort Green Park Prison
11 Ships Martyrs Monument was re-lighted but there's
12 been some technical problems.

13 As you know I put in some capital
14 money but there have been some maintenance issues.
15 There's been multiple malfunctions and the lights
16 appeared not reprogrammed to reflect the changes
17 occurring during daylight saving time. Is the
18 Parks Department looking to address the mechanical
19 issues related to the lighting of the monument?

20 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY: Yeah, you're
21 absolutely correct. We are working towards that.
22 And I can give you an update within a couple of
23 weeks.

24 [Off mic comment]

25 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: It's working

1
2 now? Okay. So hopefully we can have a meeting
3 with the residents of Fort Green, representatives
4 of Fort Green Park Conservancy. Hopefully we can
5 talk offline with respect to Commodore Barry Park
6 which is the oldest park in the City. We can talk
7 about, again, the BAM Parking Park which is
8 unfortunately closed. We can talk a little bit
9 about the trash cans as the Chair of Sanitation I
10 would love to work with you in educating
11 individuals and addressing the littering program
12 along with the Commissioner of Sanitation, John
13 Doherty.

14 And I believe--oh and last but not
15 least, new residents have come to Brooklyn on
16 Flatbush Avenue. They're concerned with respect
17 to--they were promised all of these amenities in
18 Brooklyn. They purchased co-ops and condos from
19 half a million dollars to a million dollars. They
20 were promised a park, Willoughby Square Park. I
21 understand Willoughby Square Park was removed from
22 the capital budget. And the residents are
23 obviously concerned about all of the lack of
24 amenities in downtown Brooklyn including but not
25 limited to Willoughby Square Park. Any changes

1
2 with respect to including Willoughby Square Park
3 in the budget--

4 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
5 Willoughby Square Park was never in our budget.
6 It's, what is that, EDC or?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: It's EDC?

8 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: But the good
9 news is that we are nearing the end of the Walt
10 Whitman Park. And that's a spectacular renovation
11 that should be done by this spring. And we have
12 restored Cabin Plaza Park and of course just a few
13 blocks away Brooklyn Bridge Park marches along.
14 So we're doing quite well for that part of
15 Brooklyn--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:
17 [Interposing] And I appreciate all that you do.
18 And I hope that we can also work together on my
19 skate park for my young kids.

20 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY: Yes. We
21 actually met last week with Matthew--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES:
23 [Interposing] Yes.

24 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY: --and we
25 think there's some real promise there.

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COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Thank you.
I look forward to skating with you. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
you. If I could ask my colleagues, so since we do
have a lot of questions and there are people
waiting to also testify from the public, if we
could try to be maybe one or two minutes in terms
of very quickly. I do want to follow up on the
issues of the PEP officers for a second. Because
I think that is of concern. Obviously there was a
Local Law that was passed that we passed wanting,
you know, asking that the crime in parks be
accounted for.

It's been very difficult, very slow
process. It's only a very few parks which are
actually--where you can find that information.
And there has been a rise in crime in specific
parks. That's obviously of concern. You did
indicate, Commissioner, that there seems to have
been a high attrition rate under the PEP officer
line. If you could just speak a little bit to the
amount of funding that is currently there for PEP
officers and if you could give us a breakdown by
Borough of where they are located.

1
2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We have a
3 combination of full time and part time PEP
4 officers, as with many other aspects of our
5 agency, we ramp up during the busy season. And we
6 assign them on the basis of where we have the
7 facilities. So we have to provide security at our
8 pools, at our beaches, at our recreation centers,
9 so that it's very much driven by facilities that
10 need security. And again I want to emphasize that
11 the primary responsibility for public safety in
12 parks and for crime prevention and response to
13 crime is with the Police Department. And the Park
14 Enforcement Patrol was never intended to address
15 serious crime. It's intended to address quality
16 of life issues.

17 I know that because I was a Park
18 Ranger along with Commissioner Jeffrey when the
19 Park Enforcement Patrol was created. And Kevin
20 Jeffrey is an alumnus of the Park Enforcement
21 Patrol as is Commissioner Dockett.

22 So what we do is we ramp up in the
23 summertime. We add seasonal PEP officer, provide
24 security at the pools, so at the height of the
25 season we have 65 security personnel in the Bronx,

85 in Brooklyn, 116 in Manhattan because we have more pools there than in any other Borough, 76 in Queens and 42 in Staten Island. And then some citywide officers. Year round officers--

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

[Interposing] Is that full time?

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Those are full time in the high season.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Mm-hmm.

In the high season.

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: In the high season. So year round we have many fewer. It's 10 in the Bronx, 13 in Brooklyn, 40 in Manhattan because we have so many events going on in Manhattan, 13 in Queens, 12 in Staten Island and a citywide group of 11. And then we have some--we provide through contracted services where outside organizations fund us, we provide PEP officers but the City taxes do not pay for those. So at Battery Park City Park and at Hudson River Parks we provide PEP officers but they're fully funded through private funding.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And how much are in those parks?

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: There are 24
in Hudson River Park and 29 in Battery Park City.

[Off mic discussion] And in terms of the budget--

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

[Interposing] I'm sorry, repeat that please?

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yeah. 24 in
Hudson River Park and 29 in Battery Park City.

But again I want to emphasize that those are
funded by outside organizations and the City tax
levy doesn't pay for those.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I mean,
again, this--I know that you speak highly, highly,
highly of the public/private partnerships and
there's a role for the private sector, understood,
but I think the concern here is the disparity that
results. You know? The challenges that we have
is at certain parks, you know, get treated very
differently than the vast majority. You know?

And so that is an issue because
again as has been indicated, you know, there needs
to be a presence of PEP officers, understanding
the distinction you made but obviously whenever
there is a presence of people in a park that are
there, whether it's quality of life, it does help

1
2 with the overall safety of the park. And the fact
3 that in some cases we have such few in public
4 parks that do not have conservancies does set up a
5 disparate system, you know, in how our parks are
6 treated, our communities are treated, in terms of
7 where there are conservancies, there's better than
8 others. And so that's an ongoing issue and
9 obviously an ongoing challenge.

10 So with that I'm just going to go
11 to the next Council Member that has questions,
12 Council Member Crowley. And please again, if I
13 can ask my colleagues to be as succinct as
14 possible.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you
16 Madam Chair. Just a point of clarification before
17 I begin my question. We're not talking about the
18 Capital Budget yet?

19 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: This is
20 budget hearing so you can mention that as well,
21 yes--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY:
23 [Interposing] Okay because I thought it was the
24 second part. Good morning Commissioner. Welcome.
25 I have a quick question about the recreational

1 fees. I know that it was brought up. And I share
2 the sentiments of my colleagues. Overall it
3 appears to be an increase of 100% which seems kind
4 of drastic from one year to the next.
5

6 Is there a way, like the other
7 recreational centers such as the YMCA that makes
8 it more affordable to families by charging a
9 monthly fee rather than having them pay at one
10 time? Because the recreational fee is going from
11 \$75 to \$150. And for most of our working families
12 to put up that \$150 would be drastic in terms of
13 their budget and it would be better if they could
14 do it over a number of months.

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We do offer a
16 6-month membership. And so you could pay \$75 for
17 the 6-month membership. And I just want to point
18 out again that it's free for kids up to 18 and
19 it's \$25 for seniors. And if you compare it to
20 the Y, the Y is \$800 to \$1,000 a year. So that's
21 why you might want to have a monthly thing. Again
22 we're--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY:
24 [Interposing] Okay. So any--

25 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

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So we have the 6-month membership--

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: --

youngsters under 18--

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --and under

18 is free.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: --can get

a tennis permit as well?

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Tennis

permits, free or \$10 for kids? They're a reduced

rate for kids. What's the rate for kids--?

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY:

[Interposing] The--

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: \$10 for kids.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: And

they'll stay at \$10?

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: And so the

recreational centers that have pools are free for

kids under 18 as well?

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Okay.

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: And all the

outdoor pools are free for kids and adults.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: I see that

1
2 your Expense Budget went up approximately 10% to
3 15% from what it was initially planned last year
4 from the Adopted Budget. Is this due to the
5 tornado? Would you say?

6 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: The
7 restorations and other changes made between the
8 Preliminary Budget and then the budget adoption
9 were all primarily responsible for the budget
10 going up. Most of our expenses related to the
11 tornados and the micro bursts will be covered by
12 FEMA money. And that's already been approved.
13 FEMA money will also help us, has also helped us
14 deal with the devastation to the recreation center
15 in Staten Island. And we're hoping that we'll get
16 more FEMA money to actually replace it.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: And you're
18 still working on those projects, cleaning up from
19 the tornado?

20 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We're all
21 cleaned up. What we're working on now is the
22 replanting. And I think most of the sidewalk
23 repairs have been done by DDC. It was an
24 unparalleled multi-agency effort after the
25 tornados. And we're now in the sort of planting

1
2 phase to replant the trees that were lost.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Your
4 Department did a terrific job. I know my local
5 Commissioner Dottie Lewandowski was out there day
6 and night in the weeks that followed. And overall
7 I complement your Department.

8 I wanted to ask now about the
9 Capital Program. It seems that you roll over so
10 much money from one year to the next. And I could
11 point out 50 ways to spend the Capital Budget.
12 Can you explain why so much money is rolled over?

13 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I'm happy
14 that we're able to roll it over, unlike the
15 Expense Budget; the Capital Budget can be rolled
16 over. You know I think it's just we're--I hate to
17 say this, the victims of our own success. We have
18 been given so much money by the Mayor, by the
19 Council, by the Borough Presidents, by State
20 legislators; it's just hard to spend it all at
21 once.

22 We have, even though we have more
23 than 400 people working in our Capital Projects
24 Division, civil service architects and engineers
25 and surveyors and estimators, it's just hard to

1
2 keep up with that. That's why we have to hire
3 consultant engineers and architects. And it's,
4 we, despite the economy, we still have half a
5 billion dollars a year to spend on capital
6 projects to build new parks and improve existing
7 ones.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: One
9 project, outside of my District but in Community
10 Board 9 that has gotten recent attention in the
11 media is Civic Virtue which is a statute by
12 Frederick MacMonnies who, you know many people
13 have complained about the decay of the statue. Is
14 it within your Department to keep that statue
15 maintained?

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: That's a
17 difficult question. I think it's technically not
18 park land. And we're trying to figure out whether
19 it's something that we should be taking care of.

20 There has been some suggestions
21 made, Greenwood Cemetery put out an offer and said
22 they'd like to have it move there and they'd pay
23 for its restoration. I, frankly, I'd love to see
24 it stay where it is because it's--why move it.
25 But it is the work of a very important sculptor.

1
2 You know, some people take issue with the message
3 there but I think if you took issue with the
4 message of sculptors in public collections you'd
5 have to close the Metropolitan Museum.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Right.

7 And I bring it up not for, you know, discussion on
8 whether it's valued or not but just that it is
9 deteriorating. And that I was told by the
10 Department of Cultural Affairs, if I remember
11 correctly, that it was within the Parks
12 Department's jurisdiction to maintain and clean
13 the statue.

14 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well we take
15 care of 300 statutes and about 1,200 historic
16 artifacts across the City. Historically what
17 we've done is most monuments in the City are given
18 to the City as gifts and then we seek to have
19 endowments when those monuments are given. And
20 that's largely been what's happened. That one,
21 unfortunately, was not provided with an endowment
22 when it was--one of the few monuments that was
23 actually commissioned by the City by--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY:

25 [Interposing] Well wouldn't you be able to use

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some of your capital dollars to do that--

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

If some--we don't have any discussion in capital dollars but if capital dollars were allocated, we would restore it.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: My last

question has to do with your green roofs and your weatherization, overall green job opportunities. And it appears that it's very forward-thinking.

And I understand that you are serving an underserved workforce and hiring folks in that particular department. I'm not sure exactly how many have been hired. So I'm curious as to the number and the specific training program and whether these folks then become union members once they're hired by the Parks Department.

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It's--I know

we have limited time so I'll just say that the Parks Opportunity Program which started out at the WET program, all under the broad sort of oversight of Welfare to Work which is a Federal requirement, has been fairly successful I think for the City.

It's provided some really great assistance to us in terms of maintaining the

1 parks. But we've also placed 12,000 people in
2 full time jobs since the program began in 1994.
3 Each year we place about--Commissioner Garafola,
4 about 800 people in jobs. We're doing fairly well
5 this year. So it provides a very much appreciated
6 extra workforce for us but we provide specific
7 skills training and general job readiness and
8 interview training and GEDs and English as a
9 second language. And it's been a quiet success
10 story for the Parks Department.
11

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY:

13 Absolutely. Those numbers are good numbers. How
14 about the green roofs program? It seems that
15 you've put nearly 30,000 square feet of roof on
16 your own buildings, the Parks Department
17 buildings. Has anyone thought about an initiative
18 of putting green roofs on other City buildings by
19 these employees that could possibly later generate
20 some funds for the City--

21 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

22 Well I think--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: --or your
24 Department?

25 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: If someone

1
2 can come up with the funding for the materials we
3 could probably provide the labor. Our
4 weatherization program has been a success. We've
5 put green roofs on recreation centers and on other
6 buildings. We think it's the way to go. The
7 issue often is that funding for the materials and
8 for the supplies.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: And with
10 that, maintaining of your forestry and your
11 horticulture area, it seems that the number of
12 full time positions are going down from 175 that
13 you had in '09 to planned of only 113 in 2012
14 which is sort of a decrease, about 40%. If we're
15 planting more trees don't we need to grow that
16 area so we can maintain those new trees as well as
17 our old trees?

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We'd love to
19 be growing a lot of areas in the Parks Department.
20 Unfortunately the global economy has not
21 cooperated. So particularly with reference to the
22 newly planted trees, our Million Trees Stewardship
23 Corps has been going really well. We have
24 thousands of volunteers lined up. And we work
25 with nonprofit partners to get people to help take

1
2 care of the young trees. What young trees really
3 need in the first few years is just a little TLC,
4 some water when it's hot, making sure people are--
5 the soil isn't getting compacted and people are
6 keeping their dogs out of it. So in listing the
7 army of New Yorkers who love trees is the main
8 thing. Commissioner Kavanagh, you want to talk
9 about the climbers and pruners?

10 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It's up.
11 Council Member Crowley, I'm not familiar with the
12 numbers you cited but I do know that right now we
13 have approximately 138 climbers and pruners and
14 foresters working of us. And that excludes the
15 gardeners and assistant gardeners. And that's
16 almost double the number we had in 2002. So we
17 have made a substantial investment in tree care
18 and managing the urban forest. I think it is
19 paying off and I think that it showed to great
20 effect during the storms of September 16th and
21 other storms that occurred throughout the year.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Okay.

23 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: And in
24 addition to that, you know, we did expand the
25 maintenance requirements under our tree planting

1
2 contracts so that our contractors are responsible
3 for maintaining trees for 2 years as opposed to
4 the standard 1-year guarantee that had been the
5 industry--commonplace in the industry for decades.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: And just
7 to clarify, our numbers were provided by the
8 Office of Management and Budget. And we have
9 numbers from '09 and the plan numbers for '12.
10 And we see in that area full time positions in '09
11 was 175 and planned for 2012 is 113 according to
12 our numbers.

13 And I only raise that question, I
14 know you're doing a terrific job with the new
15 trees planted, I have many old trees in my
16 District and we get a lot of complaints from
17 constituents saying that the trees are dangerous
18 with limbs hanging down. And we just want to make
19 sure that there are enough people in the forestry
20 department to maintain the trees that we have.
21 And that's why I bring that issue up.

22 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
25 you Council Member. We've been joined by Council

1
2 Member Vinnie Gentile. I just want to touch on
3 something 'cause you did say about the fact that,
4 you know, we obviously always are doing the dance
5 with this Administration in terms of the
6 restorations that we as a City Council can
7 provide. And that some of the, I guess, growth in
8 your budget, you know, was due to some of the
9 restorations that we put in. But also one of the
10 ideas that you have presented in prior budgets and
11 you present in this budget again is about
12 attrition. And that some of your savings is going
13 to come from attrition.

14 But considering that that has not
15 really worked in the past and actually the City
16 has had to restore money to your budget because
17 you did not meet the levels projected in that PEG,
18 why does this continue to be, you know, something
19 that you rely on as a way of savings? What if the
20 City is not able to restore that money this year?
21 Where does that put you? And what are the
22 alternative plans?

