

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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June 7, 2013  
Start: 1:07 p.m.  
Recess: 4:15 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers  
City Hall

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Elizabeth Crowley  
Julissa Ferreras  
Vincent J. Gentile  
James Vacca  
Daniel Dromm  
James G. Van Bramer

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

Michael Mays  
Concerned Citizen

Richard Oppenheimer  
Concerned Citizen

Jacob Morris  
Concerned Citizen

Sharon Rose  
Concerned Citizen

Stuart Eber  
Concerned Citizen

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

Janice Melnick  
Administrator of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park  
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

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

Will Sweeney  
Jackson Heights Green Alliance

Holly Light  
Executive Director  
New Yorkers for Parks

Ben Haber  
Concerned Citizen

Anthony Ng  
Jackson Heights Green Alliance

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

Elaina Contie  
Pratt Center for Community Development

Jean Silver  
President  
Flushing Meadows Corona Park

Mezita Udin  
Make the Road New York

Sara Jaramillo  
Make the Road New York

Joel Martinez  
Make the Road New York

Ed Wesley  
President  
Jackson Heights Beautification Group

Richard Helenbrecht  
Founding President  
Flushing Meadows Corona Park Conservancy

Jeffrey Croft  
President  
New York City Park Advocates

## CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

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2  
3 Alright. We are going to get started. We  
4 actually are doing two hearings today, and the  
5 first hearing that we will be doing is on street  
6 namings, so I want to say good afternoon to  
7 everybody that is here. I am Council Member  
8 Melissa Mark-Viverito, chair of the Parks and  
9 Recreation Committee joined here by Council Member  
10 Julissa Ferreras and Council Member Danny Dromm  
11 and other council members will join. Today we  
12 will first hear proposed Intro number 1045-A, a  
13 bill which will co-name 52 thoroughfares and  
14 public places through the city of New York. At  
15 this point, I want to see if there are any members  
16 of the audience that are here to present public  
17 testimony and speak on any of the proposed names  
18 of the bill, and then I am going to invite any of  
19 the committee members to speak on this item. Is  
20 anyone here to speak on any of the proposed street  
21 namings? Okay. Good so we do have some. So we  
22 will call those up to testify first. Do you have  
23 the names? I think the people that have raised  
24 their hands we haven't been able to distinguished  
25 from the - - . Did you sign speaking sheets? Can

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you tell us your names out loud?

RICHARD OPPENHEIMER: My name is Richard Oppenheimer [phonetic].

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Richard Oppenheimer. Okay. I know we have Jacob Morris. Stuart Eber [phonetic]. If you guys want to come up, if I mentioned your names. Jacob Morris, Stuart Eber, Richard Oppenheimer. We will start with those three. And Michael Mays [phonetic]. Actually, we would like Michael Mays to speak first. Mr. Mays, if you could please also--we are going to need to four... Let's see. If Mr. Mays, if you could take a seat because we want you to speak first, then I am going to ask Jacob Morris to take a seat and Richard Oppenheimer since you are standing take a seat. Sir, if you want to just give us a second if you can take a--and we will call you at the next panel. Excuse us for the confusion. We have two hearings, so we are having to separate the speaking testimony. It's complicated. Again we are here right now to listen to 1045-A, which is the street naming bills. It is 52 thoroughfares throughout the city of New York, so again, Richard Oppenheimer, Jacob

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2 Morris, Michael Mays and Mr. Mays, if you could  
3 begin testifying as to why you are here and we  
4 thank you for taking the time to be here today.

5 MICHAEL MAYS: Good afternoon,  
6 members, fellow New Yorkers. I am Michael Mays.  
7 I am here today to thank you all, particularly  
8 Robert Jackson for your kind considerations to  
9 honor my father. I think that him having started  
10 his career and ended it here basically I can think  
11 of few more appropriate punctuations to it than  
12 this, so I am just here to thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So  
14 which one are you speaking on behalf of?

15 MICHAEL MAYS: Both all and any, we  
16 are honored.

17 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I know  
18 there is a bit of confusion at the moment, but  
19 thank you though for taking the time to be here.  
20 If you want to go ahead, Mr. Oppenheimer.

21 RICHARD OPPENHEIMER: Sure. This  
22 is one of exciting moments of my life. I retired  
23 recently after 43 years of work in the  
24 Williamsburg, Bushwick Community starting out in  
25 gang prevention. Then in early childhood and was

1  
2 when I retired a few months ago vice president of  
3 CSA for early childhood, and the street naming  
4 that I am speaking to is Doc Pomus [phonetic],  
5 Pomus Place. He grew up at 51 Manhattan Avenue.  
6 The first single I ever purchased as an 11 year  
7 old was Why Must I be a Teenager in Love,  
8 songwriter Doc Pomus. As the years went by, he is  
9 a person who has written so much American music of  
10 the 20<sup>th</sup> century--This Magic Moment, Save the Last  
11 Dance for Me, Viva Las Vegas, Surrender, Lonely  
12 Avenue, hits for Elvis Presley, Ray Charles, the  
13 Drifters. He at the age of 11 I learned  
14 contracted polio and spent his whole life from  
15 that point on wearing crutches or sitting in a  
16 wheelchair, and his spirit is the spirit of the  
17 youth that I worked with and the parents that I  
18 worked with who have spent their whole life moving  
19 to achieve for themselves and their children what  
20 we call the American Dream. And Doc's Gerome  
21 Felder, Doc Pomus his brother Raul, who is the  
22 divorce attorney famous for Rudy Giuliani's  
23 divorce with Donna Hanover, Raul Felder has an  
24 intention to--he is Doc Pomus' kid brother and  
25 always looked up to him, and recently at the

1  
2 Lincoln Film Society showed a film called AKA Doc  
3 Pomus as the first film of the Jewish Film  
4 Festival, and the director of the film has every  
5 intention of being here today. His name is Peter  
6 Miller, and this man's work and his music  
7 transformed my life and gave me strength, and when  
8 I learned of his disability and my best friend at  
9 the moment that I purchased Teenager in Love, and  
10 still is my closest friend has cerebral palsy. So  
11 I can't begin to say how much his music represents  
12 to a community that needs to know about him. My  
13 goal at this point after we have the street naming  
14 change is to have the young African American,  
15 Latino and other youth of the Williamsburg area  
16 learn about his music and at the street naming  
17 ceremony, the children, the youth of a local  
18 school, high school, alternative el Puente, are  
19 planning to dance in the street to his music, and  
20 I am just very proud of this moment, and I just  
21 want to give thanks to a City Council Member who  
22 isn't here who is responsible for this, Diana  
23 Reyna.

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
25 you for taking the time. Mr. Morris?

1  
2 JACOB MORRIS: This is working? I  
3 am wearing a--

4 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:  
5 [interposing] Please be mindful. We do have other  
6 people to speak on street namings, and we do have  
7 a whole other hearing ahead of us, so we are  
8 trying--I know people come here passionately and  
9 take time, but if we can be concise in terms of  
10 the support or non-support that we may have.

11 JACOB MORRIS: I am wearing a  
12 jersey today. This at first glance looks like a  
13 Yankees jersey, but actually, it is a black  
14 Yankees jersey. The black Yankees played at the  
15 polo grounds, and they have been forgotten. Part  
16 of honoring Willie Mays and this is about for me  
17 and for Michael, today is about honoring Willie  
18 Mays, and it is also about that just a couple of  
19 days ago I was on the bus wearing this jersey and  
20 some young guy said, hey man, that Yankees jersey  
21 is slammin'. And I said it is a black Yankees  
22 Jersey, and they were in shock. They were in  
23 shock. Black Yankees, amazing. When did they  
24 play? 1947. You know the polo grounds were there  
25 until 50 years ago, and how do you lose a baseball

1 stadium, we lose history. That is what this is  
2 about--these co-namings, these honorings, these  
3 ceremonies, this is about our common history, our  
4 rich history and we give it a chance to be  
5 remembered to raise this awareness. I brought a  
6 map of the two namings with me right off of Google  
7 of course. Willie Mays Place, St. Nick's Place  
8 and Willie Mays Drive, the access road instead of  
9 Harlem River Drive. Guess what? They line up  
10 perfectly. So today I am going to state  
11 emphatically that I support both namings. I was  
12 responding from Willie Mays Drive in 2008. That  
13 was passed by Community Board 10. At that point  
14 in time, I did know exactly where Willie Mays  
15 lived. I knew that he had lived near the polo  
16 grounds, but I didn't have the exact address.  
17 That I found out after I read this great biography  
18 of him by Hirsch [phonetic], which I highly  
19 recommend. In 2008, when Community Board 10  
20 approved this, I personally went to the people  
21 that live in the neighborhood at the polo grounds,  
22 and I got my signatures from them there in Inez  
23 Dickens' district, and this was originally  
24 submitted--the Willie Mays Drive was originally  
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1 submitted by Councilwoman Inez Dickens. This was  
2 before Ydanis Rodriguez got elected as Councilman.  
3 So in terms of priorities actually Councilwoman  
4 Inez Dickens takes precedent on Willie Mays Drive.  
5 I want that in the record. This should be a  
6 combined ceremony. Major League Baseball from  
7 what I understand wants to tie this into the All  
8 Star Game, which I believe would be just wonderful  
9 for honoring Willie Mays, his memory, the polo  
10 grounds and Harlem and that he brought so much joy  
11 to Harlem with that world series and so many other  
12 wonderful playing memories, the catch, and so many  
13 other great plays. And by the way, I thank you  
14 for that because that always moved me. How many  
15 superstars today would play stickball with the  
16 kids in the neighborhood? I don't see it, but  
17 Willie played stickball with the kids of Harlem, a  
18 superstar, one of the greatest players in history,  
19 whatever color they were. He played stickball  
20 with all of them, and a great stickball player he  
21 was. I want to thank the Committee. I want to  
22 thank the senior staff. I want to thank the City  
23 Council, and I want to thank Speaker Quinn for  
24 allowing the Committee to honor the historic  
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1  
2 significance of Willie Mays in spite of the  
3 guidelines that say that you need to be dead to  
4 get honored. That his historic significance  
5 transcends his being dead, which I am glad he is  
6 still alive, and I want to thank them doing it for  
7 Mayor Koch because I believe that that precedent  
8 allowed us to have this window of opportunity.

9 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I think  
10 we have a couple of questions, so we want to make  
11 sure we allow for time for that so I am only  
12 allocating to 1:30 for this hearing, and there are  
13 a couple of speakers on other street namings, if I  
14 could allow the Council Members that are here to  
15 ask questions.

16 JACOB MORRIS: Absolutely.

17 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So we  
18 have been joined by Council Member Robert Jackson.  
19 We have been joined by Council Member Ydanis  
20 Rodriguez and also by Council Member Jimmy Van  
21 Bramer, I think Robert had indicated that you had  
22 a question. Robert?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Thank you,  
24 Madam Chair, so I speak in favor of the street co-  
25 namings for Willie Mays, one of the greatest if

1  
2 not the greatest baseball player that has ever  
3 lived and played the game, and obviously in  
4 listening to his son, Michael Mays, and listening  
5 to Jacob Morris who has been instrumental as we  
6 know in many street co-namings in mainly northern  
7 Manhattan and Harlem, but other areas of our  
8 borough. Clearly, the street co-naming of Willie  
9 Mays Place where he actually lived between 153<sup>rd</sup>  
10 and 155<sup>th</sup> Street and St. Nicholas Avenue and  
11 clearly Harlem River Drive to be co-named Willie  
12 Mays Drive, if you look at the book going back  
13 before there was any development there there was  
14 the stadium and then there was the hill, and  
15 people used to stand up on the hill to look down  
16 to observe and watch the baseball from on top of  
17 the hill, so clearly it is appropriate in my  
18 opinion to co-name both Willie Mays Place and  
19 Willie Mays Drive, one indicating actually where  
20 he lived and the other one indicating a drive  
21 where people used to stand to look down on the  
22 stadium. I support both of these street co-  
23 namings, and especially understanding from a  
24 historical perspective that Willie Mays played the  
25 game like no one else ever played it, and the fact

1  
2 that July 16<sup>th</sup> is the Mayor League Baseball All  
3 Star Game, and it is being held in New York City,  
4 so ideally it would be appropriate if we did this  
5 around that time to honor one of baseball's  
6 greatest ever players, but also, Madam Chair, let  
7 me just say with respect to Juan Rodriguez Way I  
8 see is on our agenda for a vote, I support this.  
9 This brings about additional street signs that  
10 will be listed from I think all the way from 159<sup>th</sup>  
11 Street to the end of Manhattan 218<sup>th</sup> Street where  
12 at every intersection underneath Broadway will be  
13 the name Juan Rodriguez Way, so I support that  
14 wholeheartedly.

15 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
16 you, Council Member.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Council  
19 Member Ydanis Rodriguez?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Thank  
21 you, Chairman Viverito. First of all, I haven't  
22 met Willie Mays. All I know is that three  
23 Dominican brothers - - play for the only case that  
24 I know that three brothers play on the same team,  
25 San Francisco, and I know that the three brothers

1  
2 the play on the same team, San Francisco, that  
3 Willie Mays played, and - - . He is a role model,  
4 especially at this moment when there is so much  
5 concern about the - - they need to correct and  
6 having baseball players as a role model, and that  
7 is important. I was introduced on the co-naming  
8 of 155<sup>th</sup> through Jacob. My district goes from 218  
9 to 155<sup>th</sup>, so my district ends there in the - -  
10 Avenue and the Hybridge Park. And of course, it  
11 is something to celebrate, especially a district  
12 that is mainly black and Latino communities. It  
13 is important that we celebrate what we do in the  
14 baseball and the economic opportunity since we  
15 also face similar challenges. I only would do  
16 what the family would like to do. This co-naming  
17 on 155<sup>th</sup> was introduced by Jacob. I believe that  
18 there is no doubt that if also we get to co-name  
19 both, where Willie Mays used to live and 155<sup>th</sup> is a  
20 great honor for his life, his contribution as a  
21 role model in our city, so if the family is okay  
22 of doing the co-naming in both areas, for me it is  
23 an honor to maintain that effort to co-name.