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well we
24 projected the attrition levels based on historic
25 patterns. And we suspect, we don't know, that

1
2 because of the economy, people just didn't resign
3 or quit or move on to other jobs that they might
4 have. So we didn't have the attrition we
5 anticipated which again is a silver lining. It
6 did not--because we failed to meet the attrition
7 targets, we didn't have to lay people off. So
8 far, we're hoping that again that will be the
9 case. That's why we've been as creative as we can
10 be and made some hard decisions.

11 So we'll see. The economy has
12 picked up. People are moving on, as I mentioned,
13 and in certain of our sectors people have moved on
14 to other jobs and we've had higher attrition
15 levels in some areas compared to others. But it's
16 hard to project. You can look at historic
17 patterns and say we think this many people will
18 retire or resign, move on to other jobs, and then
19 fewer do and you have the good fortune of having a
20 larger workforce than you anticipated.

21 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So what
22 is the attrition levels? What is the savings you
23 hope to--you project in that area this year, for
24 your Fiscal Year '12 budget?

25 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well it's

1
2 hard to say. One of the things, as I mentioned
3 before, we had a number of people at a very high
4 level leave and not be replaced so we were able to
5 meet some of our cut targets by virtue of the fact
6 that higher salaried people were leaving. So we
7 have a few higher salaried people leaving or more
8 higher salaried people leaving than we expected
9 and fewer lower salaried people leaving.

10 So we more or less met our target.
11 So again we hope to--it's a moving target. We
12 hope to meet the cut targets without having to do
13 layoffs. So far in the 3 years that we've had
14 this tough economy we haven't laid anybody off but
15 once we have the Adopted Budget and once we see
16 what the realities are in terms of attrition,
17 we'll know what we have to do.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: We have
19 two more colleagues that have questions. We have
20 Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer followed by
21 Council Member Julissa Ferreras. Council Member
22 Van Bramer.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank
24 you very much. Commissioner if I heard your
25 earlier testimony about the fines, the fees

1
2 rather, correctly, you posed it as somewhat of a
3 choice between layoffs and raising revenue. And,
4 you know, I would just argue that that's a false
5 choice. And either way, working people are
6 punished. And I realize this is not your call but
7 if we were able to raise revenue through taxes on
8 millionaires and billionaires, then we wouldn't
9 have to be faced with that false choice where
10 working New Yorkers are losers either way.

11 And I remember when I got my first
12 tennis permit at Lost Battalion Hall on Queens
13 Boulevard. It was a big deal for me. And those
14 things are not that easy for working and poor New
15 Yorkers to afford as you know. So I would hope
16 that we could avoid layoffs of the hardworking men
17 and women who staff our parks and our pools and
18 also not punish working people who want to be
19 playing more tennis on our tennis courts. And not
20 making it harder for them to do so.

21 I also had a question about your
22 executive management. And has there been an
23 increase in positions in executive management over
24 the last few years? I'll ask you that first.

25 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: That question

1 was asked earlier--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER:

3 [Interposing] Oh was it?

4 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --when you
5 weren't in the room. And as I said, most of the
6 purported increases were simply a change in title.
7 Existing managers whose titles were changed into a
8 managerial title. And most of the managers that
9 we're talking about are people in technical areas,
10 forestry managers, horticulture managers,
11 engineering and so on.
12

13 So in fact we've had a reduction in
14 our most senior management. We've had 4 Assistant
15 Commissioners retire and not be replaced. In our
16 Field Managers, we are having them take on larger
17 and more Districts rather than--when we've had
18 attrition losses rather than adding new Field
19 Managers.

20 So we have a very small number of
21 managers, roughly 250 compared to a, you know, a
22 season high total of about 10,000 employees, it's
23 about 2.5%. I think if you compare that to any
24 other City agency or even in private companies,
25 it's a very small management group--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER:

3 [Interposing] How many Assistant Commissioners are
4 there?

5 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Approximately
6 9--

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER:

8 [Interposing] 9 Assistant Commissioners.

9 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --and that's
10 fewer than most of the agencies.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: As you
12 know the Administration announced a waterfront
13 plan for the City of New York which is very
14 exciting on a lot of different levels. But as you
15 know the Queensbridge Park and the seawall issues
16 continue. And it would be an absolute shame if in
17 the midst of all of this attention paid to New
18 York City's waterfront; the park that abuts the
19 largest public housing development in the country
20 is not taken care of as well.

21 As you know there was a meeting
22 several weeks ago and Parks has agreed to take the
23 lead on this issue. So I would like to know what
24 Parks has done since that meeting in terms of your
25 leadership in making sure that Queensbridge Park

1
2 and the seawall and the esplanade are returned to
3 the people.

4 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Thank you
5 Council Member. As you know, we did meet with you
6 and with Congresswoman Maloney. It's something
7 that I share your frustration with. We originally
8 had a plan of how to deal with it. We were going
9 to use mitigation money for wetlands that were
10 taken during highway projects. The problem was
11 that there was found to be some contamination in
12 the soil.

13 So some of the agencies that were
14 going to provide mitigation money stepped back
15 thinking there was going to be an unlimited amount
16 of money to have to spend to mitigate the site.
17 What we're doing now is we are doing testing.
18 Following the testing we will do environmental
19 cleanup and then seek to have those agencies bring
20 that mitigation back in so we can restore the
21 seawall.

22 It's really important to that park,
23 to that community, and to our general idea of
24 trying to get people back to the waterfront. The
25 tricky issue however is that all across the City

1
2 the waterfront tends to be formerly industrial
3 sites because that's what the waterfront was used
4 for for 2 centuries. Any time you work in a
5 former industrial site and any time you work on
6 the waterfront your costs multiply dramatically.
7 And what could be a simple project for \$1 million
8 or \$2 million quickly becomes a \$12 million
9 project. And Commissioner Lewandowski, do you
10 have any additional information on Queensbridge
11 Park?

12 COMMISSIONER DOROTHY LEWANDOWSKI:

13 Yes, thank you Commissioner. Council Member Van
14 Bramer, I should just add we recently met with the
15 MTA as a follow up to see where we can partner on
16 this job. And the MTA has made a commitment
17 because they do need to do the work on the subway
18 line and the LAR tube that runs through the park
19 to match dollars to the City to restore the
20 seawall. So the steps would be, as the
21 Commissioner had said, we need to have the
22 investigation done to see what contaminants may in
23 fact be in that shoreline area, do a remediation
24 and then been able to partner with the MTA and
25 City funding to do restoration.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So
3 right now you're not remediating, you're testing.

4 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: We're
5 testing.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Do we
7 know how long that will take?

8 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: The
9 contractor, once he begins, should be no more than
10 9 months. And at that point then we'll have an
11 estimate then of what work needs to be done. And
12 that remediation work can then be tied into the
13 contract to do the restoration of the wall as
14 well.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Is it
16 once it begins, once the testing begins or once
17 the remediation begins?

18 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: The
19 testing.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So the
21 testing has not begun.

22 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Is it?
23 It has not begun yet. We are in the process of
24 bidding for a contractor. And when that
25 contractor is then on board, that assessment that

1
2 will be done will determine what in fact is found
3 in that area.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So
5 what's the timeline for the testing to begin at
6 Queensbridge Park?

7 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: The bids
8 are back in 2 months.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: The
10 bids are back in 2 months. Then?

11 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: We'd
12 have a contractor on shortly after that.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So this
14 summer, the testing will actually begin.

15 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Exactly.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: And how
17 long will that take?

18 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: I
19 believe the estimate was 9 months.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So just
21 the testing--

22 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI:
23 [Interposing] And that'll be a full--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: --
25 that's not the remediation, that's just testing.

2 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: --well
3 it's a full testing and a report that would
4 indicate then what in fact needs to be done to be
5 remediated.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Okay.
7 And that would also determine the cost of the
8 remediation?

9 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Of the
10 remediation which can then be tied into the cost
11 to restore the wall.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: And
13 then how long would the remediation take?

14 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: That I
15 don't know. Until we have that full report I will
16 not have an answer on that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So it
18 could be years.

19 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: I would
20 think not.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Think
22 not?

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yeah, it
24 could probably be done faster than that.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Okay.

2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Once we have
3 a course of action, we can move a lot faster.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So as
5 you all know, you know, and I have, you know,
6 respect for our Queens Commissioner, the situation
7 continues to get worse as long as it's not taken
8 care of. Is Parks doing anything to shore up the
9 seawall right now because if we don't do anything
10 for years, potentially years, we hope not, but
11 potentially while this is going on, won't the
12 seawall continue to deteriorate and actually be in
13 a worse position and cost more money by the time
14 we get back with?

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well the
16 seawall has to be entirely replaced. It can't get
17 any worse than it is. And we will probably have
18 to, the initial designs, we will probably have to
19 create sort of embayments, the DEC probably won't
20 want us to replace the seawall in kind. They want
21 us to do some kind of an embayment as we did on
22 the other side of the East River in East River
23 Park.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: And is
25 there lead paint actively falling in--

2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

3 We don't think so.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: --the
5 park?

6 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It's not
7 known, you know, whether it's badly contaminated
8 or slightly contaminated, what the source of the
9 contamination is, just that there is some
10 contamination.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Right.
12 So you said you don't think lead paint is falling
13 into Queensbridge Park? Shouldn't we know if lead
14 paint is falling into Queensbridge Park--?

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
16 We don't. There's no evidence that lead paint is
17 falling into Queensbridge Park--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER:
19 [Interposing] Okay.

20 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --because we
21 don't--we haven't painted with lead paint for many
22 decades.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Okay.
24 But we are making sure that there are no open
25 contaminants. Obviously, as you know, that park

2 is actively used and ball fields and--

3 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

4 The park is safe to use.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: --parks

6 and children. So I just want to say it's good
7 that Parks has accepted the leadership role on
8 this park and on this problem, which should have
9 been dealt with a long time ago. And it's an
10 outrage that Queensbridge Park and the people of
11 Queensbridge have not had access to their
12 waterfront for years and that it's taken a lot of
13 pressure to bring us to the point where Parks is
14 taking a leadership role on this.

15 And I realize that there are other
16 agencies involved but ultimately it's Parks and
17 someone has to be responsible. And in a City
18 where we are trying to make sure that everyone has
19 access to their waterfront and can enjoy their
20 parks, it's an absolute disgrace and an outrage
21 that the people who live in the largest housing
22 development project in the country have a wall and
23 a fence blocking their access to their waterfront
24 which they are equally deserving as anyone
25 anywhere else in this City. And I'm sure on that

1
2 we can probably agree.

3 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We are
4 working very hard to provide access to as much of
5 the waterfront as possible across the City to as
6 many New Yorkers as possible so we share your
7 desire to do that.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: But I
9 look forward to working with all of you to make
10 sure that these timelines, you know, happen more
11 quickly because there are at this point now, you
12 know, a generation of children in Queensbridge,
13 you know, who are growing up looking at a park
14 where there is a gaping hole in it and chain link
15 fences around the waterfront.

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yeah.
17 Unfortunately that waterfront tends to deteriorate
18 at a faster level because of the effect of the
19 tides. The effect of cleaner water that allows
20 marine borers to weaken wood. So we,
21 unfortunately, have collapsing waterfronts across
22 the City. If you look across the river you'll see
23 on the Upper East Side there are closed off
24 sections of the waterfront because of the marine
25 environment that's causing collapse. So it's a

2 very complex, very expensive problem all across
3 the City.

4 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: If I
5 may, I just want to add on and support Council
6 Member Van Bramer because I think that when you're
7 talking about Queensbridge as opposed to the Upper
8 East Side, you know, literally people are living
9 right by the waterfront here as the Upper East
10 Side it's a walkway, it's, you know, on the East
11 River, I know I see it every day. It's not like
12 people live right on it and have access to a
13 waterfront.

14 And I'm hoping that in your Capital
15 Plan whatever monies have been allocated for this
16 project is not one of the projected cutbacks. I
17 would hope that if there's any money allocated to
18 this that it continues to be there at 100% with no
19 cut, is that accurate?

20 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: That's
21 correct.

22 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: And I
24 just want to add one other thing to that, Madam
25 Chair, that for working New Yorkers and poor New

1
2 Yorkers their public parks are their vacations,
3 right? It is their summer. And that's why
4 Queensbridge Park is even more important. And
5 that is why we have to do everything we can as
6 fast as we can to return all of it to the people
7 of Queensbridge who deserve it. And there are
8 other parts of the waterfront, as you know, in
9 Western Queens and lots of parks and we love them
10 all but this problem is at Queensbridge, in Queens
11 and it has not been solved. It has gone on too
12 long. And it needs to be fixed as soon as
13 possible.

14 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: And we agree
15 with you on that.

16 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: We've
17 also been joined by Council Member Gale Brewer and
18 Council Member Julissa Ferreras.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank you
20 Madam Chair. And since we're on the waterfront,
21 as you are well aware, I have the marina in my
22 District. And I think whenever you visit any city
23 and you know that there's a marina, the marina is
24 kind of the economic engine, oftentimes. And that
25 hasn't been the case in our Flushing area,

1
2 neighboring Citi Field and Woods Point. As we
3 talk about raising fees, what are the docking fees
4 at that marina now?

5 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I'm going to
6 ask Keith Kerman to come up who, in addition to
7 other things, oversees the marinas.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay.

9 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
10 Commissioner, while we wait for--could you just
11 talk, just quickly address an outstanding question
12 that I just had with regards to the status of the
13 ball fields at Yankee Stadium? That's obviously a
14 pending issue, an outstanding issue. If you could
15 just speak quickly to what is the status?

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I was at the
17 ball fields at Yankee Stadium earlier this week
18 with Commissioner Aponte, touring. It's a very
19 active construction site. There are an average of
20 about 85 workers a day working there.

21 It's perhaps the biggest
22 construction site I've ever seen. They're a few
23 weeks away from putting down the sod. All of the
24 heavy infrastructure work has been done. The
25 fences are done. Many of the trees are going in.

1 So we're nearing completion on that. We're
 2 probably about 6 to 8 months behind schedule on a
 3 5-year project which is not that unusual for a
 4 project of this complexity and this expense.
 5

6 Every other aspect of the
 7 replacement parks has been done. Mill Pond Park
 8 is done. Macombs Dam Rooftop Park is done. The
 9 River Avenue Park, the skate park is done. The
 10 new ball fields at West Bronx Park and at the
 11 public school are done. So this is the last
 12 remaining piece. It is going to be spectacular.
 13 The same company that put in the baseball field
 14 for the new Yankee Stadium is installing these 3
 15 fields at what has been known as Heritage Field.
 16 And so the sod will go in. It will need to rest
 17 for a few months. And then we hope to have people
 18 playing on it by this fall.

19 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
 20 you. Going back to the docking fees.

21 COMMISSIONER KEITH T. KERMAN: The
 22 size of your boat, it's about \$75 per boat-foot on
 23 average.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: So it's
 25 going to be cheaper to dock a boat in a marina

1
2 than it is to be a member of a recreational center
3 in the City of New York?

4 COMMISSIONER KERMAN: Absolutely
5 not. You're--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS:
7 [Interposing] Okay tell me how it won't.

8 COMMISSIONER KERMAN: You're
9 paying, if you have a boat that's, you know, 30
10 feet, you're paying about \$3,000 to \$4,000--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS:
12 [Interposing] Okay.

13 COMMISSIONER KERMAN: --as opposed
14 to \$150 for a rec center. So there's no
15 comparison to that. In the Worlds Fair Marina we
16 have seen, you know, increases in revenue coming
17 in. so we have more business. The reality and
18 the economy has impacted that. Boats and, you
19 know, the saying is a boat's the last thing you
20 get in good times and the first thing you give up
21 in bad times. But we've actually seen additional
22 revenue, additional usage of the marina. We
23 restored 40 slips--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS:
25 [Interposing] Right.

2 COMMISSIONER KERMAN: --so we do
3 have some availability. So if you have a boat or
4 you know someone who does, you know, we can--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS:
6 [Interposing] Sure I'll get right on that.

7 COMMISSIONER KERMAN: --use some
8 more customers but.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: But
10 actually being, you know, whenever I drive by that
11 marina, you can see it's significantly busy. And
12 I think it's probably--everyone that, you know,
13 that I know that owns a boat says that it's more
14 affordable to park in a City-owned marina than a
15 non-City-owned marina. And it just seems that if
16 we're talking about raising fees and raising
17 certain fees in our City in relation to our parks,
18 that if anyone could probably give a little bit
19 more it would be a boat owner in this City.

20 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We have
21 raised fees significantly at all the marinas.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay.
23 And in your waterfront plan, it was very
24 frustrating and I was actually excited to hear
25 that there was a waterfront plan, the 10-year

1
2 plan. And I've already spoken to Seth Pinsky over
3 at EDC. But it just seems that that waterfront or
4 that marina really isn't ever part of a major plan
5 or a major conversation. Is that in the horizon?
6 I know it wasn't anywhere in the 10-year plan.

7 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: The
8 waterfront at Flushing? The marina's there. The
9 park is there. It's in pretty good shape. There
10 are plans for waterfront access, as I understand
11 it, with the Willets Points developments along the
12 Flushing Creek. And you have water access along
13 through Flushing Meadows Park. So you have water
14 access by the marina. There is a waterfront park
15 there. Unfortunately as you go west of there you
16 run into LaGuardia Airport.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Right.

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: And I don't
19 think the airport authorities would want people
20 wandering around the runways there.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Well I
22 wasn't suggesting that but I think that there's a
23 great potential and probably bringing in different
24 types of concessions. And so that those people
25 that are coming to visit the waterfront could

1
2 possibly invest in the community as opposed to
3 going straight into Citi Field. There is really
4 no reason to--other than to maybe walk around in
5 the promenade, I think there's a great opportunity
6 to perhaps expand our concession revenue at the
7 waterfront and get more families to stay there a
8 little longer.

9 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: So you'd like
10 to see like cafes or something?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Yeah.

12 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Okay.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I think,
14 you know, it's what we see in--

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
16 We could look into that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: --regular
18 waterfronts when you go visit a city, you know,
19 you kind of go and get some food and be able to
20 hang out by the marina. It just seems that we are
21 wasting or have a great opportunity that we should
22 be expanding on.

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: If you'd like
24 to see a waterfront café we can look into that.
25 I'll ask our concessions division to check that

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out--

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS:

[Interposing] Okay.

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --we do have--
--there is an indoor concession there at the marina
but we could--

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS:

[Interposing] Yeah. It's like a catering hall.

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --yeah, we
could look to see if we can do some outdoor food
opportunities there. I know a lot of people like
eating in parks and are looking for more things
like that. So we can definitely look into that
for you.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank

you. And my other question is in reference to the
tennis, USTA expansion. It was news to me that I
found out one morning that they're expanding. And
I want to know were you a part of those
conversations. You know, we're getting a new
facility which I think is great. Any time that we
can get more revenue into the City, but I just
wanted to know what were the impacts. Who do they
need to speak to when they expand?

2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: They're
3 actually not expanding. They're creating a new
4 court within their confines of their leasehold.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: So when
6 that happens, they do not have to consult. Do
7 they consult with you? Who do they speak to--?

8 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
9 They consult with us. They have to get approval
10 from the Public Design Commission. But it's
11 inside the confines of the USTA National Tennis
12 Center. It's within their footprint. So there's
13 no expansion.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: So as
15 long as they're within their footprint they--but
16 they did consult with you? They had a
17 conversation about we want to add a new building
18 within our confines?

19 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It's not a
20 building. It's an outdoor tennis court with 3,000
21 seats.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay.

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: And it
24 replaces existing tennis courts.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay.

2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Go ahead.

3 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Thank
4 you. I just would like to add the United States
5 Tennis Center did also inform all of the Community
6 Boards that adjoin Flushing Meadow Park that this
7 was occurring. And as the Commissioner said, it's
8 basically taking 2 outdoor courts within their
9 foothold and creating just a bleacher stadium that
10 seats 3,000 people.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: It would
12 have been great if they could have informed the
13 Council Member in the area. But maybe next time.

14 And actually I just wanted to kind
15 of piggyback on what the sentiments were that were
16 already mentioned. I know that the recreational
17 center in Queens and the Queens pool are very much
18 used. And the residents love it. And when you
19 make these increases, one of the things that you
20 always hear is how affordable it is. And people
21 like going to it because it's affordable. It's
22 clean. It's a great facility. And I think that
23 once we raise the fees, this will make things
24 unaffordable to many people that are currently
25 enjoying it especially the pool which is what we

1
2 hear a lot of feedback on.

3 Now on the programs which you made
4 in your statement here, the Shape Up New York City
5 and Swim for Life, are any of these--do you see
6 any of these cuts affecting those programs?

7 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Fortunately
8 not. We were able to replace some losses in
9 Health Department funding for Shape Up with
10 contributions. Equinox has really stepped up and
11 lately Blue Cross Blue Shield has given us a very
12 large grant to keep Shape Up going for another
13 year. So there will be no loss in any of those
14 program services.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: And also
16 for Swim for Life?

17 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Swim for Life
18 is growing rather dramatically. Again we had a
19 very large grant from the Heckscher Foundation for
20 Children and other private donors who have stepped
21 up. And we hope to double or even triple the
22 number of second graders we serve through Swim for
23 Life. Swim for Life is something that we started
24 just a few years ago. It didn't exist before.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Mm-hmm.

2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Which is to
3 get second graders in public schools into our
4 pools in the middle of the day when they're empty
5 and teach them basic water survival skills because
6 I am personally distressed by the fact that often
7 when there are drownings, say after hours when the
8 lifeguard is not on duty, it's because the
9 individual couldn't swim, an adult, a child.

10 And we need to do a better job of
11 teaching our kids how to swim. So we're going to-
12 -we hope to triple the number of public school
13 students we serve. We have kept up with all of
14 our Learn to Swim programs at our indoor pools and
15 our outdoor Learn to Swim, so we'll probably be
16 serving 25,00 or 30,000 kids a year now compared
17 to just a few thousand a few years ago. So in
18 spite of the economy we've had some very good
19 responses and we're able to offer some increased
20 services in some areas.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I think
22 that program is wonderful. And I've heard some
23 very positive feedback. And that's something that
24 I'd love to be able to support you, Commissioner,
25 on your leadership with that. That was just

2 great. Thank you.

3 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Thank you.

4 Thank you Council Member.

5 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
6 you Council Member Ferreras. I have a question
7 'cause we do keep talking about these increases in
8 fees and, you know, again the disproportionate
9 impact that it has on people that can least afford
10 it. Let me ask you very quickly about the park
11 conservancies. How many conservancies are
12 associated with the Department right and how many
13 of these positions is Parks paying towards the
14 salary of the executive?

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: That depends
16 on how you define a conservancy. There's 10 to 12
17 nonprofit organizations that are raising
18 significant amounts of money to either be for a
19 specific park or for--

20 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
21 [Interposing] All right. So hold on. Let me just
22 stop you right there.

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Okay.

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay so
25 they raise a significant amount of money. All

1
2 right. So we have a report here from the Post,
3 right, just recently from February. Central Park
4 Conservancy, Mr. Polansky got a 20% raise. He
5 gets paid \$433,000. Debbie Landau, Madison Square
6 Park Conservancy, \$15,000 raise plus a bonus of
7 \$20,000. Amy Bowden, she got a spike in her
8 salary from \$166,000 to--during these challenging
9 times these executives are getting paid bonuses
10 and salary increases and a large portion of their
11 salaries is coming from Parks--

12 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
13 Well that's just not true.

14 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: --why
15 can't we--well.

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It's simply
17 not true.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: In some
19 cases it's half of their salary.

20 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: That's not
21 true for Doug Polanski--

22 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
23 [Interposing] Well.

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --that's not
25 true for Debbie Landau.

2 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.

3 So why don't we look in terms of what Parks
4 contributes to these salaries as a way of saving
5 money. Maybe we could avert--

6 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
7 Well if Parks doesn't contribute to salaries then
8 we're saving money.

9 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Right.

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We don't
11 contribute to those salaries.

12 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: You
13 don't contribute to any of these salaries?

14 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Amy Bowden,
15 half her salary or a little bit more comes from
16 the City because she's--

17 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
18 [Interposing] You can show--Commissioner, let me
19 just ask bottom line, Central Park Conservancy,
20 does the Parks Department contribute anything
21 towards the salary?

22 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: No.

23 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Madison
24 Square Park Conservancy, does the Parks Department
25 contribute anything towards the salary?

2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: No.

3 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

4 Randall's Island Sports Foundation?

5 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes, but she
6 also serves as the administrator of the park.

7 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Bryant
8 Park Corporation.

9 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: No.

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.

11 What else? Let's see what other ones are here.

12 Did I mention--so in what amount of money does
13 Parks contribute towards the conservancies?

14 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Virtually
15 nothing.

16 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

17 Virtually, what's the amount?

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: The one
19 exception is that Central Park we have a
20 contractual relationship with the Central Park
21 Conservancy. The Central Park Conservancy raises
22 about \$25 million to \$30 million a year from the
23 private sector to pay for the maintenance of a
24 public park.

25 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Mm-hmm.

2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: The City pays
3 them a fee of approximately between \$4 million and
4 \$6 million a year in a management fee in lieu of
5 providing City-funded staff to run the park.

6 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Well
7 how much do--so the question is well how much are
8 we contributing from the Parks budget towards the
9 conservancies?

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Nothing.

11 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Whether
12 it's the salary or anything else.

13 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Almost
14 nothing.

15 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Almost
16 nothing.

17 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.
19 Well I'd like to get a more specific figure if
20 possible--

21 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
22 We'll be happy to provide that to you.

23 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Huh?

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yeah.
25 Conservancy is the very nature of the

1 conservancies is that they are nonprofit groups
 2 who raise private money to assist the City. It's
 3 a wonderful thing. That's why people come here
 4 from all of the world and all across the country
 5 to study and say we wish we had in our cities what
 6 you have in New York which is generous New Yorkers
 7 by the tens of thousands providing volunteer labor
 8 and writing checks from their own money to support
 9 public parks. It's a terrific thing.

11 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

12 Understanding, understandably. But again, it's in
 13 terms of the people who are benefiting at times
 14 when these parks--that's the issue we're talking
 15 about. You also talk about increasing revenues
 16 when we talk about tennis permit fees, etcetera.
 17 Those increases are in a way are limiting people's
 18 access to parks and to a public resource. That's
 19 the concern and the challenge that I think we've
 20 been raising--

21 COMMISSIONER BENEPE:

22 [Interposing] And the conservancies increase
 23 access.

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Well.

25 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: And the

2 conservancies are in parks across the City and
3 they make the parks better.

4 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I--well
5 we have a difference of opinion to certain aspects
6 of how it is. But I would like a more concrete
7 figure in terms of what we pay towards these
8 conservancies. And see if there's any room there
9 to, you know, revisit that. But I'm going to--I
10 think Council Member Gentile then Council Member
11 Brewer, is she still here? Yes. So Council
12 Member Gentile.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: Thank you.
14 Thank you Madam Chairman and thank you
15 Commissioner and your whole staff for being here.
16 It's a full room. I wanted to, I was just looking
17 through your opening statement which I missed, but
18 I picked up on a few words that you're saying that
19 you have focused; you continue to be focused on
20 core services and that is concluding you're doing
21 more across the board. And that's good to hear.

22 I'm curious 'cause I don't see it
23 in the budget, the issue that repeatedly comes up.
24 And I want to ask you if it's addressed anywhere
25 in this budget of having real quality of life

1
2 issues in the parks when you have park attendants
3 closing the restrooms at 3:00 o'clock in the
4 afternoon whether it be weekdays or weekends. And
5 leaving, really, the majority of the people who
6 use the parks from 3:00 o'clock to closing without
7 the use of a restroom.

8 And you can imagine for any age
9 that's a daunting challenge to be in a park
10 without a restroom that's open. Certainly
11 embarrassing to some extent particularly if you're
12 a female and have that situation. But yet, we've
13 talked about this before, is this--this certainly
14 affects the quality of the use of our parks on a
15 regular daily basis. Is that addressed anywhere
16 here in this budget?

17 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Not directly.
18 You know, it's an interesting call. Do you leave
19 a bathroom open if there isn't staff there? My
20 general principal is you do leave it open and then
21 you have nighttime staff come lock it up. And
22 most of our parks are in fact not staffed and they
23 haven't been for decades in the afternoon hours.

24 So, you know, if a bathroom's being
25 closed at 3:00 it probably shouldn't be so if you

2 let us know which ones those are, we'll work on
3 that.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: We go
5 through this every year.

6 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yeah. So
7 just let us know. Tell us which ones are being
8 closed and we'll speak to Commissioner Jeffrey and
9 make sure they stay open. You know, bathrooms
10 should stay open. We have directed a tremendous
11 amount of resources into making sure that our
12 public toilets, and let's face it, we're the only
13 City agency, the only entity anywhere, that runs a
14 large network of free public bathrooms. You know,
15 they were all closed down on the subways and all
16 closed down other places.

17 And restaurants, they won't let you
18 in to use the bathroom. We provide and we're very
19 proud of that service. We have invested a lot of
20 money in making them universally accessible. We
21 have invested a lot of money in making them
22 weatherproof. And so they should be open. And we
23 inspect them to make sure they have soap and hand
24 dryers and toilet paper and all the things you'd
25 expect. So, you know, if you can give us some

2 specifics, you know, a clean, you know, supplied
3 bathroom doesn't do anyone any good if it's
4 closed.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: Correct.
6 And limits to a great extent how much time people
7 spend in the park.

8 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Right. So if
9 you let us know there's a bathroom that's being
10 closed too early, we'll make sure it stays open.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: Okay.

12 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yeah.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: That's
14 good to know. Let me move on then to you mention
15 the seawall at Kingsbridge Park in Queens. You've
16 talked about that extensively. You just in
17 passing mentioned the one at the East River Park.

18 I would be remiss if I did not ask
19 you about the progress in completing the
20 renovation, repair of the seawall along Shore
21 Parkway from the Verrazano Bridge to Bay Parkway.
22 As you know the other portion of it from the
23 bridge to 69th Street has been addressed but that
24 was years ago. And can you tell me where we
25 stand, 'cause I don't really see anything in this

1
2 budget that would address that issue as to
3 finishing that renovation and repair of that
4 seawall.

5 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yeah, we
6 don't have funding currently for the continuance
7 of that repair and it's a very expensive project.
8 So anything you can do to assist us to get capital
9 funding from either the Borough Delegation or
10 maybe the Army Corps of Engineers or something.
11 You know, as I mentioned there are hundreds and
12 hundreds of miles of waterfront and the waterfront
13 is subject to the forces of nature and enormously
14 expensive to maintain. So the idea that the
15 waterfront would always be in impeccable shape is
16 probably unrealistic given the enormous expense of
17 doing anything on the waterfront.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: But it
19 would seem to me that if you have found a way to
20 do some funding for Kingsbridge Park and I don't
21 know what you did on East River Park that you
22 should be able to at least address something on
23 Shore Parkway in Brooklyn.

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well we'll
25 try to get the funding. In each case we go to the

2 authorities and try to get the funding, whether
3 it's Federal, State or City. So we will continue
4 to seek funding for that.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: In the
6 meantime it deteriorates.

7 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: In the
8 meantime we'll do what we can to keep it open.
9 And unfortunately the, you know, time and tide
10 waits for no one and it sits there laying waste
11 to--we're seeing perhaps the effects of a global
12 climate change and, you know, more frequent and
13 stronger storms. You only have to look at the
14 terrible tragedy in Japan to see the awesome power
15 of nature.

16 And we're a waterfront city, and
17 we're going to be dealing with that fact, with
18 rising sea levels, with more frequent and more
19 powerful storms. And it's something that not just
20 this Administration but the administrations of the
21 future will have to allocate tremendous amounts of
22 money to, to reinforcing the shorefront and to not
23 just reinforcing the shorefront but figuring out
24 ways to make the shorefront more sustainable, to
25 preserve wetlands, to build wetlands, to build

1
2 soft infrastructure and the City has committed
3 \$1.5 billion to green infrastructure to try to
4 figure out ways to process storm water and make
5 the City more sustainable.

6 But it's not something that can be
7 easily solved. And it's the price, the thing that
8 makes New York City great, is that we live in a
9 great freshwater harbor and saltwater harbor. The
10 thing that makes it vulnerable is the fact that
11 we're in a harbor.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: And one
13 thing that makes the neighborhood where I
14 represent great is that it has the access to the
15 waterfront. And when it's threatened as it is now
16 on that Shore Parkway, that is a real issue of
17 quality of life, as it is in the other
18 neighborhoods.

19 And I think when we ballyhoo a
20 waterfront policy and access to the waterfront, I
21 think we're, meaning the Administration, is a
22 little bit day late and dollar short when it does
23 not include repairing and renovating the
24 deteriorated areas like Kingsbridge and like Shore
25 Parkway as part of that entire waterfront plan.