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
25 you, Council Member. So thank you all for coming

1  
2 to testify and I appreciate you being here. I  
3 think it is clear that there is support for both  
4 and so hopefully the idea here is after this  
5 hearing we will be voting on the street namings on  
6 Monday, June 10<sup>th</sup>, so thank you all for coming.

7 JACOB MORRIS: if I may say one  
8 brief--

9 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:  
10 [interposing] Brief please, thank you.

11 JACOB MORRIS: But very important.  
12 After the City Council votes on these particular  
13 street namings I would love to see your committee  
14 take up revising the guidelines to encompass a  
15 waiver for historical significance so that you  
16 won't have to bend the rules next time to honor  
17 someone like Willie Mays.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: We have  
19 been having conversations about the guidelines for  
20 street namings, so it is already in the works, but  
21 thank you for the recommendation. We have a  
22 couple--

23 RICHARD OPPENHEIMER: [interposing]  
24 Can I just say one sentence about Doc Pomus?

25 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: We

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really do need to move on.

RICHARD OPPENHEIMER: One of the most amazing things this man did, this man who was in the rock and roll hall of fame, rhythm and blues hall of fame, the blues hall of fame, he saved so many famous musicians from their own addictions, which I spent a good portion of my young life dealing with substance abuse in the Williamsburg-Bushwick Community.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you. We have two more. I don't know if anyone else is here to speak on street namings and I don't call your name, please raise your hand. So I have got Stuart Eber and Sharon Rose. So you can step up to the table. Is there anyone else here that I did not name? Okay. Thank you. I think that will be--Stuart Eber and Sharon Rose, and that is it for street namings, right? Perfect. Okay. So feel free either who wants to start.

SHARON ROSE: Okay. I am Sharon Rose. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, council members, Madam Chair. I am Sharon Rose and I am the mother of Christopher Rose and we

1  
2 have petitioned for street co-naming in honor of  
3 in memory of my son that was killed at the corner  
4 of East 40<sup>th</sup> Street and Avenue D in Brooklyn in the  
5 45<sup>th</sup> District, and I just wanted to be here present  
6 to be able to make sure that this is given serious  
7 consideration. Although my son was only 15 years  
8 old and he might not have been famous or  
9 accomplished any great works during his short  
10 life, his memory has been esteemed by so many  
11 people. He was--and I know I am not saying this  
12 because I am just his mother--but he was actually  
13 an excellent young man and had great promise, and  
14 our community at large can testify as to that. We  
15 had been doing, myself and the community members,  
16 work in the community for years. I have been in  
17 the community for 40 years before this happened.  
18 If any of you know anything about the 45<sup>th</sup>  
19 District, it is a quiet community, it is an  
20 immigrant community and in the past it has  
21 remained that way, but recently there has been a  
22 rash of violence and upheaval in the community.  
23 Since my son's death we have started this  
24 organization and we would like to be able to  
25 continue in my son's memory to be able to not only

1  
2 preserve the 45<sup>th</sup> District from violence and from  
3 crimes against our youth, but also to transform  
4 it, and I think I believe one of the ways we can  
5 do that is to continue a presence in the community  
6 and the street sign and the street co-naming is  
7 going to be coalesce community members and other  
8 community factions in the community to be able to  
9 at least continue in this effort and garner  
10 support for addressing issues that affect our  
11 young people in the 45<sup>th</sup> District, so I would like  
12 this to be given very, very serious consideration.  
13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
15 you for coming, Ms. Rose, and I am sorry for your  
16 loss. The name is in the packet, so it is  
17 something that we will be voting on, so thank you  
18 for coming here.

19 STUART EBER: Hi. My name is  
20 Stuart Eber. I am here to speak on James V.  
21 Downey Way, a naming in the Bronx on - - Avenue.  
22 I want to thank the Committee for this  
23 opportunity. If you look in the packets, I won't  
24 bore you with the details, but there is  
25 recommendations from our community board, from

1  
2 City Council Member Oliver Koppell, the Church of  
3 Saint Margaret's of Cortona as well as the Knights  
4 of Columbus and the North Riverdale Baseball  
5 League. Jim Downey served in Vietnam, came back  
6 to America, served in New York City Police  
7 Department then went to work for the Federal  
8 Bureau of Investigation. He married Gerry  
9 [phonetic]. They had three children, two of whom  
10 are policeman, one of whom is a fireman today.  
11 Jim got involved in the North Riverdale Baseball  
12 League in the early 1980s, was a coach, then a  
13 manger, president of the league and the longtime  
14 treasurer of the league. Under Jim's tenure on  
15 the board, we expanded to have the only girls'  
16 softball league in the entire District 23 and it  
17 became a model for other leagues in District 23 to  
18 have softball leagues for the girls. He always  
19 was about sportsmanship. It wasn't about winning.  
20 It was about sportsmanship. It was teaching  
21 children how to play baseball the right way and  
22 that after the game was over, we are all on the  
23 same team. Jim unfortunately died of lung cancer  
24 at a young age. After this retirement from the  
25 FBI, he served as liaison between the FBI and the

1  
2 police department after 9/11 because of his  
3 expertise in forensics, so he was also involved in  
4 the aftermath of 9/11. He was a quiet man, but he  
5 has the respect of everybody in the neighborhood  
6 whether it was through the league, the church, the  
7 Knights of Columbus. We believe that naming the  
8 street for Jim Downey he will live in everyone's  
9 memory who goes to a little league game at Sid  
10 Augarten Field, the field that which the North  
11 Riverdale Baseball League plays and this is the  
12 street that immediate abuts that park. It is  
13 unfortunate his family couldn't be here today so  
14 that they could hear--so they could see this  
15 committee and see that everyone wants to honor Jim  
16 for his outstanding sportsmanship and leadership  
17 that he has provided to hundreds and hundreds of  
18 children in North Riverdale. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
20 you as well for coming to testify. I just want to  
21 recognize we have been joined by Council Member  
22 Gennaro, Council Member Vallone, and thank you. I  
23 don't think we have any questions on the panel,  
24 and with that, I believe this hearing on Intro  
25 1045-A will close and we will take a moment

1  
2 recess, but we are going to start up with the  
3 Flushing Meadows Park hearing in a moment.

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5 [pause]

6 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: We are  
7 begin. Before we do, I have to say that with  
8 regards the bill that we just heard 1045-A, that  
9 bill will be laid over. The hearing will be laid  
10 over until Monday, and in which date we will  
11 voting on that bill. So with that, we are going  
12 to jump into the other aspect of today's hearing.  
13 So again, I want to say good afternoon to everyone  
14 that is here. I am Council Member Melissa Mark-  
15 Viverito, chair of the Committee on Parks and  
16 Recreation. Again, I will name the Council  
17 Members that are here: Council Member Jimmy Van  
18 Bramer, Council Member Julissa Ferreras, Council  
19 Member Vallone, Council Member Gennaro. We also  
20 have been joined by Council Member Danny Dromm,  
21 and I think there was another. Oh, Ydanis  
22 Rodriguez, but he is not a member of the  
23 Committee. Today we will be examining the overall  
24 conditions and needs of one of our city's largest  
25 parks, Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Just to be

1  
2 clear to all of my colleagues, this hearing's  
3 scope is limited to issues relating to the  
4 condition and maintenance needs of the park, and  
5 not the various land use projects that have been  
6 proposed. Those topics will be covered at the  
7 appropriate Land Use Committee hearing at the  
8 proper time, so I would like to ask my colleagues  
9 again to refrain from questions or statements that  
10 are off topic. Flushing Meadows is located in  
11 Queens and once used as the Corona ash dump  
12 [phonetic] is now the city's fourth largest park,  
13 and is well-known for both being heavily relied  
14 upon by those in the nearby communities and for  
15 its large scale events and institutions, such as  
16 Two Worlds Fairs, the U.S. Open, the New York  
17 Mets and the Queens Museum. It also has many  
18 concessions, one of which is Terrace on the Park,  
19 the largest concession in the city park system.  
20 Though Flushing Meadows attracts visitors from  
21 around the city and even the world, it is mostly  
22 relief upon as the prime source of open space for  
23 residents of the local surrounding communities and  
24 these communities really need quality open space.  
25 For example, if you exclude Flushing Meadows,

1  
2 there are point .77 acres of open space per 1,000  
3 residents in these adjacent communities overall  
4 which falls well below the city's benchmark of 2.5  
5 acres per 1,000 residents. It appears however  
6 that Flushing Meadows is in need of a lot more  
7 resources, so it can better serve those who rely  
8 on it. When compared to other landmark parks of  
9 similar size like Central Park or Prospect Park,  
10 Flushing Meadows falls ways behind on having what  
11 it needs to be properly cared for. While those  
12 parks have conservancies and large fund raising  
13 capabilities, Flushing Meadows attracted only a  
14 token amount of donations when compared to those  
15 two parks. Additionally, it has been reported  
16 that only 18 fulltime, and 35 seasonal Parks  
17 Department employees are dedicated to the overall  
18 care maintenance of the park, while Central Park  
19 has close to 300 workers and Prospect Park has  
20 135, even though both parks are smaller in size.  
21 It seems that such a small workforce is really not  
22 capable of properly maintaining such a vast park  
23 without more resources. I am hoping this hearing  
24 can help us arrive at some solutions. Clearly,  
25 more funding for this park is sorely needed, but

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2 how we achieve that goal will likely involve a  
3 multi-faceted approach. Perhaps, some of those  
4 solutions lie in diverting more concession money  
5 directly to the park or as others have proposed  
6 creating an alliance or conservancy similar to the  
7 ones in other large parks, so they raise funds and  
8 use the increased resources to hire more staff.  
9 It is my hope that some of these ideas can start  
10 to advance the agenda of improving this park so  
11 that we can ensure the park has sufficient  
12 resources to properly meet the recreational needs  
13 of park goers in short and long term. So again, I  
14 look forward to examining this issue in greater  
15 depth today. I would like to welcome the  
16 administration and the advocates that are here,  
17 but I would like to allow my colleague, Council  
18 Member Julissa Ferreras, to say a few opening  
19 remarks, and I know that we have been joined by  
20 Council Member Elizabeth Crowley. I saw her  
21 earlier. She is right here. Council Member  
22 Julissa Ferreras?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank  
24 you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon. My name is  
25 Council Member Julissa Ferreras, and I represent

1  
2 Council District 21 in Queens that includes nearly  
3 all of Flushing Meadows Corona Park, which I share  
4 with Council Members Karen Koslowitz and Council  
5 Member Gennaro. I would like to thank the Chair,  
6 Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito, for agreeing  
7 to hold this important hearing today. I would  
8 also like to thank the Parks and Recreation  
9 Committee staff for their hard work on today's  
10 hearing. I am glad to find that this Committee is  
11 taking the opportunity today to examine the  
12 current conditions and needs of Flushing Meadows  
13 Corona Park and talk about the future about what  
14 is the largest and most important space for the  
15 residents of Queens. Every inch of green space is  
16 precious in the city. Unfortunately, Queens  
17 particularly, the communities of Corona, Jackson  
18 Heights and East Elmhurst is severely lacking in  
19 green space. Having spent my entire life in and  
20 around Flushing Meadows Corona Park, I can attest  
21 to the fact that it has not received the attention  
22 and resources a park of its size and high  
23 utilization deserves. Hundreds of thousands of  
24 people use this park. Our families use it for  
25 recreation, family gatherings, soccer, baseball,

1  
2 cricket, picnics, boating, running and other  
3 exercises, and also the chances to visit the zoos,  
4 the museums, the Hall of Science and other  
5 entities. Despite hosting upwards of 20,000  
6 people from organized soccer alone every week not  
7 to mention all of the teams and leagues our  
8 beloved park only has a quarter of the staff of  
9 Prospect Park, though it is a much larger park.  
10 Additionally, Central Park, which is smaller than  
11 Flushing Meadows Corona Park has nearly eight  
12 times as many workers. I look forward to getting  
13 a better understanding of the maintenance and  
14 capital needs of Flushing Meadows Corona Park from  
15 the Department of Parks and Recreation in this  
16 hearing today. Having more information on its  
17 budget, staffing, the use of funds from  
18 concessions, implementations of the FMCP  
19 [phonetic] strategic framework plan, safety needs,  
20 and the usage of the parks by entities such as the  
21 USTA [phonetic] will help us create a plan for the  
22 future of Flushing Meadows Corona Park. I'd like  
23 to reiterate that this hearing today is to focus  
24 on the park itself, and not about the proposed  
25 construction and development projects being

1  
2 discussed in and around the park. The City  
3 Council will hold public hearings in accordance  
4 with the uniform land use reform procedure or  
5 ULURP at the appropriate time for each project.  
6 The Council will review the USTA National Tennis  
7 Center's strategic vision project later this  
8 month, the Willets Point redevelopment project  
9 this fall. As we look at these projects  
10 holistically and consider their impact, Flushing  
11 Meadows Park will work with colleagues in  
12 government to find ways to protect this  
13 irreplaceable park. Flushing Meadows Corona Park  
14 is an oasis for the residents of the densely  
15 packed borough of Queens. It is our Central Park  
16 as many would like to say. It is the heart and  
17 lungs of our community. While this park has many  
18 needs, it is a gem for our city. As the site of  
19 the 1939 and 1964 World's Fair, Flushing Meadows  
20 Corona Park drew visitors from all over the world  
21 and the park retains many of the structures build  
22 from these celebrations. Sadly, many of these  
23 structures have fallen into disrepair. Flushing  
24 Meadows Corona Park retains its status as a global  
25 park hosting many global events every year, but

1  
2 unfortunately, the park does not receive the  
3 attention it once did. With increased focus on  
4 the parks management and allocation of resources  
5 over coming years, we can help Flushing Meadows  
6 Park achieve its full potential. I look forward  
7 to the testimony of the Department of Parks and  
8 Recreation, members of my community and the parks  
9 enthusiasts on the overall conditions and needs of  
10 our park. Thank you, Madam Chair.