2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We share your
3 desire to renovate and make accessible all the
4 waterfront as much as we can.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: One other
6 quick question and it's really a local question,
7 just wanted to get your sense of it, we have
8 talked about bids and concessions as you had with
9 one of the other Council Members here,
10 particularly at the new overlook at the Owls Head
11 Park. Has that plan gone forward to do
12 concessions at Owls Head?

13 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Off mic
14 discussion] Okay. We're always interested in
15 hearing where Council Members and communities want
16 to see new concessions in parks. So Commissioner
17 Jeffrey will report on that.

18 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY: Yes, just a
19 short on that, we recently visited with our
20 revenue division and we'll be getting back to you
21 with the findings on it.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: Okay.

23 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY: It's a very
24 interesting site for that.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: 'Cause

2 we're looking for a public/private partnership to
3 do some concerts there over the summer.

4 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY: Yes. Yes--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE:

6 [Interposing] Okay.

7 COMMISSIONER JEFFREY: --very much
8 aware of that.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: Great.

10 Thank you Commissioner. Thank you Commissioner.

11 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
12 you Council Member. Council Member Brewer.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you
14 very much. We like Castro and Simon. That's
15 number one. 59th Street Rec Center, thank you very
16 much. Will the lifeguards be staying elsewhere
17 when it's all done?

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It remains to
19 be seen. You know we have an urgent need to train
20 lifeguards and one of the great virtues of 59th
21 Street is that it's accessible to mass transit
22 from the 5 Boroughs. So we don't want to short
23 shrift public safety by saying we won't train
24 lifeguards in a certain recreation center.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. But

1
2 we don't--we're sure they're very happy wherever
3 they are. And we would like them to stay there
4 because we only have 1 pool now 'cause we don't
5 have enough money for a 2nd outdoor pool. And we
6 love the design and the landscape architect but
7 wherever the nice lifeguards are, their director,
8 we hope that they enjoy staying where they are.

9 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We'll see
10 what we can do. We lost a training facility in
11 Staten Island so we're--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
13 [Interposing] Oh I'm sure we could find another
14 one somewhere.

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well we--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
17 [Interposing] Okay.

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --don't want
19 to dump lifeguards on somebody else's District do
20 we?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh, they
22 don't seem to mind. I'm the only one that minds.

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [laughing].

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The rotunda
25 on 79th Street. I know that it's a big lift. Is

1
2 that something that down the line capital-wise,
3 we're thinking about fixing or? It's you and DOT
4 I believe.

5 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes. Us and
6 DOT. So it was built in 1937. It needs a lot of
7 work. What I suspect is we will need to get in,
8 get on line for the next round of Federal multi-
9 modal transit funding because it's hard to see
10 City funding paying for something that's probably
11 a \$30 million or \$40 million project, including
12 the rotunda.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. So
14 that's something that you're paying attention to
15 in terms of the--

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
17 Absolutely.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Earmarks.

19 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Tress on
21 bike paths. I'm one of the few people that likes
22 bike paths. But--

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
24 And we like bike paths.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah I know

2 but--

3 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

4 Yeah.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: --around

6 here, I mean.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Wait a

8 minute, I like them too.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Me and

10 Tish. A few of us, not many. I love them.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I think

12 I've weighed in on that so I don't know.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Trees in

14 the pits I know that Soup Stop which is a store is

15 going to plant herbs so she can put them in her

16 soup, which is a great idea. But do you, like do

17 we have enough trees for the bike path plots that

18 have dirt in them?

19 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: When we have

20 worked with DOT and DOT has created bike paths, we

21 have added trees wherever they're needed. And

22 thanks to the continuing relative health of the

23 Million Tree Program we can certainly add trees

24 wherever they're needed on bike paths.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Great

1
2 because Penny Ryan thought there might be a
3 problem there so she'll be very happy to hear
4 that.

5 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Is that the
6 Columbus Avenue bike path--?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
8 [Interposing] Yes.

9 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Okay. We can
10 take a look at that, Steve, you?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

12 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It's already
13 in the plan, see that?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh good.

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We're 2 steps
16 ahead of you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah Simon

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yep.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Tavern on
20 the Green, is there an update on that and any--is
21 it just going to stay as is which is?

22 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: For now it
23 will stay as is. It has a great visitor center
24 and a gift shop and then it has a food court, an
25 outdoor food court with some terrific, interesting

1 food offerings there--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

3 [Interposing] Right.

4 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --and it's
5 very popular in the nice weather.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

7 School Yards to Playgrounds, I know you mentioned
8 it. Is there any-- there is a decrease in
9 funding. Can you just be specific unless you
10 already did as to how many are going to be able,
11 this particular, coming year, to be renovated?

12 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I know we've
13 got 175 completed. And Sue, what are we looking
14 to do this year? [Off mic discussion] Oh I can
15 repeat it. We have 50 in construction, 50
16 additional on top of the 175 that are already
17 done.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay and
19 how much, what will be the allocation?

20 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: You mean per-

21 -

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

23 [Interposing] Yeah.

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --per site?

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Or some
3 number for the year.

4 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Again, it's,
5 I think, it's \$111 million total.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

7 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: For the
8 program.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. \$100
10 million for the program and you'll be able to--

11 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
12 And we're going to be doing about 250 in total.
13 We had some reductions--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
15 [Interposing] Right.

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --in the last
17 budget, cuts in the Capital Budget. We originally
18 had enough to do 290. We probably look more like
19 250. That may grow if we get some private funding
20 from the Trust for Public Land or other groups.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. The
22 79th Street Boat Basin. I think you've done a lot
23 of work there. The major issue will be in the
24 future; those boat owners always worry about some
25 kind of an ice storm, any kind of other disaster.

1
2 So they've always worried about how we could
3 prevent that with--and I'm just wondering if
4 there's any capital dollars in the budget at all
5 for the future of 79th Street, for that kind of
6 problem? It's a big--there are a lot of issues
7 there but that's one of them.

8 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: No, there's
9 no capital dollars currently in the budget, you
10 know, in addition to ice protection, at some point
11 that will have to be dredged which will be another
12 expensive and environmentally difficult project.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.
14 'Cause we don't know where to put the dredging
15 materials--

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
17 Yeah the dredge spoils--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: --seems to
19 be the issue.

20 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --presumably
21 contaminated with PCBs and other things--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:
23 [Interposing] Have you been able in other places
24 to figure out where you have done dredging what
25 you do with the material? 'Cause that--

2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

3 We haven't done dredging in any of the marinas
4 that I'm aware of. And so we haven't had to. But
5 there's been a lot of dredging done in the harbor
6 for channel deepening, for all the big ships that
7 need to come in--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

9 [Interposing] Right but we do need dredging there
10 because as you know when the tide is low, the
11 boars are high and--

12 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

13 Yes.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: --sometimes

15 out of the water. So is there any plan to even
16 think about funding for dredging? Is that a--

17 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

18 We've been--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: --Federal

20 project or is that--

21 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

22 It's--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: --something...

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Could get

25 Federal money. It's been something we've been

1
2 trying to get funding for without success, you
3 know, we've appealed to OMB because we said this
4 is an income producing facility--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

6 [Interposing] It is?

7 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --for the
8 City.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It is?

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We haven't
11 been able so far to secure that funding.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right.
13 So at a later time can you give us some numbers as
14 to what that might cost and we could work on it--

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
16 Yes we can get back to you on that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you
18 Madam Chair.

19 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
20 you Council Member. I wanted to just delve a
21 little bit into the concession issue. You know,
22 recent audit reports by the Comptroller on Parks
23 concessions have shown that there have been
24 instances where there have been deficiencies in
25 record and revenue reporting by concessionaires

1
2 that is potentially costing the City revenue.

3 So if you could talk to the
4 Committee, if you could just speak a little bit
5 about what steps are you taking to ensure that
6 there is more proper accounting and not
7 underreporting of potential revenue towards the
8 City?

9 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: So we've
10 really been ramping up what we do with our
11 concessionaires. We did extensive outreach to
12 educate operators. We've done compliance mailings
13 and individual meeting with concessionaries to
14 assess, make sure they understand all the
15 requirements of the contracts, and reporting
16 issues, and making sure that they're in
17 compliance.

18 We place an emphasis on ensuring
19 that they properly record, account and report
20 their gross receipts. And that tends to be the
21 area of weakness. And in particular when a
22 concessionaire is obligated to pay a license fee
23 as a percentage of the gross receipts instead of a
24 flat fee, you know, for the small hot dog courts
25 and stuff, we get a flat fee, but in larger

2 operations it's a percentage of gross. We require
3 a point of sale system that has to keep an
4 automatic record of transactions.

5 So in addition to--we don't--we no
6 longer count on the City Comptroller or State
7 Comptroller to do audits. We do a number of
8 internal audits. We have an internal audit unit
9 of concessionaires' books and records. And we've
10 done dozens of compliance reviews of these
11 concessionaires in the last three years--

12 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

13 [Interposing] Just quickly, just for
14 clarification--

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

16 Yeah.

17 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: --is

18 the point of sale always been in place or is that
19 new requirement?

20 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It's been in

21 place for a while but what happens is you get
22 slippage. And they have a point of sale system
23 or, you know, the point of sale system machine
24 breaks and they no longer have a point of sale or
25 they don't number the contracts for, say, if

1
2 you're doing weddings and you have wedding
3 contracts and you don't number the contracts.

4 So there's a lot of real fine
5 detail involved with managing the concessions.
6 And, you know, our goal is to make sure that we
7 get the maximum money back for the City even
8 though we don't keep it. You know, it goes to the
9 City's treasury, it's still paying for vital
10 services like police and fire and sanitation.

11 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And you
12 said \$60 million is what you're projecting from
13 concession revenue and that's--

14 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
15 We're--concession revenue it's closer to \$40
16 million--

17 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
18 [Interposing] Okay.

19 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --so \$60
20 million is the total revenue.

21 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Right.
22 So \$40 million from concessions.

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yeah.

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Now let
25 me ask you specifically about one case with

1
2 regards to the boathouse in Central Park. And the
3 operator there who doesn't seem to be a very nice
4 gentleman. And I understand that that originally,
5 there were conversations happening about him
6 taking over the operations of Tavern on the Green
7 and that all broke down and the City pulled away.

8 One of the things that I think he
9 refused to really do was to work with the hotel
10 trades union which had members in the Tavern on
11 the Green in terms of bringing them onboard. That
12 was one of the conversations that was being asked.
13 And I don't think he was willing to do that.

14 But the workers in the boathouse
15 are unionized, also represented by the hotel trade
16 workers. And a series, primarily people of color,
17 you know, low wage workers, that have now filed a
18 complaint with the National Labor Relations Board
19 for abuse in labor practices by the operator. The
20 NLRB decision has not come down as of yet. If the
21 decision comes and if it's favorable towards the
22 workers, where does the Department of Parks stand
23 with regards to that license agreement with that
24 operator? I would hope that there are serious
25 penalties or considerations there.

2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well I would
3 disagree with your characterization of Dean Poll
4 who is running a very effective business which a
5 lot of people enjoy and which contributes over
6 \$1.5 million every year to the City's treasury
7 through the concessions revenue. They were
8 earning twice as much per capita at the boathouse
9 compared to Tavern on the Green. And they were
10 paying \$1.6 million a year, the top paying
11 restaurant of all our restaurants. Dean Poll is a
12 terrific operator. He owns a number of
13 restaurants. You know, we'll see--

14 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

15 [Interposing] So you don't give any weight to the
16 workers that have filed complaints against him on
17 how he treats them--

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

19 Well that's not our, you know, it's the NLRB who
20 has to weigh that. We have no capacity to--

21 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

22 [Interposing] And my question is what is the
23 repercussions in the case where the Department of
24 Parks is in an agreement with an operator, if he
25 is found to be abusing workers and defying labor

1
2 practices. What is the repercussion on a license
3 agreement if that's the case?

4 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: The license
5 agreements don't address labor grievances. And I
6 think when you said that it's a unionized
7 workforce there, I think you're mistaken. It's
8 not a unionized workforce.

9 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Well
10 they're working with the hotel trade workers. So
11 they did--

12 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
13 Yeah but they're not unionized.

14 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: --file
15 a complaint. Okay. Well they did file a
16 complaint. All the more reason they probably
17 should be. I would encourage that. So what is
18 the, what would be the steps taken by Parks, in a
19 situation like that? And I'm saying in this
20 specific case because if this happens to be or
21 happens to be in other agreements where there is
22 this kind of a situation, you know, what measures
23 would Parks take to kind of address this--

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
25 We would take--

2 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: --or
3 are you saying you don't--

4 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --anything
5 that's in the contract with the City we would make
6 sure is enforced.

7 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And in
8 the case of a situation like this, what does the
9 contract call for?

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: There's
11 nothing in the contract about labor relations.
12 That's handled by a completely separate division
13 of government.

14 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And you
15 don't think that there should be something maybe
16 in license agreements about workforce treatment
17 and how people treat their workers?

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It's not
19 currently in the City's law.

20 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.

21 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: And, you
22 know, if you look at some of the other businesses
23 like Tavern on the Green went bankrupt and, you
24 know, Café De Ortiz [phonetic] went bankrupt.
25 And, you know, there's no obligation for one of

2 those businesses to have a unionized workforce.

3 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I'm--
4 very disheartening what you're alluding to in your
5 statement. Somehow saying that--and people paying
6 decent wages to workers, it drives businesses to
7 the ground and that maybe something that shouldn't
8 be considered as part of their practice. That's
9 kind of what I'm reading through the lines there.
10 But again I think that that is something that we
11 would want to look at that if the NLRB rules in
12 favor of the workers in terms of what the
13 implications are, what would be asked of that
14 operator. I think that is something that you
15 should play a role in--

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
17 Whatever the NLRB requires, they'll do.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.
19 And, oh I'm sure--

20 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH:
21 [Interposing] Council Member if I could just add,
22 all of our concessionaires are required to conform
23 with Federal and State laws including Federal and
24 State labor laws.

25 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And if

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they don't?

COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It's not--
it depends on, I guess, the extent of whatever
violation is found. Obviously, this issue arises
with our capital contracts. We require our
capital contractors, you know, to adhere to the
220 laws of the City, the State rather, and
sometimes our contractors violate that. If it is
a significant violation, you know, those
contractors are barred from working for the City
for a period of time.

If it is a lesser violation of
those laws, they have to comply with whatever
requirements are established by the, in the case
of 220 violations, by the Comptroller's Office, in
some cases by the courts. And we make sure that
they adhere to whatever rulings are made by the
governing body.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: How do
you make sure of that?

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Because they
can't work for us--

COMMISSIONER GARAFOLA:
[Interposing] They can't work--

2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --if they
3 don't adhere to it.

4 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.
5 So that means that contracts can be terminated
6 based on that is what you're saying.

7 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes.

8 COMMISSIONER GARAFOLA: In the case
9 of an egregious violation, of course, yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Has
11 that happened historically at any point with Park-
12 -

13 COMMISSIONER GARAFOLA:
14 [Interposing] I don't know of any case where a
15 concession contract has been--

16 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
17 We've terminated many contracts but it's not--I
18 don't know--

19 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
20 [Interposing] Right but not for this specifically.

21 COMMISSIONER GARAFOLA:
22 [Interposing] But for that particular reason I
23 don't know of one off the top of my head.

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: 'Cause I'm
25 not aware of any egregious labor violations that

2 have been found in any concessions.

3 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.

4 So we--

5 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

6 So we're speaking somewhat theoretically here.

7 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Well in
8 this case, you know, again if the NLRB decision is
9 won, then, you know, we will definitely want to
10 follow up on that and make some sort of requests
11 from Parks in terms of how it interacts with this
12 operator. I think that that's a right that we
13 have and I think that we can make that request but
14 we'll look at that when the time comes. But I'm
15 just saying that in terms of how this comes down
16 the line, it could also be something that, in
17 terms of how it, you know, how we work and how we
18 deal with contracts in the future--

19 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

20 [Interposing] Mm-hmm.

21 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --you know,
22 in terms of the expectations of the operators. So
23 thanks for that. And now I think there was one
24 follow-up from Council Member Crowley and then
25 we're going to close the section with the Council

Members, so we can go to the public. Council Member Crowley.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you Madam Chair. Just to follow up on what the Chair Member brought up, when was the last time the City did an audit on the boathouse?

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: They were audited by the Comptroller within the last 3 or 4 years at least.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: You don't-- don't you do internal audits to make sure--

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing] Yes. We audit constantly.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Every year?

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: I don't know about every year but they are a very good operator. They pay the City a lot of money--

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: [Interposing] We just want to make sure that they pay--

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --and the money that they pay pays for teachers and fire fighters and police officers.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: \$1.6
3 million, has it gone up from year to year?

4 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It goes up--
5 actually it's \$3 million? [Off mic discussion]
6 Over \$3 million a year. So it goes--it's the
7 highest paying operation.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: But you
9 don't have a policy within the Parks Department to
10 do internal audits on your concessionaires--

11 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
12 Yes, we do. Yes we do.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: But how
14 often do you do those?

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Off mic
16 discussion] Come up here.

17 [Pause]

18 COMMISSIONER ELIZABETH W. SMITH:
19 Good morning. I'm Betsy Smith. I'm the Assistant
20 Commissioner for Revenue and Marketing. Just to
21 remind the group here, we have over 500
22 concessions in the Parks Department of which about
23 100 are major paying concessions. We have a very
24 extensive internal audit process. We've been
25 doing 20 or 30 internal audits a year. So you can

1
2 imagine we do get around to our major concessions
3 on a fairly regular basis.

4 In response specifically to your
5 question, we did do--the Comptroller did an audit
6 of the boathouse about 3 years ago. And the
7 concessionaire has been in full compliance with
8 all the recommendations of that audit.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Well when
10 was the last time the Parks Department did an
11 audit?

12 COMMISSIONER SMITH: Well since it
13 just completed and often the Comptroller's audit
14 is because they have the staff, have much more
15 extensive recommendations. And so it would be
16 unlikely that we would do another internal audit
17 after a Comptroller's audit. So we--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY:
19 [Interposing] Right but that is approximately--

20 COMMISSIONER SMITH: --they will
21 probably be on our list.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: They bring
23 in approximately 10% of your revenue.

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: A little bit
25 less--

2 COMMISSIONER SMITH: [Interposing]
3 5%.

4 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --but yeah.

5 COMMISSIONER SMITH: 5%.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: How is
7 that 5% if--

8 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
9 5% of \$60 million or--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Not if
11 it's \$6 million, you said it was \$6 million.

12 COMMISSIONER SMITH: Oh it was \$40
13 million. Yes, they are--

14 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
15 Okay so 7% is \$40 million.

16 COMMISSIONER SMITH: They are our
17 largest concession. They are an extremely well
18 run, very professionally, very popular concession
19 in Central Park. So we've been very pleased with
20 what they've done.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Now my
22 final question had to do with the downsizing or
23 the number of months that you're reducing the
24 workforce from 12 months to 9 months. This is
25 select titles. You'll save \$17.5 million in

1
2 Fiscal Year 2012 by reducing these full time
3 positions from 12 months a year to 9 months a
4 year.

5 I'm curious, you know, I imagine
6 that reducing these staff workers to 9 months of
7 the year, they're going to just collect
8 unemployment for 3 months. And then wind up
9 costing the State and the City monies through
10 various benefits they'll receive when they'll be
11 staying home and not working. And I don't know
12 what 3 months is in the plan but every month of
13 the year and even in our winter months, we're in
14 need of workers, especially as we've seen this
15 past winter with so much snow removal in and
16 around our parks that it clearly doesn't make
17 sense, economically, for--

18 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
19 Well what we're looking at now Council Member is a
20 voluntary program for people who would like to
21 retire and come back and work for us for 6 months
22 of the year. And, you know, no one is being
23 forced to work a reduced schedule. And it's,
24 again, an effort to avoid layoffs. Totally
25 voluntary--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY:

3 [Interposing] Okay but is it--it says from 12
4 months to 9 months in the paperwork that I have.
5 Is that accurate?

6 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: That's an
7 earlier version of that plan. Yeah, and we're in
8 negotiations--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY:

10 [Interposing] That's--

11 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --this plan
12 may or may not come to fruition. We hope that it
13 does because we think it's a more palatable
14 alternative to layoffs. And other agencies have
15 been doing layoffs. We have managed to avoid
16 those for three years. A layoff is a terrible
17 thing. And if we can come up with some voluntary
18 programs where people work a slightly reduced
19 year--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY:

21 [Interposing] Well I just think that the money is-

22 -

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --it's
24 totally voluntary.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: --is going

1
2 to be--it's not really going to reduce the overall
3 City's budget. It might come from miscellaneous
4 budget or other areas of the budget and reduce the
5 Parks Department budget. But we're planning for
6 unemployment insurance and other benefits that
7 these workers are going to be collecting.

8 It's one thing if a worker is doing
9 it voluntarily. But if we're going to be paying
10 benefits and some sort of salary whether it's
11 through unemployment insurance for the other
12 remainder of six months, while they're waiting to
13 come back to work, and there's plenty of work they
14 could be doing, that--

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
16 I think what we're envisioning is people would
17 resign and collect their pension and then come
18 back to work for a few months a year.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Okay. All
20 right. I just don't see how that would be cost
21 savings if the City is going to be paying money
22 though that pension for six months. 'Cause it's
23 going to cost money in the pension--

24 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
25 I mean you pay that pension regardless.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Well when
3 they start collecting it but it would delay that.
4 And they could be working those six months.

5 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yeah. I
6 share your concerns. We're trying to be creative
7 to avoid layoffs--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY:
9 [Interposing] I understand.

10 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --I think
11 nobody wants layoffs. So we're trying to be as
12 creative as we can.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Right.
14 Okay. Thank you.

15 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yep.

16 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
17 you Council Member. And so just with regards to--
18 'cause I think that touches on a whole bunch of
19 things that we've talked about but the seasonal
20 budget reduction is you're projecting a \$5.5
21 million savings, is that accurate?

22 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And so
24 again going back to the question that was raised
25 before that if you haven't been able to really

1
2 meet the hiring freeze and attrition programs, you
3 know, in terms of this request, I mean it just
4 seems like it's not gelling so to speak in terms
5 of what--

6 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

7 Well that's--this is slightly different. With
8 attrition you don't force people, they either
9 resign or move on or they don't. With the
10 seasonal plan you simply don't hire those
11 positions. So it's totally within our control.

12 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: But

13 trying to--I think in some of the recommendations
14 as Council Member Tish James was saying about
15 something that she put out in a statement
16 yesterday about trying to meet your attrition
17 levels or your layoffs, encouraging people to
18 maybe retire earlier as a way of trying to
19 minimize these very important positions. And
20 don't you think that the seasonalization plan is
21 going to impact the cleanliness of parks and some
22 of the other work--

23 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]

24 Yeah. We hope it won't but look we have to face
25 reality here. Across the board, the City and many

1
2 other cities across this country are facing severe
3 fiscal problems. And all agencies have to make
4 cuts. And so we are not exempted from that. And
5 so we can do it a very simple way which is simply
6 to lay people off and reduce services or we can
7 raise fees and not have layoffs or we can try to
8 come up with creative strategies. But, yes, there
9 will probably be an impact of a continued fiscal
10 crisis, not just on our services but on all the
11 services across the City.

12 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And I
13 know that you testified last year and you kind of
14 alluded to this year when we talked about the
15 planting of trees and the stewardship programs,
16 you seemed to have a lot of faith, which obviously
17 we would love to have a lot of people
18 volunteering, but in terms of keeping our parks
19 clean and in terms of also the stewardship of the
20 trees that are newly planted, how successful has
21 that been? Because you did mention that last year
22 as part of your budget testimony, that you were
23 looking to engage in a more active program of
24 having people volunteer in parks, help towards
25 parks cleanliness. So how has that fared? And

1
2 are you projecting to grow that in this--

3 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
4 It's been very successful and we're projecting to
5 grow it.

6 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Does
7 that also apply for the stewardship of the
8 horticulture, the planting--

9 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
10 Yes. As part of the Million Trees NYC Stewardship
11 Program.

12 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And so
13 that's where--okay. So 'cause you did talk a lot
14 about aggressive planting and I guess one of the
15 questions was about the budget for that. Mr.
16 Kavanagh, you did talk about the positions, 135
17 positions, but in terms of the budget for pruning,
18 stump removals, has that stayed the same? Has
19 that been impacted in this budget--?

20 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
21 That's been impacted.

22 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: By how
23 much, can you just say the amounts? For this
24 year's?

25 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: It was two

2 years ago during that round of project cuts, we
3 lost--

4 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

5 [Interposing] Okay.

6 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --money for
7 pruning contracts. But Commissioner Kavanagh can
8 speak to it more.

9 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: The
10 pruning and the stump removal budget was reduced
11 by between \$4 million and \$5 million. And that
12 happened two years ago. We still have
13 approximately \$1.5 million to \$1.8 million for
14 block pruning and emergency work. And of course
15 in situations like we experienced in the September
16 tornado, additional money was added to our budget
17 to, you know, to meet those emergencies.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So the
19 last question I have is that on March 21st when we
20 did our hearing here, Mark Page indicated that a
21 letter had been sent to all agency heads asking
22 for additional 4% budget reductions. So what
23 additional impact do you see that having on your
24 agency? And where are you looking to get that 4%
25 from?

2 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Well we're
3 looking all across the agency again and trying to
4 minimize--the main thing we want to try to do is
5 preserve services for the communities and to
6 minimize the effect on cleanliness or safety in
7 the parks. But we don't have our final details
8 worked out yet. We're still looking where we
9 could make those cuts while minimizing the impact.

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And
11 thank you for that. And we're going to close this
12 but I just have to say, you know, it's very--of
13 great concern. I understand that your role is to
14 come here and say that we're going to do more with
15 less. But in looking at what we're looking at,
16 when we're looking at the cuts, minimizing the
17 number of months that people work, not only are we
18 talking about the people's livelihoods obviously
19 being impacted, but I just can't see this being
20 fulfilled and somehow saying that our park system
21 is still going to be the wonderful park system
22 that it is.

23 I see what the increase in permit
24 fees, recreation fees, less people accessing our
25 parks, limiting public use, increasing private

1
2 use. You know, it's just a lot of inconsistencies
3 here. It really, I think, sends the wrong message
4 about where our priorities are at. And again I
5 would also encourage your agency, Commissioner, to
6 be a little bit more engaged with the local
7 representatives. I think Council Member Ferreras
8 mentioned about work that's happening in her
9 District that she wasn't aware of.

10 The fact that Council Member Arroyo
11 in the Bronx did not know until about a month ago
12 that there was a major decision begin made by
13 Parks when it comes to Mill Pond Park. And that
14 recreation center which the community fought for
15 to have and has got a renovated facility there
16 because of the whole Yankee Stadium vote that we
17 took, you know, there's a lot of conversations
18 that need to happen and more engagement with the
19 local electeds.

20 The Cedar Grove issue, where's the
21 EIS on that? What's going on with that right now?

22 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: We're in the
23 middle of the EIS process and should have it done
24 by the summer--

25 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

[Interposing] And how much is that going to cost?

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: A quarter of a million dollars.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So it's already started.

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: Oh yeah--

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
[Interposing] Okay.

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: --and we've had our first public hearing about a month ago.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Okay.
Well with that, thank you, Commissioner and--

COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
Let me thank you and assure you that, you know, your concerns that we work with local communities, I think there's probably no agency that works harder to work with local communities. Our managers attend all the Community Board meetings. We have Borough Commissioners. We have District Managers. I think we are as responsive as any agency in the City in terms of our outreach. We have our Partnerships with Parks Program. We have Outreach Coordinators.

But you can always do a better job.

1
2 And you can't, you know, you'd like to make sure
3 that everyone knows everything that's going on at
4 all times but I would say in general the Parks
5 Department does the best job of any agency I can
6 think of in terms of its outreach and its
7 solicitation of what communities want to do
8 because after all at the end of the day we want to
9 make parks that people want. You know, we have no
10 interest in spending money on services that people
11 don't need or want. So we try to be as responsive
12 as we can. And all the capital projects go to the
13 Community Boards. We work with the elected
14 officials. We go before review agencies.

15 So I would agree with you in terms
16 of, you know, why would I remain optimistic in the
17 face of these challenges, yeah, we really don't
18 have a choice. I could sit here and look in the
19 glass as being half empty or I could look at it as
20 being half full. I could say, you know, we're,
21 for what ever reasons, our park inspection program
22 ratings are slightly higher this year compared to
23 the same time last year. That's somewhat
24 counterintuitive.

25 I know that we're becoming better

1
2 managers. We're automating a lot of things. We
3 have, thank goodness, these wonderful
4 conservancies that are raising up to \$90 million a
5 year to augment what we do. It's things like that
6 that make me feel optimistic that despite the
7 budget cuts we will continue to provide as good a
8 park system as you'll find in the world. And
9 that's our goal.

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Well I
11 appreciate your optimism. I look to be optimistic
12 as well but my role and my responsibility and my
13 perspective and philosophy is about equity and
14 equal treatment of all. And regardless of how
15 much you make, regardless of what community you
16 live in, and I believe--and I'm not speaking
17 specifically, you know, there are concerns and
18 challenges that we've spoken about with regards to
19 certain things in your Department but I'm just
20 saying in your agency, but I'm just saying in
21 general about where our priorities stand as a
22 City, where our priorities stand as a State and
23 what message we're sending in some of the
24 decisions that we make, give me great concern.

25 So that's what I will seek to

2 continue to do and raise those questions of
3 inequity when it needs to be raised and figure out
4 ways we can arrive at a great mutual
5 understanding. So with that--

6 COMMISSIONER BENEPE: [Interposing]
7 I'll let you have the final word

8 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: --I
9 appreciate it. Thank you Commissioner. I thank
10 you very much for the time. And I'm sure that
11 there will be some people from your agency that
12 will stick around. And then we're going to go to
13 our panels. We'll take a short minute, like 5-
14 minute break and then we'll come right back.

15 [Pause]

16 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Ms.
17 Jackie Rowe Adams will be the first panel. I
18 think you give it to the Sergeant at Arms.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
21 you. They don't like us to take it from you.

22 [Pause, witnesses getting settled]

23 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I think
24 there's four chairs, yeah. Yes, I see Jackie Roe.
25 I see Peter Stein, Franklin Page and Javier

Rodriguez, okay. Wonderful.

[Witnesses getting settled]

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: All right, once they decide how they start, we can just begin the testimony. We will wait until all testimonies are read and if we have any questions we will ask them at that point. Thank you.

[Pause]

MR. PETER STEIN: Thank you. Council Person, this is, I guess, we can't keep meeting like this. This is becoming an annual event. Last year, very fortuitously, your wisdom, the Council's wisdom restored \$2 million to the Parks Department which permitted the Parks Department to continue to operate its 66 pools throughout the City for the entire summer and avoid closing 4 pools constantly for the entire summer.

While I am the President of Local 508 which represents supervisory lifeguards, I come before you as an advocate of water safety, of swimming. And I've devoted my life to that discipline. And I'm not here as a partisan president, I'm here to urge the Council to restore

1
2 the \$2 million that once again has been removed
3 from the Parks budget which will result in the
4 closing of the 66 pools, 2 weeks prior to Labor
5 Day. I know this is an awful day outside. It's
6 rainy. It's miserable. It's in the 40's. I'm
7 going to try to just bring you back to a time last
8 summer where it was 97 degrees on August the 31st,
9 the hottest summer in recorded time.

10 Had you folks not done what you did
11 in the restoration the swimming pools of New York
12 City would have been closed through the hottest
13 week of the summer, the last week of August. Not
14 the Administration, not the Mayor, and no anyone
15 can predict the weather. There are 2 million
16 people that use New York City's pools. Clearly
17 last year 10% of that number used them during the
18 last week of the summer. Those people would have
19 been turned out on the street and in effect what
20 would that have resulted in. Well it would have
21 resulted in numerous fire hydrants being opened.

22 And I'm going to share with you not
23 a what might happen but something that happened
24 last summer. It was a Saturday. It was close to
25 95 degrees. The Parks Department received a phone

1
2 call from the Commissioner of DEP, asking the
3 Commissioner, the Parks Commissioner whether in
4 fact Highbridge Swimming Pool in Washington
5 Heights could be kept open until 9:00 o'clock in
6 the evening.

7 The concern was the fact that the
8 water pressure in Washington Heights was already
9 extremely low and taking 3,000 young people and
10 turning them loose at 7:00 o'clock in the evening
11 was a concern that the water pressure would have
12 been reduced to the point that had there been a
13 fire, Washington Heights and unfortunately Council
14 Member Jackson isn't with us, I would have liked
15 to have reminded him that his neighborhood might
16 have burned to the ground.