11 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
12 you, Council Member and obviously this is a Queens  
13 day here today. Other than myself on this panel,  
14 every Council Member is from Queens, which is  
15 great the level of interest and support. I know  
16 that Council Member Gennaro wanted to make some  
17 opening remarks.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Thank you,  
19 Madam Chair, and thank you very much for holding  
20 this hearing. It is really an honor for me over  
21 the last 12 years to represent the southern half  
22 of the park that is below the LIE and total - -  
23 total acreage it is at least 35-40 percent of the  
24 total acres of the park, so it has been wonderful  
25 to have such a big chunk of the park to be host

1  
2 for an I would like to thank the Chair for holding  
3 this hearing. I also want to thank Dottie  
4 Lewandowski. I think it is appropriate to thank  
5 on the record people who have worked with me to  
6 make the park into what it is today. So I want to  
7 thank Dottie. We are going to hear from her. I  
8 want to thank Janice Melnick [phonetic]. We just  
9 took a tour of the park recently where my latest  
10 million dollars is going to be put to good use,  
11 and I certainly appreciate that. I shouldn't say  
12 my million dollars. It is the taxpayers' million  
13 dollars. I would also like to thank Council  
14 Member Ferreras, who neglected in her statement to  
15 indicate how generous she has been to the park and  
16 thank you for all the allocations that you have  
17 made through your capital funds to the park. I  
18 would also like to thank Council Member Koslowitz,  
19 although I don't she technically represents any of  
20 the footprint in the park. I may be wrong and she  
21 has been very generous to the park. I want to  
22 thank her. I don't know if the Flushing Meadows  
23 Park Conservancy president Jean Silva [phonetic]  
24 is here. Oh, Jean, hi. I thank you for being  
25 here and all of your good work, and we have done a

1  
2 lot work with the national resources group of the  
3 Parks Department headed by Braham Gunter and  
4 because the part of the park that I represent - -  
5 are of natural significance and over the past 12  
6 years I have put more than four million dollars  
7 into the park, and the borough president has put  
8 that I know of in my section of the park about six  
9 million, and although I represent the lower  
10 section of the park, I do have the opportunity to  
11 recreate myself at the aquatic center and at the  
12 order center, which are new and beautiful and  
13 notwithstanding descriptions today of you know the  
14 park being underfunded. It gets great use and  
15 people can really enjoy it, and I just wanted to  
16 be here to not only participate in this hearing,  
17 but to pay tribute to the people in the Parks  
18 Department and all of the advocates and people  
19 that use the park and I look forward to testimony  
20 of the Parks Department and I just thought it was  
21 appropriate to give thanks to you, Madam Chair,  
22 and all those that have made the park that park  
23 that it is and thank you for this opportunity to  
24 make some comments, and I would like to be put  
25 down on the list for questions of this panel.

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Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you, Council Member, and with that, we would like to welcome Dorothy Lewandowski, who is the Queens borough commission, who will be providing testimony on behalf of the Parks Department and with that, I am not sure if I have the name of the person who is with you, but you will introduce her.

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: I will.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: And I thank you. You can begin your testimony.

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Thank you. Good afternoon, Chair Mark-Viverito and members of the Parks and Recreation Committee. I am Dorothy Lewandowski. I am the Queens Parks Commissioner. Joining me on the panel today is Janice Melnick, who is the administrator for Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to discuss the fourth largest park in New York City, Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Flushing Meadows Corona Park was created as the result of the 1939 and 1964 World's Fairs. In 1967, the land was officially turned

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2 over to the Parks Department. The original  
3 landscape architect Gilmore Clark [phonetic]  
4 intended for a great variety of interest in the  
5 plan for this new public park including active  
6 recreation, physical fitness, passive recreation  
7 and spectator venues that would continuously serve  
8 the needs of an ever growing city well into the  
9 future. As the flagship Queens park, Flushing  
10 Meadows Corona Park today meets the original  
11 intent and continues to offer a large variety of  
12 opportunities for recreation and entertainment.  
13 Flushing Meadows Corona Park annually draws over  
14 seven million people from all over the world for  
15 recreational and spectator activities. As the  
16 largest park in Queens Flushing Meadows Corona  
17 Park has public baseball, soccer, volleyball,  
18 tennis, cricket fields, a skate park, a recreation  
19 center with annual membership over 30,000 persons,  
20 an indoor Olympic sized pool and national hockey  
21 regulation sized ice rink. The park has hosted  
22 religious leaders such as John Pope Paul the  
23 Second and Billy Graham as well as world famous  
24 musical acts including the Beatles, the Who, Billy  
25 Joel and Bruce Springsteen, but we are also home

1  
2 to many charity events, including the March of  
3 Dimes walkathon, juvenile diabetes walkathon, the  
4 American Cancer Society relay for life and Autism  
5 Awareness. FMCP has become a leader in the  
6 adaptive sports world offering national wheelchair  
7 softball tournament, sled hockey, adaptive  
8 basketball and adaptive water skiing, and our  
9 playground for all children was the first  
10 playground in New York City designed for use by  
11 children of different abilities. In addition the  
12 park hosts large events celebrating various and  
13 diverse cultures, including but by no means  
14 limited to cinco de mayo, the Hong Kong dragon  
15 boat festival, - - with attendance of these  
16 festivals ranging from 50,000 to 150,000 persons  
17 and not only are we very proud of this ethnic  
18 diversity of our park, but we also believe that  
19 this adversity is highly woven into the fabric of  
20 the park and makes it a jewel that it is today.  
21 Flushing Meadows is home to several premiere  
22 cultural institutions including the Queens Museum  
23 of Art, which dates back to the 1939 world's fair,  
24 and is currently undergoing a major renovation,  
25 the New York Hall of Science, the Queens Zoo, the

1  
2 Queens Botanical Garden and the Queens Theater.  
3 Combined, these cultural institutions alone bring  
4 over one million visitors each year into the park  
5 and of course, we are home to the Billie Jean  
6 [phonetic] National Tennis Center, which hosts the  
7 U.S. Open, a premiere international event and  
8 Citi Field home of the New York Mets, which this  
9 year is hosting the Major League All Star Game.  
10 In 2008 through a grant from the JM Kaplan fund  
11 and the firm Quinnel, Rothchild and Smith Miller  
12 and Hawkins architects [phonetic] helped Parks  
13 develop a framework for Flushing Meadows Corona  
14 Park to set forth guiding principles and a new  
15 vision and direction for the park's future. This  
16 strategic framework plan identifies three major  
17 park improvement goals, re-envisioning the world's  
18 fair core, reconfiguring and restoring the park's  
19 lakes and reconnecting the park to the  
20 neighborhood and the city. Since the completion  
21 of the framework plan, we have used it as a guide  
22 for our capital projects. Through the New York  
23 State Department of Environmental Conservation - -  
24 act grant, our natural resources group and our  
25 capital projects division are currently designing

1  
2 a plan that will address shoreline restoration and  
3 path improvements in the southwest corner of  
4 Meadow Lake. This work will include the  
5 prevention of further shoreline erosion, the  
6 eradication of - - and the reduction of pavement,  
7 which is consistent with the Park's strategic  
8 framework plan. In 2011, we completed a  
9 restoration of a portion of paths adjacent to  
10 Meadow Lake south of the boat house. Two paths  
11 were combined into one, which is designed to  
12 accommodate both bikes and pedestrians. This is  
13 in keeping with strategic framework goal to reduce  
14 the amount of pavement in the park. In addition  
15 rain gardens were planted near the path to treat  
16 and reduce storm water entering into the lake,  
17 another goal of the strategic plan, and while we  
18 are committed to providing world class recreation  
19 and open space opportunities, the Parks Department  
20 also remains focused on caring for the park as an  
21 important ecological habitat in the city. Last  
22 fall NRG completed the first phase of the Willow  
23 Lake Preserve reforestation project. It is part  
24 of Mayor Bloomberg's million trees NYC initiative  
25 to restore plant diversity in the lake ecosystem

1 through the planting of more than 12,800 trees,  
2 shrubs, grasses and wildflowers to establish  
3 multi-story forest habits [phonetic]. NRG  
4 recently received an additional funding to begin  
5 phase two of this reforestation project. This  
6 work will include removal of invasive weeds  
7 including - - and additional plantings similar to  
8 those in phase one. The restored forest will  
9 create new nesting habitat for a greater diversity  
10 of native and migratory bird species and numerous  
11 butterflies, moths, dragonflies and damsel flies.  
12 In addition removal and control of - - will allow  
13 for the reintroduction of native wetland plant  
14 communities and allow for more successful wetland  
15 restoration. In addition to the NRG work, we work  
16 closely with volunteers in Willow Lake and  
17 throughout the park. We recently renamed the  
18 trail at Willow Lake after Pat Dolan, a longtime  
19 park advocate and volunteer who was founder and  
20 president of the Flushing Meadows Corona Park  
21 Conservancy, and through its my park day events as  
22 well as with other volunteer days trails are  
23 cleared, benches are painted, leaves are raked and  
24 litter is removed from the park, and the Parks  
25

1  
2 Department takes pride in the partnership and  
3 support we get from local residents and  
4 volunteers. In 2012 we had over 20 groups that  
5 volunteered over 13,000 hours including groups  
6 from the Queens Vocational High School, the PAL of  
7 Jamaica, Laborers Local 79 and New York Cares.  
8 With the 2013 season just beginning we already  
9 have had 14 groups give almost 3,000 hours of  
10 their time to this great park. We also take pride  
11 in the strong relationship we share with elected  
12 officials and thank them for their support of this  
13 park. In total, our elected officials have  
14 contributed 87.8 million toward the park since  
15 2002. For example, Council Members Ferreras,  
16 Gennaro, Koslowitz and Borough President Marshall  
17 recently allocated a combined 2.9 million in  
18 funding to reconstruct soccer fields two, three  
19 and five, which should be opening very shortly.  
20 In addition, Council Member Ferreras provided an  
21 additional one million to reconstruct soccer field  
22 number one and Council Member Gennaro funded over  
23 3.5 million for pathway and shoreline work within  
24 the park. During her tenure as borough president,  
25 Helen Marshall has been a strong advocate of the

1  
2 park providing 26 million in funding for projects  
3 such as the unisphere and the boathouse and nearly  
4 52 in mayoral funding has been allocated to  
5 Flushing Meadows Corona Park during the Bloomberg  
6 administration. The 50 million dollar out order  
7 [phonetic] recreation center, the largest in  
8 Queens open in 2008, it is by far one of our most  
9 frequented centers across the city. We are also  
10 proud to have opened the Flushing Meadows Corona  
11 Park Aquatic Center and Ice Rink funded by 18  
12 million dollars from Mayor Bloomberg and 11  
13 million from Queens Borough President Marshall and  
14 3 million from the City Council. Most recently  
15 Mayor Bloomberg provided 4.78 million in funding  
16 for structural studies of our - - , the tide gate  
17 bridge and tide gates and the new York State  
18 Pavilion Towers and foundation of the tenth of  
19 tomorrow [phonetic]. Additionally, the city has  
20 been a strong supporter for cultural institutions  
21 within the park and has provided financial support  
22 both in expense and capital dollars contributing  
23 48 million to the Queens Museum and 27 million to  
24 the Queens Theater. This past week we were happy  
25 to be joined by our elected officials, community

1  
2 residents and leaders as we opened the Flushing  
3 Meadows Corona Park carousel for the 2013 season  
4 and celebrated the new fantasy forest amusement  
5 area. The majestic Flushing Meadows carousel was  
6 created by a merger of two historic carousels, the  
7 1903 Feltman [phonetic] carousel and the 1908  
8 Stubbman [phonetic] carousel. Both were  
9 originally located in Coney Island and arrived in  
10 Flushing Meadows Corona Park for the 1964 World's  
11 Fair. Last year New York Carousel Entertainment  
12 began operating the carousel and during this past  
13 offseason they added four new rides, including  
14 Queens only rollercoaster and other amusements for  
15 this fantasy forest for children to enjoy. As a  
16 destination the park, we continue to make this  
17 area a family friendly zone. We have added  
18 volleyball courts that were created as mitigation  
19 from Con Edison electric feeder upgrade within the  
20 park and will be adding additional landscaping and  
21 picnic tables shortly. We are also proud to offer  
22 extensive free programming throughout the park.  
23 In July and August we are offering music and me  
24 together, a music program for preschoolers, the  
25 movie Madagascar 3 with craft projects for

1  
2 children and Little Red's Hood performed by our  
3 City Parks Foundation's puppets in the park, and  
4 we also have two Shakespeare performances by Hip  
5 to Hip Theater, the Tempest and Love Labors Lost.  
6 Our recreation at the - - rec center and the  
7 playground for our children hosts free shape up  
8 New York classes including Zumba, Yoga, boot camp  
9 and step classes as well as our playground  
10 associates providing arts and crafts, games and  
11 other activities in the park. We are also proud  
12 of our partnership with the Queens College in  
13 offering a free summer sounds Latin jazz concert  
14 at our playground for all children. The urban  
15 park rangers also offer a variety of public  
16 programs on the parkland and in the waters of  
17 Flushing Meadow including birding, hiking, fishing  
18 and canoeing and in 2012, they conducted  
19 environmental programs for over 300  
20 schoolchildren. The Parks Department's overall  
21 mission is to provide all New Yorkers with access  
22 to world class parks whether it is our fourth  
23 largest park or our fourth smallest. We are proud  
24 of the work we have done in and around Flushing  
25 Meadows Corona Park and we look forward to

1  
2 continue working with the Council and other  
3 elected officials and the community to work to  
4 make this park a vital and important open space  
5 resource for the surrounding neighborhoods of  
6 Queens and for the city. I thank you for allowing  
7 me the opportunity to testify and would be happy  
8 to answer any questions that you may have.

9 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
10 you, our borough commissioner, for that.  
11 Considering that every council member here is from  
12 Queens and is on the list to ask questions, I will  
13 refrain from asking questions. I think they are  
14 better suited to ask those questions. Council  
15 Member Gentile just joined us. Well, now we have  
16 got Brooklyn. I am sorry. Everyone here was  
17 Queens, now we have Brooklyn as well. Thank you,  
18 I was feeling a little bit alone and left out.  
19 Our first set of questions will be Council Member  
20 Julissa Ferreras.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank you  
22 and with respects to my colleagues, I am going to  
23 ask a few questions and then let them ask  
24 questions and then I will circle back on a second  
25 round. I just wanted to clarify I know that in

1  
2 your testimony you said Mayor Bloomberg had  
3 allotted several millions of dollars to the park.  
4 I just want to make sure that it wasn't the  
5 mayor's private pocket. It is the administration,  
6 is that correct?