17 So we have the following situation.
18 We have a situation where healthy, supervised
19 facilities can be kept open throughout the entire
20 summer for the additional \$2 million. The Parks
21 budget is roughly \$362 million. I'm sure in this
22 City, somewhere, someone can find \$2 million to
23 service these communities. And they transcend not
24 just the Committee but every Councilmatic
25 District. Some place, one of your constituents is

1
2 going to a New York City pool.

3 I urge you to once again find the
4 wisdom to make that restoration. It seems like
5 it's a bargain. I also suggest to you, you will
6 not be able to predict what the weather's going to
7 be this summer. Fortunately last summer everybody
8 dodged the bullet because you folks did the right
9 thing.

10 I would suggest also, I'm not going
11 to read this to you, I provided the testimony to
12 you; you can read it for yourself. I want to call
13 to your attention something I was reminded of
14 while I was putting this together. If you can
15 recall, and it's unfortunate the Council Person
16 from the Bronx has left, unfortunately some young
17 people in the Bronx found a place to swim.

18 It was the wrong place to swim. It
19 was a river. It was unsupervised. And they
20 drowned. You close the pools; kids are going to
21 open hydrants. They're going to find a way to get
22 cool. They're going to find other places to swim
23 that are not safe. And the results will be
24 disastrous. This is not hypothetical. This is
25 something that happened last July. It was all

1
2 over the newspapers.

3 So I am asking you to do what
4 obviously the Administration can't find the
5 ability to do and that's find \$2 million at a time
6 where there is a \$2 billion to \$3 billion surplus
7 in the budget to keep these pools open. And I'm
8 hopeful that next year we won't be having this
9 discussion again 'cause quite frankly I'm getting
10 tired. I mean we talk about taking more kids to
11 the pools and teaching them how to swim. That's a
12 wonderful thing. And the agency should be
13 commended for that expansion.

14 But it's inconsistent with the fact
15 that you're closing the places that they can go to
16 swim where there are Learn to Swim programs, where
17 there are lunches served for free, and you are
18 locking the doors to those places. I hope in the
19 next week or two, certainly some time before the
20 budget process ends, to speak with many of you
21 privately about this. We need an advocacy here.
22 We don't seem to have a natural advocacy. And
23 it's very difficult at this time of the year with
24 the weather the way it is to get folks to focus on
25 this.

2 I am concerned that by the time the
3 decisions need to be made, somehow this will be
4 obscured. So once again I commend you for what
5 you did last year. I'm not going to read my
6 written testimony. I provided it to each of you.
7 I'm not going to bore you with that. I hope you
8 can all remember the sweltering heat last summer.

9 Think also of the fact that your
10 constituents, the people my members service for
11 the most part, don't have second homes in the
12 Hamptons, don't get on a plane and go to Bermuda
13 when it's hot. They go to the New York City
14 swimming pools. And to close them at this point
15 would be a travesty. And I thank you for your
16 time. And I think my colleagues have ceded their
17 time to me. I don't want to spend a lot of time.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Oh so
19 you're not going to testify? And you didn't give,
20 you know--

21 MR. FRANKLIN PAGE: I just want to
22 say--

23 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
24 [Interposing] --yeah, you--

25 MR. PAGE: --President of Local

1
2 461. I just want to second everything that Peter
3 said. Madam Chair, thank you for last year. We
4 did not forget you and we hope to restore the
5 funding for not closing the pools. And thank you
6 again.

7 MR. JAVIER RODRIGUEZ: Javier
8 Rodriguez, Local 508 Vice President. I just want
9 to let the Council know that I grew up on
10 Manhattan's Lower East Side and my parks were the
11 East River Park and Ham Fish Park. And when I did
12 finally get a bike I would go up to Carmine from
13 time to time. I learned to swim in New York City
14 parks. I was one of the activities that helped me
15 go on to high school competitive swimming, college
16 competitive swimming.

17 And it helped me get out of my
18 neighborhood. It was a place where my family
19 would go to the park, you know, on hot days. I
20 mean we went on some vacations, not many. But,
21 you know, Ham Fish Park was the park to go to.
22 It's a very big pool. It's a place for--I grew up
23 in 691 FDR Drive where most of the building went.
24 And we hung out there at the park. When we were
25 done swimming we'd go to the East River Park to,

1
2 you know, play softball.

3 If communities are going to be
4 impacted, it's going to be a communities like this
5 where kids like me were growing up. This is their
6 release. This is where they go. I do remember
7 when water levels dropped because kids like me, we
8 would go to the fire hydrants and open them up and
9 cool off, if you will.

10 I was made aware of that call where
11 Highbridge Pool was requested to remain open for
12 the fear that after 7:00 o'clock when the pool was
13 closed that kids would go out into the streets and
14 it was during the heat wave that they may open up
15 the hydrants and cause the water levels to drop.
16 And in the event there was a fire, it would have
17 impacted the community, you know, even more with
18 respect to no place to go versus potential fire
19 and where do we get the water from.

20 I just want to thank the Committee,
21 the Council, last year for restoring the budget
22 and keeping the pools open the entire season. And
23 I hope that you are able to do that again.

24 MS. JACKIE ROWE ADAMS: Good
25 afternoon. Oh, and let me say that again, good

1
2 afternoon Chair Mark-Viverito. And I should know.
3 I'm so used to saying hi Melissa to you. And
4 fellow members of the Parks and Recreation
5 Committee. My name is Jackie Rowe Adams. And I am
6 President of Local 299 of District Council 37. I
7 represent 424 members in the titles of Park
8 Associate, Recreation Specialist, Recreation
9 Directors and Recreation Supervisors. I also
10 share with my colleague Peter the Learn to Swim
11 program that teaches the kids to swim. And I have
12 members in Local 299.

13 Let me begin by saying I come
14 before you today not only as a Local President
15 representing members who work within the Parks
16 Department but also as a mother, an advocate, who
17 believes these recreation centers are the lifeline
18 in our communities. I understand the importance
19 of having these recreation centers as safe havens
20 for children and teens in our community.

21 Prior to becoming President of
22 Local 299, I would say I was a Recreation
23 Supervisor but I still am a Recreation Supervisor.
24 For 26 years I have served Parks. I am proud to
25 say that Parks is a part of my growth. I have

1
2 learned so much from Parks. And I have seen how
3 important these centers are in our lives where we
4 live, especially low income families who many
5 times cannot afford to enroll their children in
6 costly activities or even take a vacation.

7 These recreation centers play a
8 crucial role in shaping the lives of many, many
9 children and teenagers. Many of the activities
10 that we offer bring structure to their lives and
11 help them to learn teamwork. And as you know
12 that's very important, teamwork.

13 Some of the duties our members are
14 responsible for include overseeing basketball
15 leagues, aquatic activities, and running after
16 school programs. Without these centers, many
17 children and teens would not have a safe place to
18 go after school to get assistance with homework or
19 even participate in group activities.

20 The alternatives for many kids
21 would be to become key kids or engaging in
22 unsupervised street activities with gangs. And we
23 know it's many, many gangs out there waiting to
24 recruit our kids. But I'd rather our centers
25 recruit our kids before the gangs get to them. I

1
2 want to say we cannot, we cannot afford to lose
3 not even one child to the streets.

4 My members also work with seniors
5 who need an affordable place to swim, take Tai Chi
6 or aerobic classes or just walk a treadmill.
7 Recreation centers encourage retirees to
8 socialize, exercise, increase their quality of
9 life.

10 Let me end by saying as a long time
11 mother and advocate in Harlem, I am urging the
12 City Council to restore the 15% the Mayor has
13 proposed to eliminate for seasonal workers in
14 recreation centers. This is the least you can do
15 and you have done. As you sit there you
16 understand, especially our Chair. And really the
17 whole Council 'cause you all have worked closely
18 with me as we stood out there in the street and
19 cried for places to send our children.

20 We cannot for low income families
21 in our community afford to close any centers,
22 afford to lose any of our staff, especially with
23 the summer coming and they're talking about
24 cutting summer programs? What are we going to do?
25 We are going to send them to the Parks Department

1
2 where they have wonderful programs. Where I
3 learned to do recreation. And I am very proud to
4 be in Parks. And I know that the City Council is
5 going to continue to work with us. And I ask you
6 once again, it's all about the children.

7 When you put that gun down and pick
8 up the ball, I want us to recreate in our centers.
9 Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I want
11 to thank you all for your testimony. And Jackie,
12 thank you very much for all the advocacy you do
13 with Harlem Mothers Save, in addition to your full
14 time job. It's very much needed. And so
15 obviously, you know, advocating on behalf of
16 places where our young people can go is critical.
17 You speak specifically in your testimony with
18 regards to the increase in recreation fees. But I
19 would assume you're representing 425 members, I
20 would assume that this budget is probably calling,
21 right--

22 MS. ROWE ADAMS: [Interposing] Mm-
23 hmm. Absolutely.

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: --on
25 impact in terms of the staffing.

2 MS. ROWE ADAMS: Yes, absolutely.

3 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So
4 those workers would be impacted too--

5 MS. ROWE ADAMS: [Interposing]
6 Absolutely.

7 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: --with
8 the policy changes or recommendations that are
9 being proposed by this budget. So I don't know if
10 any of my colleagues have any questions for
11 anything. Thank you Mr. Stein for your testimony
12 as well. Thank you all.

13 MS. ROWE ADAMS: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: The
15 next panel, Holly Light, Jeffrey Croft, Ruth
16 Leonard, Eric Tomen, I hope I'm pronouncing it
17 right; I apologize if I'm not.

18 [Pause]

19 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So I
20 see Jeffrey Croft and Holly Light, the other two,
21 Ruth, Leonard Goldstein? Eric Tomen? [Off mic
22 discussion] I guess not, okay. Yes? Well I think
23 they can hear me. And he's coming, okay. Yes, if
24 you could sit up on the panel. On the panel.

25 [Witnesses getting settled]

2 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And so
3 Ruth is not here. Okay. We'll leave that on the
4 side. All right, any one of you can begin. Feel
5 free to, anyone jump in and start.

6 MS. HOLLY LIGHT: I'll start. Good
7 afternoon Council Member Mark-Viverito, staff of
8 the Committee. My name is Holly Light and I'm
9 Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks a 100-
10 year old organization that champions greener,
11 cleaner, and safer parks for all New Yorkers.

12 Thank you for this opportunity to
13 comment on the Administration's Preliminary FY '12
14 budget for DPR. It comes at no surprise that
15 Parks Capital and Expense Budgets, like those of
16 all City agencies face significant cuts. While
17 cuts to the Capital Budget are always painful and
18 result in the elimination or delay of anticipated
19 parks projects, New Yorkers for Parks commends
20 Parks' efforts to spread these cuts so that the
21 most underserved Boroughs are the least affected.

22 We recognize that budget cuts are
23 unavoidable in this economic climate and our
24 primary concern is that the resources that remain
25 at Parks' disposal are allocated equitably so that

1
2 all New Yorkers have access to quality parks and
3 open spaces.

4 To this end my testimony will focus
5 on two proposed PEGS that we are concerned would
6 have a disparate impact on those New Yorkers least
7 able to afford alternative recreational
8 opportunities. First the proposal to double adult
9 recreation center fees, more than double senior
10 rates and increase permit fees including doubling
11 the price of tennis permits from \$100 to \$200.
12 DPR projects this will provide \$4 million per year
13 in revenue to the City's general fund after an
14 estimated 5% loss in membership.

15 We believe this is a highly
16 optimistic loss projection. When fees were first
17 imposed in 2003, recreation center membership
18 dropped 13% and when they were doubled in 2007,
19 membership dropped 38% initially though it later
20 rebounded somewhat. Doubling tennis permit fees
21 in 2003 resulted in a 40% drop in permit sales.
22 While fees remain less than the cost of most
23 comparable private venues, they will nonetheless
24 price some lower income New Yorkers out of these
25 opportunities, the very New Yorkers who have the

1 most limited alternative recreational options.

2 We've started a dialog with DPR
3 about whether a tiered fee structure is viable.
4 And we encourage the Council to ask engaging in
5 thinking about ways to encourage this so that this
6 PEG does not have a disparate impact on low income
7 New Yorkers.

8 Secondly we're concerned about the
9 proposed 15% seasonal reduction. While the
10 specifics of this cut have not been laid out,
11 based on past proposals this could mean the
12 closure of pools as well as limited pool and
13 playground hours. We respectfully ask DPR and the
14 Council to reconsider this reduction as it would
15 disproportionately affect those New Yorkers with
16 the fewest other places to swim and play during
17 the summer months.

18 Finally I'd like to say a word
19 about the pending Federal cut in CDBG funds. The
20 entire \$800,000 budget of Green Thumb, the
21 community gardening program of DPR, is supported
22 by CDBG funding. In a time of limited resources,
23 Green Thumb is about the best deal going. On a
24 miniscule budget they enable communities to create
25

open spaces that require no City-funded design, build-add or maintenance. It is imperative the Green Thumb, already operating on a bare bones budget be held harmless from any CDBG cuts.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak on behalf of Hew Yorkers for Parks. And I look forward to working with DPR and the Council to address these concerns.

MR. JEFFREY CROFT: Good afternoon. My name is Jeffrey Croft. I'm the President and Founder of New York City Park Advocates. "The budget isn't a true budget, it is a sham. It does not reflect the demands of the Department". That was Robert Moses testifying before the City Budget Director in 1935 after being instructed by Mayor LaGuardia to submit a less than appropriate budget.

Today I am here to give testimony on the FY '12 budget for the Parks Department, specifically the Expense Budget. Over the last 40 years no other City agency has lost a greater percentage of its workforce than the Parks Department. Mayor Bloomberg's proposed budget allocates only a fraction, just \$222 million in

1
2 tax levy funds that are desperately needed to
3 properly maintain, operate, secure, and program
4 over 29,000 acres of public parks.

5 The Mayor's proposed \$65.6 billion
6 for the next Fiscal Year anticipates Parks
7 Department spending dropping by \$52 million or 15%
8 to \$290 million (sic). This would result in
9 massive service cuts and thousands of jobs being
10 lost or reduced to seasonal only. Nearly 1,800
11 Park jobs through a Welfare to Work program would
12 be cut. In July, 1,468 full-timers would see
13 their workload reduced to 9 months a year. And
14 another 299 jobs would be eliminated through
15 buyouts.

16 Crimes in parks, as everyone knows
17 now, were up 24% in 2010. Yet we only have a
18 handful of Park Enforcement Officers for 29,000
19 acres. The majority of them are in so-called
20 contract parks. The City's increasing reliance on
21 these public/private partnerships has resulted in
22 a vastly inequitable distribution of services. It
23 has quickly become a Tale of Two Cities.

24 Experience with public/private
25 partnerships over the last 20 years has proven

1
2 that private subsidies to individual parks has
3 created an enormous gap between the haves and the
4 have-nots while ignoring the real problem: that
5 our parks are not funded as an essential City
6 service.

7 The Parks Department is in dire
8 need of thousands of additional workers and
9 hundreds of millions of dollars in additional
10 expense funding: funding and personnel many say
11 the agency will never receive. This is shameful.
12 The City routinely allocated one-third of what the
13 Parks Department actually needs. It is imperative
14 that the City allocate a budget that reflects the
15 true needs of the Parks Department.
16 Unfortunately this one does not come remotely
17 close as usual.

18 For more than four decades, City,
19 State and Federal governments have allocated a
20 fraction of the funds needed to maintain our vast
21 parks system. The City's parks, once the most
22 celebrated and unprecedented public work program
23 in the nation, many have become dumping grounds.
24 Their maintenance and safety have plummeted under
25 the weight of crippling budget cuts.

1
2 Despite being in violation of the
3 City Charter for decades, the City has been able
4 to get away with this with virtual impunity. The
5 question is how much longer will the City's
6 elected officials collectively be able to ignore
7 this public health crisis. For decades the public
8 has been told the expense funding needed to hire
9 the skills laborers, the gardeners, the climbers,
10 the pruners, the foresters, the plumbers, the
11 blacksmiths, and positions like park enforcement,
12 qualified managers and other positions that are so
13 desperately needed are not available for our
14 public parks.

15 This proposed budget is an
16 unfortunate and constant reminder of how in both
17 good economic times and bad, remember last year we
18 had a \$3 billion surplus, public funding for Parks
19 is simply not a priority. Our elected officials
20 refuse to allocate adequate funding. The
21 political will necessary to provide funding for
22 safe, well-maintained parks and public recreation
23 programs that every neighborhood deserves simply
24 does not exist. It's not a priority.