7 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: These  
8 are administration capital dollars.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay. I  
10 know he has the capability, so I just wanted to  
11 make sure. And if we can kind of hone in now on  
12 the dollars, and if we can speak of how much is  
13 allocated for the overall park maintenance of  
14 Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

15 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Council  
16 Member, are you referring to staff or capital?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: We can  
18 start with staff and also capital.

19 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: The  
20 staffing there is currently 65 persons that we  
21 allocate to Flushing Meadow Corona Park, and that  
22 is a combination of administrative staff,  
23 maintenance and operations personnel, seasonal,  
24 our JTP and our WEP forces.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Can you

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give me the breakdown of those 65?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI:

Currently what we have now five for administration, 18 for maintenance and operation, 4 seasonal employees, currently as of today 30 JTP. Now that does in the winter months go as low as ten and in the summer months can go as high as 50, so as of today it would be 30. There is currently eight WEP workers that are assigned to the park as well, giving us a total of 65.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: We have a

lot of residents and community residents. Can you just briefly explain what each one--what do seasonals do, what is the responsibility of the 30 JTP, the 5 administrative, kind of what the breakdown of that is.

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: The

administrative personnel are including Janice Melnick and the supervisors within the park, but primarily the maintenance and operation forces are responsible for the daily routine cleaning and maintenance of the park, and that is everything from cleaning bathrooms, picking up litter, cutting grass, doing some light maintenance within

1  
2 the park. Those are the workers that are assigned  
3 there regularly. They are supported by resources  
4 from throughout the borough, so that occasionally  
5 we will bring in specialized crews that would do  
6 tree pruning, fence work or other maintenance  
7 repairs within the park, grass cutting or  
8 sometimes ball field maintenance if things need to  
9 be supplemented and we do that in that park and  
10 other parks throughout the borough.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay.

12 And the four seasonals, what is the season?

13 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Seasons  
14 vary, but primarily from the spring through early  
15 fall across the borough we bring on persons to  
16 assist the work that we need to get done in parks  
17 and that is through our seasonal budget.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay, and  
19 the eight WEP workers. What is their schedules?

20 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: The  
21 welfare workers work approximately 20 hours per  
22 week and they are assigned to maintenance duties  
23 throughout the park as well, and that number  
24 fluctuates slightly. I don't know the range  
25 specifically, but there are some fluctuations in

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that.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay, and what is the acreage of our park.

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: It is interesting you ask that question because Parks recently began what they are calling a digital spatial analysis tool to map all of our parks so that the measurements are more accurate than they were previously possible, so currently what we are estimating or determine the actual area of the park is 897.8 acres.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: And that is from what is the original number that we had?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: There was an older map of Flushing Meadows Park dating back to the 1950s or earlier that consistently indicated the park was 1,255 acres.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: And you stated that this is the fourth largest park in New York City. It is following which three?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Van Cortland [phonetic], Pelham Bay and Prospect Park--nope, Van Cortland, Pelham Bay--well, actually Pelham Bay is first. Pelham Bay, Van Cortland and

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the greenbelt.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: You said that really low, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Pelham Bay, Greenbelt and Van Cortland. I should know the two Bronx because I was [off mic].

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I don't know if you have it 'cause it wasn't specific to this hearing so if you don't have it I would like to get it, the breakdown of staffing for those three parks also?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Yes, we can get that for you.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Please I would like to have those numbers, and then I wanted to focus on one other question, and we will open up to my colleagues, but how many concessions are present at Flushing Meadows Corona Park and what was the total revenue brought in by such concessions from the most recent fiscal year? How much of the total revenue brought in by the concession goes back to the Park's budget?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: So the number of active concessions in the Park

1  
2 fluctuates by season, but that over the course of  
3 the year there is generally 22 concessions that  
4 operate within the park. In fiscal years '11 and  
5 '12 the concessions generated over 3.4 million  
6 dollars annually. This year to date we are at two  
7 million, and the fundings from the concessions are  
8 put towards the general fund and the general fund  
9 then supports the department.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: So what  
11 percentage do you currently if we are sending to  
12 the general fund 3.4 and you have the  
13 responsibility of the budget what percentage of  
14 the budget of the 3.4 million that we send to the  
15 general fund does the park see back, and reinvest  
16 it in the park?

17 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: It is  
18 interesting 'cause the city annually spends 11.6  
19 million dollars per year in Flushing Meadows  
20 Corona Park, and that is a number of areas from  
21 the - - arena, administrative support, and the  
22 Queens Zoo which was one of the areas that we do  
23 support, so that if you look at what was then the  
24 3.4 million compared to the 11 million that is  
25 spent there. There is more actually spent in the

1  
2 park by the city than is given through the revenue  
3 division.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: So the  
5 11.6 million--let me circle back before we go to  
6 the 11.6, the 22 concessions, I am sure it goes  
7 from carts all the way to Terrace in the Park. Is  
8 that correct?

9 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Yes.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: So what  
11 is the largest concession bring in currently at  
12 the park?

13 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: The  
14 Terrace on the Park concession annually supports  
15 the city with 2.5 million dollars in revenue, and  
16 then there are as low as some of the mobile food  
17 carts that are about 19,000 dollars per year.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: And the  
19 restaurant at the marina?

20 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: The  
21 marina restaurant is 214,000 dollars.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Is the  
23 marina itself a concession?

24 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: The  
25 marina actually is run by the Parks Department so

1  
2 that that is one of our revenue division  
3 concessions. Actually, we operate it. It is not  
4 a concession. We do operate that. Persons do  
5 come to us for--it is operated by Park staff 24  
6 hours a day, 7 days a week. We do rent boat space  
7 at 73 dollars per foot.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: At 73  
9 dollars per foot of the boat?

10 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: for the  
11 summer season, which compares to rates around the  
12 city and Westchester, which could range anywhere  
13 from 120 to 200, so the rates for the New York  
14 City Marina are actually very reasonable.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay.

16 JANICE MELNICK: This is the same  
17 way that all marinas are run in the--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Janice,  
19 can you just say your name for the record?

20 JANICE MELNICK: Janice Melnick. I  
21 am the park administrator, and this is the same  
22 process for all of the marinas in the city.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay, and  
24 is that the only revenue generator at the marina  
25 dock is the slip fee or is there like a concession

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at the dock?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: They have a small concession, which I hear is very popular by persons going to Citi Field before the game. It is a good place to go for a hamburger.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay. Now can you tell me the difference between the concession and the possible lease agreements that the park has that might be revenue generating?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: I am sorry. I am not certain of the question.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Is that the only revenue--are concessions the only revenue generating entity within our park?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: No, there are lease agreements with the New York Mets and with the United States Tennis Center, which also contribute revenue to the city annually.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Do we have dollar amounts for those two?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: I have here for the New York Mets and for the United States Tennis Association 2.63 million dollars in lease fees in 201 and to date FY '13, 2.5 million

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dollars.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: 2.5

million each?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: To date.

No, total.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Total.

So if we have 3.4 million that is generated by the concessions - - 2.5 million on the Mets and the USTA lease, it brings us to 5.9 million. Is that correct?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: I have here if we totaled the lease, the concessions and our park marina, this year to date, FY '13, 5.2 million have been contributed, but in FY '12 the total was 6,751,000.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: So if it is 11.6 million to run our Flushing Meadows Corona Park or what the city gives, right, what the administration allots for the maintenance of Flushing Corona Park, what is the in comparison because I think a lot of this is comparing us to other parks--what is the maintenance in Prospect Park and the maintenance for Central Park?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: We would

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have to follow up with you on those exact figures.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: If you can get us those numbers to the Committee I would greatly appreciate it. I have other questions, but I want to let my colleagues ask some questions, and I will come on the second round.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you, Council Member. Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer?

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I want to thank my colleague and friend Councilwoman Julissa Ferreras for her amazing work in making sure this hearing took place and making sure that Flushing Meadows Corona Park gets what it rightly deserves. Though I don't represent Flushing Meadows Corona Park like any kid who grew up in Queens, it is a very special place to me, and like so many families who currently use it in Councilwoman Ferreras' district we often used it for birthday parties and lots of things because I come from a big family. we did not have any money, so we took the Northern Boulevard bus to get to Flushing Meadows Corona Park and you could spend the day there and it is a

1  
2 shame what has happened in so many parts of the  
3 park though Commissioner Lewandowski, you know how  
4 highly I regard you and your work and respect you  
5 so much. one of the things that we used to play  
6 around as kids of course was the New York State  
7 Pavilion and you know, we probably shouldn't have  
8 done that, but when we were kids you could  
9 actually get in and play on the map that is still  
10 I guess, there are pieces of it left there, but  
11 the whole New York State Pavilion is a tragedy  
12 right because it is something that could be I  
13 believe if it had been maintained properly and as  
14 I am sure you would attest every day that goes by  
15 that we don't fix it, it gets more and more  
16 expensive of a proposition to actually restore it.  
17 But I wanted to ask you about the status of that  
18 because I don't believe in nostalgia projects for  
19 the sake of nostalgia, but it seems to me like if  
20 that pavilion were a project that the  
21 administration cared about that it could be  
22 restored and actually turned into a revenue  
23 generating entity perhaps like it was in the '64,  
24 '65 World's Fair where there might be a  
25 restaurant. Certainly there is viewing towers.

1  
2 Those could be tourist attractions. At this point  
3 probably the number is going to be astronomical,  
4 but even the fact that we are getting to that is a  
5 sign of neglect in my mind, so what is the status  
6 of the pavilion? Is it going to fall down? Are  
7 we going to keep it just standing there? Is it as  
8 a relic? Are we ever going to repair it?

9 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: I have  
10 to say first I do share your concerns particularly  
11 for that location. When I came into the borough  
12 nine years ago it was one of the areas that we  
13 identified needed to be better understood so that  
14 we knew what to do with it. I do want to say  
15 though that also three years ago we worked with  
16 the University of Pennsylvania who took out  
17 sections of the map on the floor, the map of  
18 Texaco, the Texaco map of the United States and  
19 portions of that had been reserved and actually  
20 were on an exhibit at the Queens Museum at one  
21 point in time. We had them in safe storage and  
22 the map itself has now been covered in sand and  
23 protected so that it would no longer be damaged.  
24 We have embarked on two studies, one that looked  
25 at the pavilion and a second one that the mayor

1  
2 has recently funded that has allowed us now to  
3 explore the conditions of the towers. Both of  
4 those studies, one is completed. The pavilion  
5 tower study is completed, and the tower study--

6 JANICE MELNICK: [interposing] We  
7 have a draft of the study and are waiting for the  
8 final product, but it does give us stabilization  
9 options, restoration options and removal options,  
10 so we will be looking at all of that once we have  
11 the final study.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Are  
13 there costs associated with those options?

14 JANICE MELNICK: Yes, there are.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Could  
16 you tell us...?

17 [crosstalk]

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Is the  
19 city Parks Department looking at also as these  
20 studies a possibility of turning them into  
21 attractions, concessions, revenue generating  
22 options so that they could actually be used by the  
23 people of Queens and the city of New York and  
24 actually generate revenue for Flushing Meadows  
25 Corona Park?

1  
2                   COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: I would  
3 say yes. The city had explored some options  
4 previously that did not pan out as adaptive reuse  
5 of the pavilion particularly, but I think we will  
6 be challenged with what to do with this facility  
7 based on other needs within the park and with the  
8 dollars that you have. Where do you best allocate  
9 your money towards? So I think these studies will  
10 allow us to as Janice alluded to have conversation  
11 about whether you preserve it as a ruin, restore  
12 it for some sort of adaptive reuse, or do you face  
13 the decision should it come down and be invested  
14 in something else. Those are conversations that  
15 we look forward to having with all of our various  
16 elected officials.

17                   COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: And  
18 obviously Councilwoman Ferreras obviously will  
19 have a big role to play in all of that, and I look  
20 forward to working with her on that, but I just  
21 want to say the premise of what we just said is  
22 that given the funding that this may not be  
23 possible because we may need to do that, and I  
24 think that I would argue is that this part  
25 deserves a lot more resources so that we are not

1  
2 faced with these either/and/or choices for  
3 Flushing Meadows Corona Park because of that tower  
4 if that New York State Pavilion, which Philip  
5 Johnson [phonetic] designed I believe were in  
6 Central Park, it would have been restored a long  
7 time ago, and it would be a lovely restaurant and  
8 a lovely reviewing station with binoculars and  
9 things up on the top, so I just think that the  
10 answer to these questions has got to be more for  
11 Flushing Meadows Corona Park. So speaking of  
12 which I wanted to just talk because Councilwoman  
13 Ferreras asked those really good questions about  
14 where revenue is being generated. I don't know if  
15 anyone else felt this way, but I was stunned that  
16 Terrace on the Park, which is a lovely facility  
17 where lots of folks have their weddings and bar  
18 mitzvahs and things like that generates as much  
19 revenue as Citi Field and USTA combined, which is  
20 staggering. So you didn't have the breakdown  
21 between Citi Field and USTA, but if USTA and Citi  
22 Field--let's just split it, right, they are both  
23 generating 1.25 million or so, how is it that Citi  
24 Field, the New York Mets and the USTA which  
25 everyone talks about being the highest revenue

1  
2 generating event in the city of New York in a year  
3 are giving back to the park of what a catering  
4 facility having weddings and bar mitzvahs is  
5 doing?

6 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: We would  
7 have to get back to you with the particulars on  
8 the arrangements with the Mets and the USTA.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER:  
10 Commissioner Lewandowski, I respect you and you  
11 didn't cut that deal, right, so this is not on  
12 you, but the city did cut that deal, and it sounds  
13 like to me Citi Field and USTA are getting off  
14 really easy and they are not doing their fair  
15 share in making sure the park is cared for, so I  
16 will leave it at that, but there is something  
17 fishy in those numbers. That just can't be--  
18 Terrace in the Park generating as much revenue as  
19 the New York Mets and the USTA combined. I just  
20 find that problematic. I don't know if anybody  
21 else does as well. So I think Councilwoman  
22 Ferreras agrees with me, so I just want to say  
23 like all of us I love the park, and it is so  
24 incredibly important to all of Queens, to all of  
25 New York City, we have got to do more, we have got

1  
2 to do better, and I thank my colleagues in  
3 particular Councilwoman Ferreras for shining a  
4 bright light on this and really hope that out of  
5 this comes a renewed commitment to this amazing  
6 park on behalf of the City of New York, so thank  
7 you very much.