25 The Bloomberg Administration is

1
2 also quietly pushing through massive recreation
3 fees for Parks Department facilities. This is on
4 top of the huge recreation fee increases for
5 tennis and ball field permits that just went into
6 effect this season. As usual this will impact the
7 City's most vulnerable. And as I predict and we
8 just heard, these will not yield the financial
9 gains as projected.

10 The City is claiming the recreation
11 fees increases are designed "to help defray the
12 costs for the Department to maintain fields,
13 courts and recreation centers" even though the
14 money goes to the City's general fund. Also the
15 City estimates it will take in \$142.9 million from
16 Park revenue this year but again the Mayor's
17 proposed Expense Budget allocates just \$222
18 million in City funds for the embattled agency.

19 This Administration is desperately
20 trying to get the agency to pay for itself. This
21 policy represents the wrong priorities. And
22 although this is a citywide problem that affects
23 virtually every segment of the population, it is
24 no secret that a disproportionate amount of the
25 most severe issues exist in poor neighborhoods:

1
2 the City's underserved communities, namely the
3 working class, the poor and the disenfranchised in
4 areas populated by people predominantly of color.
5 This is, of course, the great irony considering
6 these are the communities that rely on these
7 public services the most.

8 This pattern of neglect must be
9 reversed. In closing this plan, if adopted, would
10 be devastating to an already decimated City
11 agency. Our parks system cannot afford these
12 reductions especially in these economic times when
13 the public is depending on our public parks and
14 programs the most. Thank you for that, I just
15 want to just add a couple of things.

16 On the capital expenditures, the
17 Goodhue Woods Park is a wonderful property that we
18 are allocating \$6 million for. I just wanted to
19 say a park like Saviors in Maspeth, that community
20 has been trying to get a park for more than 5
21 years. And we're still having problems. You know,
22 St. Saviors, we need the capital funds. We need
23 money to have that park acquired. And I cannot
24 stress that more. Also the Asphalt to Turf
25 Program, again, these fields aren't even ADA

1
2 compliant which is a huge issue. The people can't
3 use them in the summer because they're so hot as
4 we know these fields are reaching temperatures of
5 over 160 degrees. That is a big issue.

6 The last thing I just want to say,
7 I don't have enough time to correct all the
8 misrepresentations made by some of the public
9 officials at your, you know, from the Parks
10 Department. The Yankee Stadium projects, Adrian
11 misrepresented and said that he used--they were
12 behind schedule 6 months. Some of the Yankee
13 Stadium projects were over 3 years behind
14 schedule, 3 years. And, you know, that still is
15 impacting not only the community but the
16 taxpayers. The Yankees made almost \$800 million
17 from that stadium, just in the last 2 years. And
18 the public still does not have a ball field as
19 opening day is today. Thank you very much.

20 MR. ERIC TOMEN: Thank you very
21 much. My name is Eric Tomen [phonetic]. I've
22 been a Community Gardener for 15 years and I'm the
23 Vice President of the New York City Community
24 Garden Coalition. I want to thank the members of
25 the Council for the chance to speak here and

1
2 specifically to Chairperson Viverito for your
3 opening remarks underscoring the importance of
4 Parks supporting the funding for the Green Thumb
5 program. Thank you very much.

6 The New York City Community Garden
7 Coalition along with its partners and allies, call
8 upon our City, State and Federal government
9 representatives to protect New York City Parks and
10 Recreation Green Thumb Program. Green Thumb is
11 fully funded by the Federal Community Block Grant,
12 CDBG, Program. And it has a modest budget of
13 around \$800,000 annually, less than one-half of 1%
14 of New York City's current \$200 million CDBG
15 allocation.

16 Now the US House of Representatives
17 2012 budget or HR 1 calls for nearly a two-thirds
18 reduction in the CDBG program. This proposed
19 Federal budget cut could mean elimination of Green
20 Thumb or a drastic cut into its existing meager
21 budget. Since 1978 Green Thumb has nurtured over
22 600 community gardens and 20,000 members and City
23 residents with gardening supplies, technical
24 assistance, and personal guidance.

25 Green Thumb was created in response

1
2 to the City's fiscal crisis of the 70's when over
3 1,500 vacant lots were spread throughout the City,
4 mostly in low income neighborhoods of color. It
5 was a partnership between the City and local
6 residents to reclaim these vacant lots and turn
7 them into community gardens. As community
8 gardeners who have invested their hearts and souls
9 in these gardens, we now want to cash in on our
10 sweat equity in return for Green Thumb funding.

11 In anticipation of the impending
12 crisis we are requesting that our elected
13 officials protect funding for Green Thumb in all
14 CDBG-funded programs in New York City. Green
15 Thumb's programs are essential. The programs are
16 vital to the growth and resurgence, for civic
17 engagement, urban agriculture, and community
18 development.

19 In the 30-year history of Green
20 Thumb, the City of New York has never been
21 fiscally responsible for its funding. We
22 therefore ask New York City Office of Management
23 and Budget ensure that Green Thumb receives its
24 full share of CDBG funding, once received.

25 Now is the time for the Mayor and

1
2 the City Council to act in good faith. Just like
3 the banks of Wall Street got a bailout, our
4 gardens and Green Thumb need a bailout right now
5 whether it be from tax levy money or Federal
6 assist forfeiture funds. For years we've been
7 told that the amazing work of Green Thumb and its
8 community gardens. In 2010 Green Thumb received a
9 US Environmental Protection Agency, Environmental
10 Quality Award for demonstrating and outstanding
11 commitment to protecting and enhancing
12 environmental quality and public health, a
13 testament to the importance of its role in health
14 and the well being of our City.

15 In conclusion, by supporting Green
16 Thumb, we are not only recognizing their outstand
17 work but we are also making a commitment to the
18 gardeners who help make this City great and to the
19 future of community gardens and urban agriculture
20 in New York City. Thank you very much.

21 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
22 you all for your testimony. I think you've raised
23 issues that we've expressed great concern about.
24 And I'm not sure how comfortable you feel with
25 regards to the--you know, when I was asked about

1
2 it by the Commissioner about the Green Thumb and
3 if that money were to be lost that those
4 responsibilities would just be absorbed within the
5 existing agency. That basically because of the
6 commitment of the volunteers that the community
7 gardens pretty much take care of themselves for
8 the most part was kind of like the message that I
9 was getting from the Commissioner.

10 But I guess we were asking for some
11 more thought process to go into exactly if that
12 worst case scenario were to happen what, you know,
13 what we would be looking at. Obviously we want to
14 save that funding. I mean were you encouraged at
15 all by how the Commissioner answered the question?

16 MR. TOMEN: I had some questions.
17 I do want to reiterate just how important, how
18 critical the offices and the staff of Green Thumb
19 have been over 15 years and what they have
20 supported. It would be really catastrophic to
21 move ahead in the whole world of community
22 gardening without that agency at our side. Thank
23 you.

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
25 you. Well thank you all for your testimony. I

1
2 couldn't agree more with what you've laid out.
3 And we'll move on to the next panel. Thank you
4 very much.

5 MR. CROFT: Councilwoman, can I
6 just ask one thing? Someone had asked about the
7 rate, the percentage of people taking care of the
8 trees, the Million Trees thing. We have something
9 on our blog, A Walk in the Park, from last year.
10 And these numbers came from the City. And this, I
11 don't know if this has been updated, but I think
12 it was something like 5%. So Adrian when he was
13 asked about that he said oh it's tremendously
14 successful. 5% is not my definition of something
15 that's tremendously successful. So, you know,
16 obviously you guys will be doing some follow-up--

17 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

18 [Interposing] Right as we move on towards the
19 Executive Budget--

20 MR. CROFT: [Interposing] Yeah.

21 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: --
22 definitely--

23 MR. CROFT: [Interposing]
24 Excellent.

25 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: --we'd

2 be looking to get a little bit more concrete in
3 terms of the numbers that he outlined.

4 Next panel we have John Huber, Sara
5 Crippen and Dilcy Benn.

6 [Pause]

7 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Yeah we
8 already go, we already have Sara Crippen's
9 testimony has been given to us. If there's any
10 others? Perfect. Hold on.

11 [Pause]

12 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So then
13 you said John Huber has something written? No I
14 don't have that one actually, if I could get that
15 one. Oh, here I got it. Okay. I got Sara's and
16 John's, okay. Either one, anyone can start.

17 [Pause]

18 MS. DILCY BENN: Good morning Madam
19 Chair and other honorable members of the Committee
20 on Parks and Recreation. I want to thank you for
21 all for allowing me the opportunity to testify
22 regarding the impact of the City budget on the
23 Department of Parks and Recreation.

24 My name is Dilcy Benn. I'm the
25 President of Local 1505 and I am the Chairperson

1
2 of the Parks Policy Committee for DC 37. I
3 represent the City Park Workers who are the
4 largest group of employees working in the
5 Department of Parks and Recreation.

6 City Park Workers are the employees
7 responsible for cleaning and maintaining our City
8 parks and recreation centers. We are the backbone
9 of the Department. Before getting elected
10 President of my Local in 2009, I worked as a CPW
11 for 10 years. As a part of the 2012 budget, the
12 Parks Department is looking to seasonalize City
13 Parks Workers as well as other Parks employees.

14 The Parks Department wants to
15 change our full time year round employee status
16 and have us work only six months out of the year.
17 I am absolutely opposed to this idea. And I am
18 here today to explain why the City Council should
19 be too.

20 First, if City Park Workers worked
21 only six months out of the year, the quality and
22 upkeep of our parks and recreation centers would
23 suffer greatly. I want you all to understand that
24 City Park Workers are the only maintenance staff
25 working inside the recreation centers doing

1
2 maintenance and operations work. In addition
3 recreation centers are currently seriously
4 understaffed in regard to City Park Workers and
5 maintenance and operation of those centers. In
6 most recreation centers there's only one City Park
7 Worker working on any given shift.

8 Please understand garbage will not
9 be picked up, broken glass will not be swept away,
10 benches will not be repainted and trees and plants
11 will not be cared for, to give you just a few
12 examples. We maintain the heat in the recreation
13 facilities. We are responsible for snow removal,
14 spreading salt during snow storms, assuring the
15 safety of every resident, tourist and employee in
16 our parks.

17 We are responsible for delivering
18 equipment to all areas of our parks. If this work
19 isn't done on a daily basis, our parks would
20 suffer greatly and be in serious disrepair. Very
21 sorry about that. Disrepair. A condition of
22 disrepair which will impact the quality of life
23 not only for City residents but also the millions
24 of tourists which visit our parks every year.

25 Obviously cutting our work year by

1
2 six months will leave our parks less safe,
3 considerably less clean and a lot less attractive.
4 Without full time, year round staff to keep an eye
5 on things and maintain order, conditions in our
6 parks will become deplorable. What will happen if
7 something is broken or a state of danger exists
8 inside a park or recreation center? With no one
9 there to take care of the problem, it will be
10 highly probably that many park visitors will get
11 hurt.

12 This fact is extremely disturbing
13 when it comes to criminal activity, criminal
14 activity in our parks and recreation centers. If
15 the City Park Workers are not stationed year round
16 on a full time basis in our parks and recreation
17 centers, there will be serious increasing crime.
18 If Parks employees are seasonalized, the impact is
19 going to fall most heavily on poor neighborhoods
20 that don't have wealthy conservancies to fall back
21 on. For all of these reasons the City Council
22 must stop the cuts and stop the seasonalization.

23 Lastly, I just want to say that
24 despite being the largest group and the backbone
25 of the Parks Department, City Park Workers are

1
2 also the lowest paid, full time employees in
3 Parks. While we are proud of the work we do, many
4 of my members are already struggling to make ends
5 meet on a full time salary. We can hardly survive
6 as it is. If Parks were to cut our salaries by
7 50%, many of my members will end up on public
8 assistance. And to me this is unacceptable
9 especially when you hear that the Parks Department
10 has been hiring so many highly paid managers.

11 Therefore I am asking the City
12 Council to take action to stop these cuts and to
13 stop the proposal to seasonalize our Parks
14 Department employees. Thank you again for
15 allowing me to testify today. I'll answer any
16 questions.

17 MS. SIRRA CRIPPEN: Where's the
18 mic? I would like to thank the members of the
19 Committee on Parks and Recreation for allowing me
20 the time today to testify regarding the impact of
21 the City's budget on the Department of Parks and
22 Recreation.

23 My name is Sirra Crippen and I am
24 the President of Local 1507, DC 37, representing
25 Gardeners and Assistant Gardeners in the

1
2 Department of Parks and Recreation. I am also
3 here today to testify against the proposals by the
4 Parks Department to convert my members into 6-
5 month seasonal workers.

6 Make no mistake; there is no upside
7 to seasonalizing Parks Department employees. The
8 proposal would be bad on every level. Bad for the
9 public, bad for the parks, and bad for Parks
10 employees. In addition to the concerns already
11 raised, let me also add that if Parks Workers are
12 seasonalized, the esthetic quality and conditions
13 of our City parks will deteriorate even further.

14 A good amount of our greenery in
15 our parks is already in poor condition because we
16 don't have enough gardeners. So if we were to
17 become 6-month employees, plants will not be cared
18 for, lawns will not be tended, and the overall
19 park landscape will not be maintained. This will
20 make our parks less attractive to visitors and
21 possibly even turn them into eyesores.

22 With seasonalization, our parks
23 will be messy and full of weeds instead of
24 beautiful and well maintained. We can't let this
25 happen. Therefore I am calling on the City

2 Council to stop the cuts and to stop the proposal
3 to seasonalize Parks Department employees. Thank
4 you again for allowing me to testify today.

5 MR. JOHN HUBER: Good afternoon.
6 Good afternoon everybody. My name is John Huber.
7 I'm the President of Local 1506, the Parks
8 Department Climbers and Pruners. Thank you for
9 allowing me to testify today. I am here today to
10 testify on behalf of the members of my Local and
11 to enlighten you on the type of work that we do
12 for the Parks Department.

13 Our main role in the Parks
14 Department is to do dangerous street tree removal
15 and emergency storm damage. And I've provided
16 some pictures exactly the type of damage and
17 devastation that can be created by a tornado and
18 hurricanes and ice storms. And our job needs to be
19 a year round job because the City--it would create
20 lawsuits for the City from dangerous dead trees
21 falling. And it's a priority. The City, you
22 know, they would get a lot more lawsuits.

23 And I've provide a list of the
24 amount of things for the Queens Forestry Division
25 of numbers and calls that we get every year. And

2 by just having this storm, the tornado, it took us
3 3 months to catch up with the backlog of trees
4 that we had. So I'm asking the City Council to
5 consider making my job all year round and not a 6-
6 month season, because it would impact the City
7 greatly.

8 If anyone has any questions.

9 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Yes.

10 First of all thank you all for your testimony.
11 Ms. Benn, I know that we've met recently, thank
12 you for what you shared. Can you just mention,
13 each of you, how many members are in your Local?
14 For instance, Mr. Huber--

15 MR. HUBER: [Interposing] I have
16 100 members in my Local. We take care of the
17 street trees in all 5 Boroughs.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So it's
19 100, okay, that's the climbers--

20 MR. HUBER: [Interposing] We're
21 very understaffed. We lost 10% of our membership
22 this year from promotions and retirees.

23 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So that
24 100 takes into account those promotions and the
25 retirees.

2 MR. HUBER: Yes. We have 100
3 remaining--

4 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:
5 [Interposing] And so you had how many before that?

6 MR. HUBER: We had about
7 approximately 110.

8 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: 110.
9 Okay. So 110. Ms. Crippen? How many in your, do
10 you represent?

11 MS. CRIPPEN: Approximately 140.

12 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And
13 obviously that would impact, this decision would
14 impact every single member in your Local, right?

15 MS. CRIPPEN: Yes it would.

16 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And
17 you, Mr. Huber as well--

18 MR. HUBER: [Interposing] Yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: --how
20 about you Ms. Benn?

21 MS. BENN: I have approximately a
22 little over 700 members in the Parks Department.
23 And they are talking about cutting almost 500 of
24 them.

25 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: When

1
2 you say cut is it by changing their--

3 MS. BENN: [Interposing] By
4 changing their status--

5 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: --to
6 seasons.