8 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
9 you, Council Member. Next on the list is Council  
10 Member Vallone.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you,  
12 Madam Chair, and thanks to you for having this  
13 hearing. It is not easy to get people from other  
14 boroughs to have hearings on different topics, but  
15 thank you for doing this. The Great Gatsby came  
16 out and Flushing Meadows was referred to as a  
17 valley of ashes, and I think if Manhattan had its  
18 way, the park might be going back to being an ash  
19 dump. None of what I say is reflected at you  
20 'cause especially you Dot, I have been working  
21 with you and you are a huge help to my community.  
22 I am talking more about Parks in general. But in  
23 our briefing paper, it says that when it comes to  
24 private donations 100 million was donated to  
25 Central Park, 20 million to the high line 40 to

1  
2 build a field house in Brooklyn Bridge Park, while  
3 Flushing Meadow Park got 5,000 dollars. That is  
4 private donations, and while that is not the  
5 city's fault, the city does have a responsibility  
6 to provide essential services and parks that are  
7 not dangerous for our kids, and they have  
8 advocated that responsibility, so we are relying  
9 on public funds more often, and part of the  
10 justification for the soccer stadium is the fact  
11 that the mayor said the park is in bad condition.  
12 That is an outrage, and Jimmy is right. The  
13 condition of the pavilion and those towers is a  
14 joke. Men in Black did more for those towers than  
15 New York City has done for those towers. That is  
16 an outrage. So what I am doing today is I am  
17 putting in a bill modeled after Dan Squadron's  
18 bill on the state level, which would require that  
19 any conservancy that has over five million dollars  
20 and there are four of them here in the city be  
21 required to contribute 20 percent of those funds  
22 to parks in need, and by parks in need we mean  
23 parks that are overseen by an alliance which is  
24 run by the Parks Department or overseen by the  
25 Parks Department, which had been rated

1  
2 unsatisfactory for two years in a row. While I  
3 have no problem with Manhattan having this money  
4 and if they want to build a castle for a rest  
5 station they should have every right to do that  
6 with the money that they are given, but since the  
7 city has - - its responsibility, I think we are  
8 forced to say that differences that exist such as  
9 100 million to Central Park and 5,000 dollars to  
10 Flushing Meadow mandate that we require some of  
11 those funds to be donated to parks in need and  
12 Flushing Meadow is surely one of those. Do you  
13 have any position on whether or not Flushing  
14 Meadow and Queens in general should share in some  
15 of the funding that is provided to other parks?  
16 Dottie, you look like you want to kill me, but you  
17 are...

18 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: We would  
19 have to look at that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: I actually  
21 had lunch with Dan Squadron and we discussed this  
22 today so otherwise I would have given you some  
23 notice like I always do. This is just on Flushing  
24 Meadow, I am trying to stay on topic, which is  
25 difficult. Okay, when it comes to--how does

1  
2 Flushing Meadow compare to other parks in Queens  
3 when it comes to its budget and its staff?

4 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Flushing  
5 Meadow Park in comparison with the other parks  
6 within the borough? We do allocate staff based on  
7 need, based on facilities and resources, so  
8 comparatively, it does fit right in line. I think  
9 what is important to note is that through our park  
10 inspection program which rates our parks every two  
11 weeks we have inspectors come out and look at the  
12 conditions of our parks facilities. Flushing  
13 Meadows is actually doing very well and strong in  
14 its ratings and that is in terms of cleanliness  
15 and overall condition and that in comparison with  
16 other parks, we are actually doing very well. In  
17 this past year, the overall condition increased in  
18 the park from what we would call 83 percent  
19 acceptable to 87 percent and our cleanliness went  
20 up from 93 to 96 percent, which is online with  
21 relatively where we are across the borough  
22 relatively in the mid-80s overall condition and in  
23 the mid-90s for cleanliness, so it falls in line  
24 with other parks.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Can I go

1  
2 through those numbers again because our report  
3 shows that from 2009 to 2013 with respect to  
4 cleanliness Flushing Meadows was found acceptable  
5 86.8 percent of the time, but the city standard  
6 was 90 percent of the time. Does that jive with  
7 your numbers or are you telling me something  
8 different?

9 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: For FY  
10 '12 the cleanliness rating for Flushing Meadow  
11 Park was 93 percent, FY '13 we were at 96 percent.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: And what  
13 is the city standard for those years?

14 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI:  
15 Unfortunately I do not have that number in front  
16 of me, but we can get that for you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Okay.  
18 Well, we were below the city standard according to  
19 our committee's research from 2009 to 2013.  
20 Perhaps, that is an average, but we will have to  
21 work those numbers out.

22 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: We will  
23 have to verify those numbers.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You talked  
25 about the different workers at the Parks. Do you

1  
2 happen to know the amount of PEP officers to  
3 assigned to Flushing Meadows?

4 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Yes, I  
5 do.

6 JANICE MELNICK: There are 16 PEP  
7 officers in the borough assigned to Queens with  
8 two PEP officers to patrol Flushing Meadow Corona  
9 Park daily. With the addition of 81 PEP officers  
10 funded by Mayor Bloomberg in the fiscal year 2014  
11 executive budget, we will be able to double the  
12 numbers of officers by 17 borough wide for a total  
13 of 34 with four officers assigned to patrolling  
14 the park daily, and in addition last summer, we  
15 had four seasonal JTP PEP officers that were  
16 assigned specifically to the unisphere [phonetic]  
17 area of the park.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Well, we  
19 are very happy about the new PEP officers. I have  
20 been fighting for that for a long, long time, but  
21 when you say--I mean there were 16 for the borough  
22 of Queens, and that has been for a long, long time  
23 and two in the park, you are talking about people  
24 back the desk, you are talking about people on  
25 vacation, sick or people just who aren't on a

1  
2 shift then because they are working night or  
3 someone else is working a day. So as I have said  
4 in the past, we have had times where there are two  
5 officers on duty for the entire borough of Queens,  
6 not just the park. That is not your fault. I  
7 know that. You would want a lot more officers,  
8 but that is what we have in Queens, while places  
9 like Central Park have 75 to Central Park alone,  
10 not two for the borough of Queens, so we are very  
11 happy, and by the way, this is the first I am  
12 hearing that we are getting--well, 34 is the  
13 total, so we are only getting..

14 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: An  
15 additional 17 to the borough.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: We are  
17 adding 17 out of what was it? 86?

18 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: 81.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: 81. Can  
20 somebody do math? Is that 20 percent of...? It's  
21 about 20 percent. We should do better since other  
22 boroughs already have us--I say outgunned, but  
23 they don't carry guns--have us out patrolled, so I  
24 would hope to do better, but it is nice that we  
25 have 17 new ones coming in. - - my colleagues are

1  
2 waiting to ask questions, so again, Dottie,  
3 especially thank you for the help you have been in  
4 my district and throughout Queens, and I know you  
5 would want the additional resources that we want  
6 also. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: thank  
8 you, Council Member, and I was just reviewing the  
9 budget document that we got that we had over the  
10 Parks Committee budget hearing a couple of days  
11 ago, and it says here that the Shea Stadium rent  
12 for fiscal 2013 was 155,000, and it is projected  
13 to be 400,000 in fiscal 2014. Would that be  
14 accurate?

15 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: I don't  
16 have those numbers, but I will have our team get  
17 back to you.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I mean  
19 and that just gives you an idea of how outrageous  
20 that is, and then I think it says here the World's  
21 Fair Marina, 1.1 million in revenue for the Parks  
22 Department, but we will get more clarity on those  
23 issues. Next on the list is Council Member  
24 Crowley.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you,

1  
2 Chair Viverito. Thank you for having the hearing  
3 today and for my colleagues who represent the park  
4 for looking after it and investing so much into  
5 it. Commissioner, good afternoon. I have a  
6 question. In line to what much of Council Member  
7 Vallone was asking about earlier, in looking at  
8 these conservancies that you know other parks have  
9 been well funded, how does that relate to the  
10 resources that the New York City Parks Department  
11 puts into the Park? Like say Central Park for  
12 example, since they have such an endowment, they  
13 really don't need city resources like a park such  
14 as Flushing Meadows. Does the city give less when  
15 a park has so much more?

16 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: I cannot  
17 speak for Central Park. I would have to have the  
18 team get back to you, but in terms of Queens where  
19 we do have partners, particularly Forest Park, we  
20 have no reduced or resources our commitment to the  
21 park, but the resources that these conservancies  
22 have allows us to do often allow us to do  
23 activities beyond what we would normally occur  
24 within park, particularly in Forest Park's case in  
25 recreational programs. In Flushing Meadows case

1  
2 with the Flushing Meadows Conservancy, we have had  
3 some restoration work around the southern edge of  
4 the park that has allowed us to occur - - they  
5 have partnered with us on grant opportunities to  
6 help us maintain structures and facilities in the  
7 parks and the monuments, so it did not reduce what  
8 we would have given, but gave us some greater  
9 opportunity in some areas.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: I

11 understand that. For the Queens parks, I don't  
12 think any of the parks need a reduction in the  
13 resources that the city gives to those parks. I  
14 think you do a pretty good job with what you have;  
15 however, when looking at other parks such as  
16 Central Park or Prospect Park they look like they  
17 get more resources. Maybe it is because of these  
18 conservancies, but if they have such large  
19 conservancies it would make sense for the city to  
20 give less to those particular parks because the  
21 need is greater in other parks. I know we have  
22 other representatives from the Parks Department  
23 here who could speak to the amount of investment  
24 that is put into a park like Central Park or  
25 Prospect Park, and I just think that it is only

1  
2 right for our city to give where it is needed, and  
3 it is not really needed in Central Park because  
4 they have such a large conservancy that we should  
5 give more to the parks in outer boroughs that  
6 could use the funds. So nobody from the Parks  
7 Department can say if less is given to a park like  
8 Central Park because it has such a large  
9 endowment?

10 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: - - .

11 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Can I  
12 just add I did hear the Commissioner did have an  
13 interview on Bryan Lair [phonetic], and a question  
14 exactly like that was posted and her response was  
15 that there is no lessening of resources to a park  
16 regardless of whether or not they have a  
17 conservancy and what it brings in. That is what I  
18 gathered from her response, but we can verify that  
19 with her and with the Department.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: That is  
21 the only question that I have. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
23 you, Council Member. Council Member Gennaro?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Thank you,  
25 Madam Chair. Yeah, I just want to get back to the

1 pavilion because even I don't represent that part  
2 of the park I had a concern about what was going  
3 to happen to the pavilion and I funded 150,00  
4 dollar study to find out what we--and of course  
5 that was the Parks Department's idea. They came  
6 to me. They wanted me to fund that study, and I  
7 just kind of want to state to my colleagues and to  
8 the audience that in anything that is going to  
9 happen with the pavilion is going to cost a ton of  
10 money just--to remake this 50 year old temporary  
11 structure into some kind of world class attraction  
12 that may preclude the park from doing the 33  
13 million dollar swim center that went up recently,  
14 the 15 million dollar - - center, the 48 million  
15 dollar renovation, the Queens museum, the 27  
16 million to the Queens Theater. I mean all of  
17 these things take a lot of money, so I just  
18 thought it was good to get the numbers on what was  
19 going to happen or like what could happen. we can  
20 preserve it as it is. We can pay to knock it  
21 down. We can pay to fix it, and so I just don't  
22 want people to think that we are not putting the  
23 brainwaves into figuring out like what we would do  
24 with that pavilion, and put that next to how we  
25

1  
2 would spend other funds and there is no - - spent  
3 here. Do you have a comment on where we think the  
4 study is ultimately going to go? There will be  
5 options. There will be numbers put out there, and  
6 then we as a Council and as the Parks Department  
7 as part of the Administration all have to make  
8 real hard decisions about what we do going forward  
9 with that structure, but when I hear words like  
10 shame and tragedy and fishy and outrage and  
11 abdication, it all just sounds like a lot of hot  
12 air. I kind of don't appreciate it, and so  
13 because that is not what I think is going on at  
14 the park. And so I have another question, but I  
15 give you an opportunity to respond. I don't like  
16 t hose characterizations.

17 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Thank  
18 you, Council Member. Particularly in relation to  
19 the pavilion and the towers, we did do the one  
20 study. We have the second underway. These are  
21 the type of tough decisions that will need to be  
22 made not only with elected officials and the  
23 administration, but with the community who uses  
24 the park so that we can best determine how best to  
25 allocate those funds to renovate and restore those

1  
2 things that are most interested to the public that  
3 use it, so I appreciate your--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO:

5 [interposing] I am frankly quite appreciate that  
6 the Parks Department along with the Council and  
7 the elected officials and the borough president  
8 and the mayor figured out how to do a 32 million  
9 dollar swim center and a 15 million dollar - -  
10 center, and 48 million dollar Queens Museum and a  
11 27 million dollar Queens Theater, and all the  
12 ecological work that we are doing in my end of the  
13 park, and you know trying to use all the volunteer  
14 resources that we have at our disposal and we are  
15 not going to get a big endowment from a big money  
16 conservancy that - - like other areas of the city.  
17 It is just not going to happen, but the  
18 administration has in concert with the borough  
19 president and with members of the Council that  
20 represent the area have come up with a lot of  
21 money, and I am frankly grateful for it, and so  
22 that is my two cents. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I am  
24 sorry. I was getting clarity on something, but I  
25 think--okay, Council Member Julissa Ferreras?

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank  
3 you, so I wanted to--I with all due respect to my  
4 colleague, I feel that we can position ourselves  
5 to get the endowments that this community  
6 deserves. I think it is evident when this  
7 gentleman gave 100 million dollars to Central  
8 Park, he grew up in Queens, so perhaps he could  
9 have given us ten percent of that. I don't think  
10 we have a way of someone contributing anything to  
11 Flushing Meadows Park at this present time. So I  
12 think that that is something that we are working  
13 on with this administration. I just wanted to  
14 circle back and although we are--I don't know if  
15 happy is the right word, but it is great that we  
16 have doubled on the PEP officers. Going from two  
17 to four is not sufficient, and I just want to be  
18 really clear. Four people don't even patrol a  
19 movie theater right now or a parking lot, and you  
20 know just recently when I heard of this woman that  
21 was found by the Hall of Science that she didn't  
22 remember if she was raped or not or what the case  
23 is, less than ten years ago there was a woman who  
24 was gang raped in Flushing Meadows Park. This is  
25 the real Flushing Meadows Park for many people

1  
2 that go there, and I understand when we kind of  
3 went a little bit back and forth on the  
4 percentages of the cleanliness. We still have  
5 issues in that park, and you know, I was speaking  
6 to Janice when we were doing the carousel opening,  
7 and I was very impressed on how the park looked  
8 that day. It was really impressive, but having  
9 the park as my backyard when I grew up I have  
10 never lived in a house, I have always lived in an  
11 apartment and like many young people and residents  
12 of my district that is your backyard. The reality  
13 is that Flushing Meadows Park isn't always the  
14 most pristine park. It isn't always clean to what  
15 your numbers may say 96 percent. I don't think if  
16 we did a survey of the people that visit Flushing  
17 Meadows Park people would say oh, it looks 96  
18 percent clean. I don't think that that is the  
19 reality. I don't know and I respect the tools  
20 that your PIPs [phonetic] use. I don't think they  
21 would be the same if we used them with the  
22 constituents, and I am saying this because this is  
23 what I hear from my community. So I just kind of  
24 want to hone in. I know we talked about the 11.6  
25 million and that is for essentials in the park.

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2 What would it take to have a park that is  
3 pristine? I don't know if there is like an a and  
4 a b and c class park, but how much would it cost  
5 us to have our park run at the best optimal level  
6 in your opinion? Please state your name.

7

LARRY SCOTT BLACKMON: Good  
8 afternoon, Council Member, members of the  
9 Committee. I am Larry Scott Blackmon [phonetic],  
10 deputy commissioner of the Parks Department. To  
11 your question, we often hold and we are actually  
12 engaged in this exercise right now--park user  
13 surveys where we have teams of interns and park  
14 staff who go out and visit our parks, our beaches,  
15 our pools and we ask the customers what their  
16 experiences are when they engage in our parks and  
17 more often than not, our users rate our parks  
18 higher than we rate them ourselves through our PIP  
19 program.

20

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: How many  
21 surveyors do you have in Flushing Meadows?

22

LARRY SCOTT BLACKMON: We have them  
23 going through all across the city right now with  
24 parks large and small, beaches, et cetera. We  
25 have - - .

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COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: - -

volunteers for the surveyors, do you reach out to the organizations that surround the park so they can be volunteer surveyors?

LARRY SCOTT BLACKMON: We have not.

That is something that we can certainly do.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I think

that would be a great way to engage our community because that was my next point of how do we engage more people from the community having opportunities to voice their opinions and what are the levels where--cause I know that there is many decisions and you know, although we would all like the pavilion to be improved, and we would all like the putrid smell of the marina to go away, perhaps if I am asking a mom or a dad or a young person in the park that might not be their highest priority, so we also need to engage or have an opportunity where community can say, you know what? Maybe I'd like you to put in some more basketball courts first and maybe we want to track, Commissioner, or whatever the case may be. I think that we need more of those opportunities so if you have these park user surveys, I think we have a wealth of

1  
2 opportunity that they are all going to testify  
3 here today, so we can--if whoever is staying  
4 behind I am sure can hear, and I am sure that they  
5 are willing to volunteer to put this tool to use  
6 so that we can have a tangible very real  
7 conversation about the maintenance of Flushing  
8 Meadows Corona Park.

9 LARRY SCOTT BLACKMON: Absolutely.  
10 We are looking at sort of new strategies to get  
11 information from people even if they are let's say  
12 physically challenges, they are not able to be in  
13 the park that day, but we actually visit them and  
14 say tell us your experience in Flushing Meadow  
15 Corona Park. That is something that we want to  
16 extract from them, so we are talking about going  
17 the extra mile and not just visiting the park, but  
18 neighborhood community groups, and we are happy to  
19 have that conversation.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: And as  
21 you are developing the tool I think we also need  
22 to put a point in accessing the park because  
23 unlike other parks in our city, this park in  
24 particular is kind of hugged or embraced by  
25 highways. We really have College Point [phonetic]

1  
2 and 111<sup>th</sup> Street and a piece of Roosevelt Avenue,  
3 but in reality it is possibly surrounded, and I  
4 have my own opinion of Robert Moses' ideas, but it  
5 is the reality that we are dealing with right now.

6 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Let me  
7 just get a point of clarity. These surveys that  
8 you are talking about, I am assuming there is a  
9 uniform set of questions that are asked standard  
10 throughout the city.

11 LARRY SCOTT BLACKMON: Yes, yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: First  
13 it would be great if we could see what that looks  
14 like and here are the questions that are being  
15 asked, but I think in addition to that there may  
16 be some additional questions that could be  
17 tailored. There is a way of getting feedback.  
18 There might be additional questions that may be  
19 specific to a park that may be important to gather  
20 as opposed to another park. That may be relevant  
21 to this park and not another park. I don't know  
22 if there are ways of crafting it a little bit  
23 more. So we can see the questions, and maybe  
24 there is ways we can work with you on figuring out  
25 how do we tailor it depending on the park and the

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surveys you are doing.

LARRY SCOTT BLACKMON: We would be happy to brief you on it.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I wanted to focus in. I know that we have a really successful recreational and aquatic center, and there are fees that are collected from those centers. Where do those fees go? What do they look like? Do we have numbers on those?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: There are two sets of fees that are collected. One is a membership fee for the recreation center and a second for the pool operator, USA Pools, for fees for various classes and such that persons may tale or purchase a day pass to use that facility. Do you have those numbers?

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Is the pool a concession then?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: No. The pool is run under a contract with USA Pools to manage the facility for the Parks Department, and they are paid as a contractor.

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COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: So  
whatever the collect for the classes is theirs?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: It  
reduces the payment the city makes to them--  
offsets that payment.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Do we  
have those numbers or?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Yes. So  
I have a combined revenue for the - - and the  
Flushing Meadow pool for FY '12 1,585,000 dollars  
and year to date FY '13 1,376,000 dollars.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay.  
Sorry, and this goes directly to the general fund  
also?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay. In  
comparison to parks like Prospect and Central Park  
probably more like Central Park what percentage of  
the concessions revenues do they keep from the  
park?

COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: I don't  
have those figures, but we would be able to tell  
you what concession revenues are generated in the  
park, and then share that with you.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Is there  
3 any park in Queens that has the contractual  
4 agreement where there is a percentage of what the  
5 park generated - - nothing comparing to Flushing  
6 Meadows because we probably generate the most, but  
7 is there any park in Queens that currently their  
8 concessions there is a percent that goes back to  
9 their park?

10 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: There is  
11 no percent of a concession that goes directly back  
12 into that park of the concession revenues. The  
13 concession revenues go to the general fund

14 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: But you  
15 can't speak to that agreement for Central Park or  
16 Prospect Park?

17 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: I can't  
18 right now, but what we can get for you were the  
19 revenues generated in concessions in Central Park  
20 and let you know how that goes.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I think  
22 we are probably going to hear some testimony on  
23 that, but my understanding is that there is a  
24 percentage of the concessions that do--that are  
25 appropriated directly to the park, but perhaps--

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CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

[interposing] If I can clarify - - I do have some conservancies in my district I do understand that the set up between Randall's island alliance and the Parks Department is that all the concessions generated on the island directly go back to the island. They do not go back to the general fund. So there are conservancy set ups where that does happen.

LARRY SCOTT BLACKMON: I think what

we will do is we will verify what those arrangements are if that is indeed the case and follow up with you and the committee. We just don't have it right now in front of us.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay.

Yes, please. Thank you. I wanted to I just I really want to hear from the community and I am so grateful that they are here under this horrible weather outside, but I just want to ask two more questions, and I will follow up with my additional questions to you directly so that you can answer them so that I don't take up any more time for the public, but I wanted to go specifically to the strategic framework plan that it seems was

1  
2 designed, and it exists and it is a pretty lengthy  
3 document. What has been done in the short term  
4 and in the long term? Is it still viable in 2013?  
5 And where are we currently with what they have  
6 identified in the framework?

7           COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Sure, so  
8 the strategic framework was done in 2008, and yes,  
9 it is still viable, but basically the plan  
10 identifies three major park improvement goals and  
11 those are re-envisioning the World's Fair core,  
12 reconfiguring and restoring the lakes and  
13 reconnecting the park to the neighborhood and  
14 city. And while we haven't had the funds to  
15 necessarily do any of the large projects that were  
16 recommended, every capital project that we do is  
17 designed with the framework in mind, so for  
18 example in 2011, we completed a restoration of  
19 portions of the path near Meadow Lake and two  
20 paths became one, and all of that was in  
21 accordance with the framework and part of the  
22 plans of the framework, so we wanted to reduce  
23 pavement in the park. That was one of the goals,  
24 and we wanted to help treat and reduce storm water  
25 entering the lake, which is another goal of the

1  
2 plan so every capital project we do is with the  
3 framework in mind.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Can we  
5 speak on the specifics of the - - ? What are the  
6 conditions? Where are we with the - - ? It seems  
7 like it comes up as a capital project probably not  
8 as priority for everyone because people want to be  
9 engaged in soccer fields and baseball fields, but  
10 this major entrance to the park is in very bad  
11 condition. Can you speak to that?

12 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Thanks  
13 to Mayor Bloomberg we did get funding to do a  
14 structural survey of the - - ramp, and in fact the  
15 project just started in May of this year. It will  
16 take approximately 18 months to complete, and then  
17 we will really understand exactly what needs to be  
18 done at the - - . And there are two other studies  
19 also being undertaken and that is for the Tide  
20 Gate Bridge and the Tide Gates themselves, and  
21 they are still in the procurement process.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Is there  
23 any imminent danger with the - - or...?

24 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: I am  
25 going to say no. The - - ramp is a remnant of the

1  
2 '39 World's Fair that connected persons from the  
3 community to the fair. It goes over the number  
4 seven rail, the Long Island Railroad Rail, and it  
5 has a building associated with it as well. It  
6 certainly has its challenges. We do inspect it  
7 regularly. over the course of the past few years  
8 have made some emergency repairs and have done  
9 just a number of in house repairs throughout the  
10 years because it is used heavily throughout the  
11 season, but the mayor has allocated funds so that  
12 a full bridge assessment survey could be done and  
13 then assess what actually needs to be done to do  
14 the restoration.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Now I  
16 want to just focus in on crime and fire in  
17 particular do you have any most recent statistics  
18 on the crimes that have occurred in the park?

19 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Based on  
20 the crime data that we receive from the police  
21 department for FY '13 in the first quarter from  
22 July through September of 2012 there were 16  
23 crimes in Flushing Meadow Corona Park, and before  
24 I go into the other quarters, I just would like to  
25 say of those 16, 10 were grand larceny and the

1  
2 uniqueness of Flushing Meadow Park with its  
3 various facilities and parking lots associated  
4 with it so that the Citi Field parking lot does  
5 count as part of this so if a car or someone who  
6 attends a Met game is broken into in some way or  
7 something occurs that car that reflects in our  
8 park count, so a number of these in each of the  
9 preceding quarters the majority of the crimes are  
10 grand larceny which then occurred within a parking  
11 lot somewhere.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: What was  
13 the breakdown of the other six?

14 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: The  
15 other six were one robbery, one felony assault and  
16 one burglary and one three grand larceny auto  
17 where that means the car was actually stolen. The  
18 others were just broken into. The number then for  
19 the next quarter again was 16 with the grand  
20 larceny being the largest of six and then in the  
21 third quarter from January 1 through March 30<sup>th</sup> of  
22 this year there were ten total, seven of them  
23 being grand larcenies in vehicles, and again, very  
24 minimal, one robbery, one felony assault, one  
25 grand larceny auto.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I also  
3 think that this is an opportunity. I don't  
4 necessarily believe that people are reporting at  
5 the rate that they probably should from the park  
6 so in any way that we can improve the reporting of  
7 incidents, I think that any opportunity that we  
8 can do that is one that is significant, and I am  
9 sure if we had more PEP officers we might see a  
10 difference in the reporting of--not that the  
11 crimes would be more egregious, but just better  
12 reporting.

13 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: If I  
14 could Council Member, I would like to just add is  
15 that we do have a very strong relationship with  
16 the 110 Precinct who patrols the park as well as  
17 the Citi Field NYPD detail that when games are not  
18 in town do also assign persons to help us through  
19 the park, so that there are opportunities for  
20 people, persons who use the park to see a patrol  
21 car whether it by NYPD or park enforcement, and  
22 although we do have the one unit assigned to the  
23 park, their main headquarters is in Flushing  
24 Meadows that people are--officers are driving  
25 through the park regularly so that if there were

1  
2 an incident I believe there is opportunity to flag  
3 someone down. I balance these numbers also with  
4 our 311 calls and you know, look at what sort of  
5 activities people are reporting as well, so I am  
6 feeling relatively confident that these numbers  
7 are reported.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I respect  
9 that you feel relatively confident in that. The  
10 reality is my community isn't known for their 311  
11 calls. We are trying to motivate people to call  
12 that system and educate people on the system. And  
13 we can all attest to the safest time to be in the  
14 park is during the U.S. Open and during a Met  
15 game. That is like the safest time. There is  
16 police officers everywhere. The lighting is  
17 amazing and it just makes for the community to  
18 feel that if we can do it then why can't it be  
19 done for the rest of the 365 days a year, and I  
20 know this isn't particular to you, but it is a  
21 reality, and it is a question that comes to me.  
22 It is a question that I think about when I walk  
23 through the park, and people want to feel safe. I  
24 just want to circle back to the fire hydrant  
25 issue. I know that there are fire hydrants

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2 throughout the park. It seems that we don't know  
3 if they are DEP or where they came from, whether  
4 they are red or black, whether they are working or  
5 not. Is there a status and update on this issue  
6 with the fire hydrants of Flushing Meadows?

7 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: The  
8 answer to that is yes.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Oh great.