7 MS. BENN: Yes. That's the--with
8 the list that came out with the 1,500, they're
9 talking about cutting almost 500. Thank you
10 again. Council Member James, I think you had a
11 question.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Just to Mr.
13 Huber, thank you for mentioning the tornado. You
14 refreshed my memory and I'm glad Commissioner
15 Kavanagh is still here. The tornado went through
16 the middle of my District and destroyed Lowery
17 Triangle which is where Underhill, Washington and
18 Atlantic Avenue meet. And it's still in terrible
19 condition. They removed all of the debris.

20 But obviously, Commissioner, we've
21 got to talk about how to restore that triangle,
22 that park. And I do know Mr. Huber, I just wanted
23 to thank you and your workers for cleaning it up
24 and making it presentable and doing all that you
25 did after the storm. I know your guys worked 24

1
2 hours, 7 days a week, because I continued to
3 communicate with them with regards to all the
4 trees that had been fallen in the District during
5 that terrible tornado.

6 And lastly, to the two Presidents
7 who are here today, Ms. Crippen as well as Ms.
8 Benn, Dilcy, I just wanted to say I stand with
9 you. And obviously these cuts and these
10 reductions and the seasonalization is obviously a
11 concern with regards to safety. The reason why
12 people are coming to parks is because of safety.
13 And so we've got to do all that we can here in the
14 City Council to restore these funds and to address
15 the needs of the residents and make sure that the
16 budget is not balanced on the backs of workers.
17 Thank you.

18 MS. CRIPPEN: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
20 you Council Member. Thank you all for--

21 MR. HUBER: [Interposing] That's
22 for the support. We really appreciate it. Thank
23 you.

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: You're
25 welcome. Thank you all for testifying. We have

2 one more panel. I think Mr. Rivel left. Oh okay,
3 so David Rivel, Daryl Pleasant, Joe Polie,
4 Marielle Anzelone? Okay.

5 [Pause, witnesses getting settled]

6 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Yeah.

7 So anybody can feel free to begin. Thank you.

8 MR. JOE POLIE: Good afternoon. My
9 name is Joe Polie [phonetic], I'm Vice President
10 of Local 93. I represent the City Seasonal Aides,
11 the Urban Park Rangers and the Associate Park
12 Workers. Okay, the APSWs. Okay I'd just like to
13 begin by saying that crime is up 25% in City parks
14 alone. They're up as high as 400% in parks like
15 Crotona. Okay, there hasn't been a crisis to this
16 degree in quite a long time. That coincides with
17 the number of Parks Enforcement Officers that have
18 been reduced.

19 Okay the numbers that they are are
20 at an all time low. As a matter of fact they're
21 so low that the Parks Department has become so
22 desperate that they place them with welfare
23 workers. Okay these are JTPs that are supposed to
24 be assigned to get training, to go get jobs
25 elsewhere. They're being placed with these

1
2 officers to go out and do police work.

3 Now, you know, I heard that the
4 Parks Department doesn't recognize the Parks
5 Enforcement Officers as a deterrent in crime in
6 parks. They are 24-hour peace officers. Okay
7 they carry handcuffs. They carry batons. They
8 carry mace. They are no different in effecting
9 arrests as a New York City Police Officer and they
10 cost half the amount of money. Okay.

11 So I don't understand how the Parks
12 Department could turn around and say that the
13 Police Department's job is to enforce the rules
14 and regulations of the park. You know, they are
15 the front line. They have been the front line.
16 And to discredit them by downplaying them like
17 they're some sort of dog watchers in the park is
18 real absurd. And I take personal offense at this.

19 The cuts that we're talking about
20 will really place the parks in a bad, bad
21 situation. Interestingly enough the Parks takes
22 an active interest in these conservancies like
23 Battery Park City, Hudson River, people have
24 money. So what they're doing basically is
25 redlining their interests. They are more

1
2 interested in rich parks where people could afford
3 to pay for their services and become sort of a
4 real estate management team you know, and this has
5 to stop, you know, this cannot continue any
6 further. You know, the people of the City of New
7 York deserve better. Thank you.

8 MS. MARIELLE ANZELONE: I did.

9 Okay. Sorry. Committee Chair Melissa Mark-
10 Viverito, distinguished members of the Committee,
11 and guest, my name is Marielle Anzelone. I am an
12 Urban Ecologist and Executive Director of New York
13 City Wildflower Week which is a nonprofit advocacy
14 organization that connects New Yorkers to the
15 nature in their backyard through free cultural
16 programming throughout the five Boroughs.

17 I thank the members of the
18 Committee for this opportunity to testify. From
19 April 2001 to November 2007, I was the Plant
20 Ecologist for the City of New York Department of
21 Parks and Recreation Natural Resources Group. It
22 was my job to conserve, manage and restore the
23 native flora of the five Boroughs. Most people
24 are surprised that New York City has nature at
25 all, yet nature is nearly half of Parks' inventory

1
2 with towering forests, expansive marshes and
3 grassy meadows covering nearly 1/8 of the City,
4 making New York the greenest in North America.

5 Most of this greenery is native
6 plants. A New York City native plant is a plant
7 that occurs naturally in our region without having
8 been introduced from elsewhere by humans. Over
9 thousands of years these native plants have
10 adapted to the climate, soils and environmental
11 conditions of our area, and developed symbiotic
12 relationships with native insects, birds, and
13 other animals. New York City native plants
14 include grasses, ferns, herbs, trees, shrubs and
15 vines and are the building blocks of our
16 biological diversity and the cornerstone of our
17 natural ecosystems, our forest, grasslands and
18 meadows.

19 During my tenure at Parks, my work
20 and that of my colleagues charted a disturbing but
21 unsurprising trend: the local extinction of our
22 wild flora. Of the 1,357 native plants ever
23 recorded in New York City, only 778 species
24 remain. In recent decades Staten Island, the most
25 bucolic Borough, has lost more than 30% of its

1
2 indigenous vegetation, including such botanical
3 treasures as Nodding Trillium and Yellow Lady
4 Slipper Orchid.

5 Most people tend to think that such
6 local extinctions are caused by dramatic, isolated
7 incidents. Attention-grabbing events like oil
8 spills or forest fires garner headlines. While
9 these are certainly detrimental, the loss of
10 biodiversity in the New York City area is largely
11 due to the ongoing destruction and degradation of
12 habitat. Our natural areas are shrinking and
13 deteriorating. The pattern of habitat loss is
14 alarming since it undermines efforts to conserve
15 what remains.

16 The biggest threat to our native
17 plants is habitat destruction due to development.
18 Given that so little land remains un-built in New
19 York City, no open space is safe, not uplands, not
20 wetlands. Our forests of oak and hickory are
21 traded for box stores and parking lots. Public
22 works projects are placed in parklands. Our
23 forests and fields are only valued when improved
24 through human activity and the original greenery
25 is gone.

1
2 After destruction of habitat the
3 biggest threat to our local flora and fauna is
4 invasive species. These are introduced, exotic
5 species that no know biological boundaries. They
6 run rampant through our parks, damaging local
7 forests, meadows and wetlands. These invasive
8 plants can smother our natives, shading them from
9 the sun and effectively starving them to death.

10 Some invasives are so closely
11 related to our indigenous flora that their pollens
12 mix, producing hybrids that overwhelm the local
13 gene pool, resulting in no native progeny and an
14 inability for wildlife to use the plants. Thus
15 invasive species disrupt ecological relationships
16 and degrade natural areas.

17 Over a 50-year period there was a
18 study done in Pelham Bay Park, the largest natural
19 area in New York City Parks' system. Pelham Bay
20 Park lost 2.8 native plant species every year
21 while it gained 4.9 new exotics annually. New
22 York City must take a more active role in
23 recognizing and encouraging the retention of its
24 native biodiversity.

25 In other places around the world,

1
2 across the country and in the region, there are
3 already initiatives in place that recognize and
4 protect local biodiversity. Last year the United
5 Nations designated 2010 to be International Year
6 of Biodiversity and held a global summit in Japan
7 last October. The Obama Administration last year
8 launched America's Great Outdoors, to reconnect
9 Americans to nature.

10 The Congressional No Child Left
11 Inside Act would make environmental education a
12 bigger priority. Meanwhile neighboring Suffolk
13 County requires property owners to keep part of
14 their land wild. Even a recent McKinsey and
15 Company global survey noted that biodiversity is
16 the next environmental issue on the corporate
17 agenda.

18 In a time of global biodiversity
19 awareness, New York City is being left behind.
20 City government should start with recognizing the
21 value of our urban ecology. Since my departure
22 from NRG in November 2007, the Plant Ecologist
23 position has been left vacant. Presently there is
24 no one who conserves and manages the native flora
25 of the 12,000 acres of New York City-owned

1
2 parkland in the 5 Boroughs. And while the Million
3 Trees Initiative is a laudable effort it is not a
4 replacement for rare plant surveys and habitat
5 management.

6 Where is the investment in New York
7 City's natural heritage? Investing in New York
8 City's nature is critical because it provides
9 oxygen for our lungs, absorbs our storm water,
10 feeds our butterflies and houses our birds. And
11 in case you didn't know birding in New York City
12 is big business. It does all of this free of
13 charge. And yet to replace these services would
14 incur real costs. New Jersey recently calculated
15 the worth of its nature at \$18 billion per year,
16 equal to the State's construction industry.

17 Nature is also critical to our
18 quality of life. Studies show that people living
19 in apartments overlooking trees reported feeling
20 healthier and less aggressive than neighbors whose
21 views were of concrete. A walk in the woods can
22 remedy city living by lowering stress levels and
23 even mortality rates for some cancers. So cities
24 that discourage wildflowers also create unhealthy
25 environments for people and incur real costs like

1
2 more frequent 911 calls.

3 We New Yorkers innately know that
4 nature is good for us. In the weeks following the
5 September 11th tragedy, New York City parks were
6 flooded with people seeking solace in green
7 spaces. The healing effects of nature are real,
8 free and available to all, as long as these places
9 are allowed to exist.

10 At this time I would like to call
11 your attention, if you have my notes you can see
12 the last page, but to the back of this past week's
13 Week in Review from the Sunday New York Times. As
14 you can see it prominently features a botanical op
15 art piece on nearly the entire page. I wrote this
16 op art piece to showcase some of the many native
17 plants that are now extinct in New York City. The
18 editors at the New York Times believe that the
19 issue of urban biodiversity loss is so critical
20 that they allocated significant resources to
21 address this issue.

22 I hope that the same may be said of
23 New York City's budget for Parks and Recreation.
24 Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

25 MS. NICOLE JOHNSON: Good

1
2 afternoon. My name is Nicole Johnson. I'm
3 Director of Government Relations for City Parks
4 Foundation. David had to leave so I'm going to
5 testify on his behalf. I'm actually not going to
6 read all of the testimony but I just want to draw
7 your attention to a couple of key points. We
8 would like the Council; we actually would like the
9 Parks Committee's support for our \$200,000 Expense
10 Leadership Request.

11 This request is actually to go
12 towards our Sports Education and Community
13 Building Initiatives. Many people know City Parks
14 Foundation for its concerts and as an arts and
15 cultural institution. In addition to those
16 programs we provide tennis in 40 parks around the
17 City, a gold program in 13 parks around the City,
18 and a track and field program in 13 parks in the
19 City.

20 I'd like to draw your attention to
21 the documents that are enclosed in a folder. We
22 have a list of parks and programs that we did in
23 all 5 Boroughs in New York City, a list of the
24 2010 organizations, excuse me, a list of the
25 organizations we worked with through our

1
2 Partnerships for Parks Program in 2010, and our
3 2010 brochures. In addition the program we
4 provide are all free of charge. Everything we do,
5 we provide the equipment for the sports programs,
6 our education programs are free as well as the
7 Community Building Initiatives, the Partnership
8 for Parks.

9 These programs we provide provide
10 safe and active parks in the summer when kids
11 don't have anything to do. These programs are for
12 kids ages 5 to 17, all free to parents. These
13 activities provide positive opportunities for kids
14 to engage and be outdoors and in their local
15 parks.

16 Through our Learning Gardens
17 Education Program we actually grow food and
18 distribute it to church food pantries so during
19 the summer month food is harvested at our Learning
20 Gardens and then given away in the fall.

21 The recent initiative for
22 waterfront that was announced about two weeks ago,
23 City Parks Foundation has a catalyst program for
24 waterfront parks that we've been working on since
25 2009. This program actually addresses some of the

1
2 needs mentioned in the waterfront plan the City
3 has developed. These three parks, East River Park
4 in Manhattan, Sound View Park in the Bronx, and
5 Kaiser Park and Calvin Vaux Parks in Brooklyn are
6 all waterfront parks that are separated by major
7 highways.

8 Through our program which is an
9 intensive program, a 4-year initiative, we are
10 actually bringing programs to these parks to bring
11 people to the parks. We brought concerts to Sound
12 View Park. We have sports and education and
13 concerts in East River Park. And we also do
14 sports programs at Kaiser Park. So all of these
15 activities are just--we're trying to encourage
16 people to utilize their local parks.

17 In addition we have a program
18 called City Parks Productions where we do media
19 and visual arts programming. These programs
20 actually have internships. We've increased our
21 internships and these are paid internships we have
22 through Learning Gardens and City Parks
23 Productions. These skills are marketable skills
24 that we've had a lot of students go on to
25 participate in things like the Tribeca Film

1
2 Festival. And we had some of our sports program
3 students then go on to play in the Junior US Open.
4 And we have another student who recently started
5 playing in a professional junior golf league.

6 I say all that to say that the
7 programs City Parks Foundation provide give
8 opportunities to youth. It just doesn't help
9 people utilize parks. We help kids stay healthy
10 and active in these parks. We also have programs
11 for adults. A lot of people have mentioned things
12 going on in the evening. We do programming that
13 starts in the evening so that people feel
14 comfortable coming and using their park at nights
15 and in the evening hours.

16 And that's it. Thank you. Thank
17 you.

18 MR. DARRYL PLEASANT: Good
19 afternoon. My name is Darryl. I'm a part of the
20 program, Seek Community Voices Heard. And I'm
21 just here to testify and read my story.

22 Like I said I'm part of the
23 Community of Voices Heard. I worked in Parks
24 program as a JTP worker and well let me read it to
25 you.

1
2 At first I was in the cleanup
3 program, the Parks on Grant Street. And I did not
4 really enjoy that but I stuck with it. Then I did
5 security for East River Park through POPs and got
6 hired. POPs is a good program. The only bad part
7 was I did not get a job at the end of the six
8 months. Community Voices Heard has been fighting
9 to end workfare, unpaid slave labors since 1996.
10 We believe societal transitional jobs are a great
11 alternative to WEP. New York City's workfare was
12 just slave labor. I also did a work assignment in
13 my housing development at Taft Houses. Work for
14 slave labor is like getting paid \$1 an hour to do
15 the same job people who get paid a real paycheck
16 for.

17 You have to do this in order to
18 receive your cash assistance and to keep a roof
19 over your head so that your children are taken
20 care of. The City created a couple of
21 transitional jobs programs in 2001. Over the last
22 couple of years CVH helped the City receive \$18
23 million so there could be more such like jobs like
24 POPs.

25 This should be the increasing

1
2 number of POPs positions or it should be. There
3 should be an increased number of POPs positions.
4 We are concerned that the transitional job
5 positions and especially WEP should not be used to
6 replace, eliminate full time employment positions.
7 Cutting jobs when we are in a recession and there
8 is more of a need than ever for jobs, this is an
9 outrage. The State received \$2.4 billion in TANF
10 money. That's to help folks like myself who are
11 low income, not to full our budget holes.

12 We need you to put the money back
13 and increase the number of transitional jobs and
14 not cut them. There should not be any reduction
15 in those jobs and create alternative job programs
16 like POPs. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
18 you Mr. Pleasant. I want to, you know, commend
19 you and the work of Community Voices Heard. I
20 know that they've been very strong on this
21 position. And I'm hoping that we can, you know,
22 see some results at the end of the day. And it's
23 good to see you again. So I know you are a
24 constituent. So it's always nice to see you.

25 And I want to thank everyone here

1
2 for testifying. You know, having people come to
3 these hearing is very much appreciated. It helps
4 us in the work that we do. And the concerns
5 you've raised, I know are ones that are shared by
6 myself and by many in this Committee. So no other
7 colleagues are here. I want to really thank
8 everyone for being here. This is, again, the
9 Preliminary Budget. We still have the Executive
10 Budget to go through and we'll be conducting those
11 hearings in the near future. And with that, this
12 hearing is adjourned.

13 [Gavel banging]

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Laura L. Springate certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura L. Springate". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Signature Laura L. Springate

Date April 14, 2011