10 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: There  
11 are 143 fire hydrants in Flushing Meadows Park.  
12 Many of them are dating back to the era of World  
13 Fairs when there were buildings and structures and  
14 many more hydrants were required than what is  
15 actually needed to be within the 210 feet of a  
16 building zone. The bulk of those within the park  
17 are on the Parks Department water main lines and  
18 then Parks Department is responsible to maintain  
19 them. The only hydrant that a DEP personnel would  
20 be responsible for is anything on one of what they  
21 would call their DEP water main lines, which are  
22 relatively few that run through the park. We  
23 coordinate regularly with DEP. We have surveyed  
24 the hydrants and those that are not working have  
25 the white ring that is around it, so it is

1  
2 identified as a non-working hydrant. The hydrants  
3 around the facilities that are required to be  
4 operating are working.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: How many  
6 hydrants are those?

7 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: We are  
8 counting 26 that are adjacent to structures and  
9 facilities within the park that by fire code are  
10 required to be operated. As Council Member  
11 Gennaro alluded to before particularly in the  
12 southern end of the park where you have Willow  
13 Lake and Meadow Lake there are hydrants in those  
14 areas that are not associated with nearby  
15 buildings so that we triage based on what we think  
16 is most important and then repair where we need  
17 to.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: So you  
19 are saying that the 143 hydrants are not  
20 necessarily needed?

21 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Many of  
22 them are not associated with a structure or  
23 facility and then required by code to service that  
24 building. They are in a more remote area from  
25 remnants of days gone by when one of the buildings

1  
2 from the World's Fair might have been there, but  
3 no longer exists.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay. I  
5 definitely want to give the opportunity to the  
6 community, but I just must tell you that we are  
7 going to be facing this again on a ULURP question  
8 with both of the concessions or the lessees of  
9 Flushing Meadows Park, and I want you to be  
10 prepared for those questions to come up because it  
11 is alarming that the lease agreements that are  
12 currently expected the contribution numbers of 2.5  
13 and 400,000 or 155,000. We are trying to figure  
14 out what that is from entities that generate great  
15 revenue for our city, and then to know that on top  
16 of that, the Mets and the USTA contribution does  
17 not come back to the park necessarily directly is  
18 something that I'd like to have an answer to  
19 during our ULURP process as we move forward.

20 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: Thank  
21 you. If I could I just want to thank the  
22 committee for having us testify today. I want to  
23 thank you for the support of Council Member  
24 Ferreras, Council Member Gennaro, Council Member  
25 Koslowitz, who is not here today and the interest

1  
2 in helping us bring this park to a new level and  
3 we appreciate that. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
5 you, Commissioner. We are going to be turning it  
6 over to the community in one second. I think  
7 Jimmy Van Bramer had a quick question.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: I just  
9 had one last question, Commissioner. First of all  
10 I just want to commend Council Member Ferreras  
11 again and agree with her that there is a lot of  
12 people with a lot of money in this city, and  
13 rather than throwing in the towel, we should  
14 actually see how much we can get for this park,  
15 and I think I was pretty clear how much I respect  
16 you and appreciate all that you do. And let's be  
17 clear, the neglect that began with the towers, you  
18 were in Grover Cleveland High School probably when  
19 that started, so you I am not holding responsible,  
20 and a lot of good things have happened, but there  
21 is still so much more that could be done, and any  
22 time a city neglects a park structure like that it  
23 is in my opinion a tragedy, and I think that that  
24 is appropriate. One last question. There was an  
25 entity that tried to raise money for the park a

1  
2 while back and without going into the specifics,  
3 you know what I am talking about. The question is  
4 there any money left from that entity, who  
5 controls it, and I realize it is not probably 600  
6 billion dollars, but is that money still there,  
7 and could it be used for any of these projects in  
8 the park realizing it is probably relatively small  
9 amounts, but even if it is programmatic or  
10 cosmetic, but what is the status of that money  
11 that was raised, all those fundraised that we all  
12 went to?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: And I  
14 will say it. We are talking about unisphere  
15 specifically and the situation with Estelle Cooper  
16 [phonetic].

17 COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI: So,  
18 thank you. Unisphere Inc. does still exist.  
19 They are in conversations with the city about  
20 folding and reallocating those funds to another  
21 entity so that they would be able to be used for  
22 the park. They currently have grants within their  
23 coffers that we are working with them, so that we  
24 are still moving forward on some grants that we  
25 have for natural areas restoration and monument

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2 restoration, so they are still paying bills  
3 related to those grants and monitoring those  
4 funds, so I think we have a unique opportunity to  
5 allow them to fold and to create something new.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I am  
7 sorry, Chair, but I just wanted to kind of  
8 reiterate and follow up on what my colleague,  
9 Council Member Van Bramer stated, is that there is  
10 a lot of people that love parks and want to  
11 contribute to parks. We are not looking to have  
12 contributors take ownership of the park, but is  
13 that we are all stewards of this park through  
14 contribution, so I just wanted to kind of put that  
15 out there and put it on the record. Thank you,  
16 Commissioner.

17 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:  
18 Commissioner, you are aware that if a park does  
19 not have a conservancy or an alliance or any sort  
20 of structure if a major donor was to come and say  
21 they wanted to give 100 million dollars  
22 specifically for Flushing Meadows Park, is that  
23 not possible? Is that money going to go to a  
24 general fund? Is there a way of still without  
25 that structure--

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COMMISSIONER LEWANDOWSKI:

[interposing] There actually is, and primarily two means, but one through the city's adopt a park program fundings can be allocated towards a specific park, specific project and targeted towards that. We also with our partners, the City Parks Foundation are able to secure funds and hold them for designated locations, and Janice has been availing herself to that in the interim while we are dealing with the unisphere issue.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Well,

thank you very much for your testimony and for being here, and it is about almost three o'clock, and we do have a lot of people to testify, so we are going to--I think for the most part we are going to use a clock. We are going to time the testimony. I know that there is a PowerPoint, so there may be a little bit of flexibility in some of that.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: And I am

hoping that some park staff will stay behind to listen to the community testimony. Thank you, Commissioner.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: First

1  
2 to testify we are going to have Will Sweeney  
3 [phonetic] from the Jackson Heights Green Alliance  
4 and also Holly Light [phonetic], New Yorkers for  
5 Parks. Those will be the first two. Yes,  
6 probably that is best and you have a mic right  
7 there. Gina, I think the Council Member has a  
8 question.

9 [background conversation]

10 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

11 Alright. Well, go ahead. You can start off.

12 WILL SWEENEY: Thank you, Madam  
13 Chair and council members for having us today. My  
14 name is Will Sweeney. I live in Jackson Heights.  
15 I am the co-founder of the Jackson Heights Green  
16 Alliance, and we are a neighborhood group that is  
17 looking to improve and expand park space in Queens  
18 and we are a member of the Fairness Coalition of  
19 Queens. Today I am going to do a little  
20 presentation about Flushing Meadows Corona Park,  
21 which if people don't know if you live in Jackson  
22 Heights or if you live in Elmhurst or east  
23 Elmhurst or if you live in parts of Flushing or  
24 parts of whole parts of Queens, it is the only  
25 viable green space for you that is within walking

1 distance or a short commute, so there are some  
2 unique challenges and I want to tell you about our  
3 coalition as well. So the Fairness Coalition of  
4 Queens is 20 Queens based community groups that  
5 have banded together to save Flushing Meadows  
6 Corona Park. We feel that the park has  
7 significant challenges and that there are  
8 corporate developments that are looking to take  
9 parts of the Park and we would like to eliminate  
10 today why the park is even seen as a target for  
11 some of these developments. I want to tell you a  
12 little bit about our values. We want to protect  
13 and expand park space. We want the park to be  
14 accessible to local residents, fair share and  
15 balanced used, community input, supportive local  
16 workers, sustaining neighborhood small businesses  
17 and mitigating community burden. So a core  
18 principal for the Coalition is that Flushing  
19 Meadow Corona Park is a park, and it is not a  
20 development site. This is an early map of  
21 Flushing Meadow Corona Park, and you can see there  
22 was a river that ran through it and that the two  
23 lakes are actually artificially made by damming  
24 the river and channeling the water underneath the  
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1  
2 park. That is an important part that we will come  
3 back to several times in this presentation because  
4 this park has a lot of very unique specific needs  
5 that are environmentally challenging in and of  
6 itself. So I want to give you a brief history of  
7 the park. In the 1800s and 1900s it was an ash  
8 dump. It was river. It was a swamp.

9 Unfortunately some of the graphics are a little  
10 bit light here. On the bottom that is an old map  
11 that you just saw larger. '34 through '40 it was  
12 the World's Fairgrounds. In '46 to '51, it was  
13 the site of the first United Nations general  
14 assembly. In 1963 Shea Stadium was built in the  
15 northern part of the part. There was a second  
16 World's Fair in the core of the park from '64 to  
17 '65. The Hall of Science was put in in '66,  
18 Queens Zoo in '68, the Queens Museum of Art in  
19 '72. The USTA moved their facilities in 1978 and  
20 expanded again in '94 and from '66 on after the  
21 World's Fair, it has been the largest most  
22 important green space for Queens families. A  
23 brief history that people also should know of the  
24 failed proposals for Flushing Meadows Corona Park.  
25 In 1983, the Koch Administration proposed putting

1 a NASCAR grand prix motor raceway around the park.  
2  
3 In 2003, the Jets looked to put their stadium in  
4 the heart of the park, and in 2005, the Bloomberg  
5 administration proposed siting a number of events  
6 for a potential summer Olympics inside of the  
7 park. One core thing that people should know is  
8 that a majority of the park has already been lost  
9 to development, and here is a little animation to  
10 show you why this is. If this animation will  
11 actually play... it doesn't look like this animation  
12 wants to play for us. I may be able to show it to  
13 you at the end. The core things about the park  
14 is, and I will just explain it--unfortunately we  
15 don't have it visually--the Parks Department now  
16 says that it is 898 acres, but that is very  
17 deceiving because only 250 acres of that are  
18 actual useable public green space. Inside the  
19 park there are cultural institutions, corporate  
20 sports institutions, there is oceans of concrete  
21 inside of the park for roads and for parking lots  
22 and that a lot of the park already is not really  
23 able to be accessed by the park. There are huge  
24 areas that are restricted to the public. There is  
25 a gas station inside the park. There is a power

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2 plant inside of the park. There are rail yards  
3 inside of the park. This is a park that has  
4 challenges and has things inside of it that no  
5 other park in New York City has, and so it needs  
6 tremendous resources just to offset what the city  
7 has already sited within the park, and one of the  
8 things that we want to talk about today is  
9 environmental justice. Flushing Meadows Corona  
10 Park does not get equal resources compared to its  
11 peers--Central Park and Prospect Park. The  
12 Central Park Conservancy which manages Central  
13 Park has 843 acres, has a 46 million dollar  
14 budget; Prospect Park is 585 acres and has 14  
15 million dollar budget. Today for the first time  
16 we learned that Flushing Meadows Corona Park has  
17 what the Parks Department says is an 11 million  
18 dollar budget. That is a new figure. Previously,  
19 we have been asking for over a year for this  
20 number, they could not produce a number for us,  
21 and that new number is now 989, and to give you a  
22 sense of staffing 'cause if you don't have budget  
23 numbers this gives you a better sense of what is  
24 really going on here,. Central Park is 291 full  
25 time workers for 843 acres. Prospect Park has 135

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2 full time workers for 585 workers. The Flushing  
3 Meadow Corona Park only has 18 full time staff  
4 members dedicated to the park, not seasonal  
5 members, not people who work one day and they are  
6 counted. We are talking about people who show up  
7 every week and work exclusively on this park.

8 There are only 18 people even though it is the  
9 largest of these three flagship parks.

10 Environmental Justice. There are a lot of people  
11 who believe that this park is underserved and  
12 underfunded by the city because a majority of its  
13 users are people of color and working people. As  
14 you can see from this map, Corona, East Elmhurst,  
15 - - City, Corona is a large population of  
16 Hispanics, East Elmhurst and - - City have a large  
17 African American population. Flushing has a large  
18 Asian population and these are the communities  
19 that need access to this park on a daily basis.

20 We also have major concerns about health  
21 challenges and childhood obesity especially.

22 Corona has the highest rate of childhood obesity  
23 in New York City. 51 percent of the children in  
24 Corona, and these are the children that the only  
25 park that they have access to is Flushing Meadow

1  
2 Corona Park that is a large green space, 51  
3 percent of them are overweight. This is--the most  
4 critical link between childhood obesity is  
5 exercise and nutrition and if we take away access  
6 to open space or if we minimize or devalue our  
7 open space, that is not going to help the problem.  
8 One of the core things that I want to talk to you  
9 today about Flushing Meadows Corona Park is 31  
10 percent of the Park is concrete, and this  
11 exacerbates a lot of problems that the park has  
12 already with flooding, and it wastes open space.  
13 As you can see here, a lot of trees and a lot  
14 grass die within the park because there is a lot  
15 of flooding, and there is a lot of flooding in the  
16 park not only because it is in a coastal flood  
17 zone, but also because there is so much concrete  
18 that water is displaced and then floods the actual  
19 green space that is left over, so there is a real  
20 resiliency problem with Flushing Meadows Corona  
21 Park. Also, Council Member Ferreras referred to  
22 it--the park is surrounded by congested highways,  
23 which harm human health and reduce access to the  
24 park for local residents. You have some of the  
25 largest highways and the most congested highways

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2 in the United States of America that ribbon this  
3 park on all sides. You have the Grand Central,  
4 you have the Long Island Expressway, you have the  
5 Van Wyck, you have the Whitestone Expressway, and  
6 they are all on each different side of the park  
7 and create a tremendous amount of pollution and  
8 also it should be noted that there is major  
9 deterioration to the park's lakes because of the  
10 solid waste pollution that comes from that car  
11 traffic. I also want to show you that the access  
12 to the park is severely hampered by the fact that  
13 it is ringed by major highways. If you live in  
14 Corona, Forest Hills or north Corona, or  
15 Queensboro Hill or Kew Gardens or Flushing, it is  
16 very difficult to access the park because between  
17 you and the park is a major highway, so there is  
18 very few access points to the park. Flushing  
19 Meadows Corona Park is the largest, most important  
20 open space for Queens families and there is a real  
21 public social value to parks that we have to  
22 recognize. The Park is a tremendous resource for  
23 the well-being of local residents not only in  
24 terms of their physical health, but also their  
25 mental health and that there is a value beyond

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2 money of parks. Access to open space is a  
3 critical element of a healthy lifestyle. Being  
4 able to play soccer, being able to run around in  
5 the park, play volleyball is critical and there is  
6 a lot of acreage in that park and not a lot of it  
7 is dedicated to that type of activity. Several  
8 local communities have extreme overcrowding in  
9 both schools and residences making the need for  
10 open space more urgent for these community  
11 members. The most overcrowded schools in all of  
12 New York City are on the western end of the park,  
13 and some of the most overcrowded housing  
14 conditions are in Corona and Flushing, and if  
15 there is ever a place in New York City where  
16 people needed access to open space, it would be  
17 this park. The park has been mismanaged and  
18 underfunded for decades. Everyone has talked  
19 about the relics within the park from the World's  
20 Fair which have been falling down for over 60  
21 years, but also there has been a problem with  
22 management and operations of the park. Last  
23 summer the Parks Administrator was arrested and  
24 charged with fraud. Unfortunately she passed away  
25 before she went to trial, so we want to know who

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2 has been held accountable for the fraud and the  
3 failure to maintain the park. This is a visual of  
4 the park, and in usage and in popular sort of--the  
5 way people interface with the park there is an  
6 existing sports ring [phonetic] of the park, and  
7 we want to talk a lot about what has become an  
8 existing community, family ring of the park. One  
9 thing we want to talk about is there is a major  
10 imbalance between the sports institutions within  
11 the park and the community usage that already  
12 exists in the park. Stadium events are allowed to  
13 have cars parking on grass inside of the park.  
14 This destroys the grass year round and is a clear  
15 signal to community residents that the park is  
16 being turned over to interests other than local  
17 residents. The park is dominated by stadium  
18 events. There are police checkpoints. The  
19 presence of police and other kinds of city workers  
20 is overwhelming and access into the park, which is  
21 already very difficult because of the highways is  
22 even more difficult with checkpoints and all kinds  
23 of security apparatus and stadium events by having  
24 cars park on grass and drive on the grass  
25 introduced pollution into the very core of the

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2 park that is already challenged by having highways  
3 on all sides. So we have real questions about  
4 fair share. New York City taxpayers provide  
5 hundreds of millions of dollars to the Mets and  
6 USTA and public subsidies. The Mets make 265  
7 million dollars a year. Over a 30 year period  
8 they will get over 500 million dollars in public  
9 subsidies. The USTA makes 275 million dollars a  
10 year and similar type ratio is at work. We don't  
11 have the final numbers from the Independent Budget  
12 Office. We have asked for them, but it is a very  
13 similar arrangement, and I can show you in detail  
14 how the independent budget office shows what the  
15 Mets get for being on parkland. One of the core  
16 things about parkland is it is one of the few  
17 types of property that by default has no property  
18 taxes, so if you are a corporate sports  
19 institution and you want to be somewhere, you  
20 probably want to be on parkland because you won't  
21 have to fight to get a property tax exemption. It  
22 will be included by default. The Mets save 250  
23 million dollars by not having to pay property  
24 taxes in addition to rent credits and tax exempt  
25 financing for their construction. There is a

1  
2 massive amount of public investment into the  
3 success of the Mets and they are inside of a park,  
4 and the problem is they create a massive burden on  
5 the park, but they pay nothing towards the park's  
6 maintenance. Neither the Mets not the USTA pay  
7 anything towards Flushing Meadows Corona Park's  
8 maintenance. Chronic flooding, it is a little bit  
9 cut off. The entire park sits in a coastal flood  
10 zone. These wetlands are natural buffers that  
11 protect communities from ferocious storms. This  
12 is a picture of the park 24 hours after Sandy.  
13 The entire park was under water. This is a  
14 picture of the Grand Central Parkway, which is in  
15 the middle of the park, runs through the middle of  
16 the park, on August 1<sup>st</sup> in the New York Times.  
17 People were stranded in their cars because the  
18 flood waters were so high. The depth to  
19 groundwater, so the water table at Flushing  
20 Meadows Corona Park is the highest in the entire  
21 city. At no point in the park is the groundwater  
22 higher, less than five feet, so if you stuck a  
23 shovel in the ground, you are going to hit water  
24 very quickly at Flushing Meadows Corona Park. And  
25 this is an important point. The U.S. Army Corps

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2 of Engineers and the State Department of  
3 Environmental Conservation has jurisdiction over  
4 large sections of the park because there still is  
5 a river that runs underneath the park. Robert  
6 Moses built over it, but that river continuously  
7 floods, and the entire park--sections of the  
8 entire park are classified as protected wetlands  
9 in the National Wetland Inventory, and with new  
10 FEMA maps coming out there is a lot of questions  
11 about resilience of the park and making sure that  
12 we have green space that is no concreted over, and  
13 that is resilient with trees and grass that can  
14 absorb storm water runoffs so that it doesn't go  
15 into local communities and harm people. New York  
16 City taxpayers have spent millions of dollars on  
17 strategic plans and masters plans for the park.  
18 The problem is they have never been implemented.  
19 I have in my briefcase an over 500 page 1986  
20 master plan for the park that was done by the  
21 Project for Public Spaces. Inside of there is  
22 every single thing almost that is in the 2008  
23 strategic plan, and nothing was implemented. One  
24 of the core recommendations was that the  
25 concessions and the revenues that were generated

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2 by the park stay in the park and pay for the  
3 park's maintenance. Three of the core  
4 recommendations of the 2008 strategic plan are to  
5 green the core of the park, more trees, more  
6 grass, ripping up concrete, restore the park's  
7 natural waterways, maybe daylight the river, which  
8 means ripping up anything that is over the river  
9 and allowing the river to be natural again so that  
10 it doesn't floor the rest of the park and also  
11 reconnect the park to local neighborhoods. I  
12 think our coalition would wholly endorse all three  
13 of these main recommendations, but the problem is  
14 again none of them have been implemented in the  
15 five years since the study was done. So in  
16 closing, Flushing Meadows Corona park is a heavily  
17 utilized park in spite of its weaknesses, in spite  
18 of its understaffing, its mismanagement and  
19 underfunding, and it is a beautiful place that  
20 needs care and what we urge the City Council and  
21 what we urge the Bloomberg Administration to do is  
22 really give it its fair share of funding and  
23 staffing and attention because hundreds of  
24 thousands of Queens residents and families depend  
25 on this park, and we ask that people really give

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it its due. So thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you, Will, for that background. At least it helps provide context. I think Holly from New Yorkers for Parks testify?

HOLLY LIGHT: Thank you, Chairwoman, and thank you for holding this hearing on an important topic that is getting a lot of attention in the process [phonetic], but I think it is great to have the opportunity to listen to the Parks Department and what they have to say about it as well. I am Holly Light, executive director of New Yorkers for Parks, the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. It is hard to overstate the critical role the Flushing Meadows Corona Park plays in the social, historic, cultural and natural landscape of Queens. It is home to an amalgam of institutions and icons, the World's Fair structures, museums, the zoo, a botanic garden, and sports complexes that draw hundreds of thousands of fans annually, but as Will just said above all else, Flushing Meadows Corona Park is

1 indeed a park, and not just any park, at 897  
2 acres, it is the borough's largest park and one of  
3 the most heavily used parks in the entire city.  
4 Approximately 400,000 people live in the densely  
5 packed neighborhoods adjacent to Flushing Meadows  
6 Corona Park. That is more than the population of  
7 Miami, Atlanta, Pittsburgh or Cleveland. For most  
8 of these 400,000 residents Flushing Meadows is  
9 their only significant green space, and they  
10 desperately need it. Not only do their  
11 neighborhoods fall well below the city's own  
12 standard of 2.5 acres of open space per 1,000  
13 residents, but a fifth of the population in these  
14 areas are children and childhood obesity in Corona  
15 on the park's western edge is 51 percent, the  
16 highest in the city. Park users consistently tell  
17 us that the park is an essential part of their  
18 lives. It is a recreational mecca for soccer,  
19 baseball and cricket players, a gathering place  
20 for family barbecues and picnics, a favorite place  
21 for bike rides and walks and a quiet escape for  
22 nature lovers, but despite the park's beloved  
23 status, it has been ill-maintained and under  
24 resourced for decades. Park users routinely

1  
2 complain about the flooded fields and drainage  
3 problems and litter is a constant battle. Over  
4 the past four years, I was glad to hear that this  
5 year's PIP scores are higher, but looking across  
6 the past four years the Parks Department  
7 inspectors have repeatedly found that Flushing  
8 Meadows Corona Park falls short of their own  
9 cleanliness standard and they rated its overall  
10 condition as acceptable only 79 percent of the  
11 time, falling short of the Department's standard  
12 of 85 percent. These poor maintenance ratings are  
13 not surprising given the park's limited staffing,  
14 which has been discussed enough, so I will pass on  
15 talking about that more. What's more thousands of  
16 cards are allowed to park on the park's lawns  
17 during the U.S. Open each year, leaving the grass  
18 scarred for months. The practice can and should  
19 end through the development of a thoughtful  
20 traffic and parking plan for the tournament rather  
21 than the current ad hoc practice of routing cars  
22 wherever it is most expedient. While the park's  
23 concessions and leases generate more than  
24 apparently 6.75 million dollars in annual revenue  
25 for the city's general fund, the city spends less

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2 than two million dollars a year on maintenance for  
3 the park, and this is a number that we did an  
4 extensive study in order to figure out that  
5 number. The private entities that are housed in  
6 the park, the U.S. Tennis Association, the Mets  
7 don't contribute a dime towards the park's upkeep.  
8 Clearly for the park to be maintained in an  
9 acceptable level the massive discrepancy between  
10 what this park is generating for the city and for  
11 private beneficiaries and the level of resources  
12 being put back into the park must change. This is  
13 one reason why New Yorkers for Parks supports the  
14 creation of a new non-profit partner, an alliance  
15 for Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Other such  
16 organizations including the Prospect Park Alliance  
17 in Brooklyn and the Bronx River Alliance have  
18 successfully transformed once neglected open  
19 spaces into top notch parks. These organizations  
20 are public, private hybrids with direct oversight  
21 by both the Parks Department and a non-profit  
22 board of directors that helps fundraise for the  
23 park and monitors its finances. We believe a  
24 crucial component of such an alliance would be a  
25 community operations council made up of

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2 representatives form surrounding neighborhoods  
3 that would advise the alliance on day to day park  
4 needs though the Parks Department would retain  
5 final approval over all projects, programs, events  
6 and budgets. Such non-profit organizations are  
7 particularly effective for large resource  
8 intensive parks, which Flushing Meadows with its  
9 elaborate network of fountains and other World's  
10 Fair icons and its many recreational facilities  
11 certainly is. There are many benefits. A non-  
12 profit alliance can fundraise and solicit new  
13 revenue sources to augment the Parks Department's  
14 endemically constrained budget. By raising extra  
15 funds for the Park an alliance can hire additional  
16 sorely needed staff and sponsor programming and  
17 community events. An alliance would work closely  
18 with the community and park users to develop and  
19 implement a long term plan for the park's  
20 stewardship and improvement. A non-profit  
21 organization has stringent financial reporting  
22 requirements and an independent board with  
23 financial oversight responsibility promoting  
24 greater transparency in how park funding is spent.  
25 Starting such an organization is critical for the

1  
2 park's future regardless of whether any of the  
3 development projects proposed for the park  
4 actually happen. Lessons have been learned about  
5 how to do this model right, and how to do it  
6 wrong. Now is the time to do it and to do it  
7 right with proper vigilance and oversight and  
8 community buy in. one of the first activities of  
9 a new alliance would be to develop a long term  
10 plan for Flushing Meadows Corona Park in  
11 collaboration with park users and the surrounding  
12 community. Perhaps elements of the Parks  
13 Department's ambitious 2008 plan for the park  
14 would be revisited including a proposal to fill in  
15 the poorly maintained fountain of the planets to  
16 create a great lawn and to daylight the Flushing  
17 River to help ameliorate flooding. Whatever the  
18 outcome of this planning process what is most  
19 important is that the Parks Department and the  
20 many stakeholders who care deeply about the future  
21 of this park create a shared vision and together  
22 begin taking the necessary steps to ensure the  
23 Flushing Meadows Corona Park becomes a well-  
24 maintained, well-resourced jewel of the park  
25 system as it deserves to be while remaining the

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vibrant public space it is today.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you for your testimony. Holly, I don't think we have any questions at this time. We are going to keep asking the people that are here to provide their testimony. Thank you very much for taking the time. I believe it is Mr. Haber--alright, come on up, Anthony Ng [phonetic] and Elaina Contie [phonetic], that will be the first panel.

BEN HABER: I'd like the record to reflect that I came here at 12:30 and it is now 3:30 after spending an hour and a half to get here and all we have left are two Councilpersons. It speaks volumes that all those Councilpersons who only cared about we seeing their faces have left. It shows that they don't care what the public has to say and it is an embarrassment. My name is Ben Haber. I am a lifelong resident of Queens County. I reside in Kew Garden Hills adjacent to Flushing Meadows Corona Park. My connection with the park began about 40 years ago when I was part of a group that successfully fought the - - organization's attempt to construct a high rise development adjacent to Willow Lake in Flushing

1 Meadows Corona Park, which we successfully fought.

2 I was also there after the chairperson of the

3 committee to stop grand prix auto racing in that

4 park, and we beat - - on that abomination. I

5 don't understand a format in which you talk about

6 maintenance, but we are not permitted to talk

7 about the going onslaught that goes on in that

8 park. You allowed Lewandowski to speak eons about

9 all these structures in the park, Councilpersons

10 mentioned it, but we cannot talk about what is

11 going on in our park. I don't get that. But I

12 have a specific question for you, Ms. Ferreras.

13 Media suggests that you are seeking to establish a

14 coalition of business interests that are in the

15 park and those outside the park as well as a

16 conservancy groups that raise money for Flushing

17 Meadows Corona Park, which if accomplished would

18 be laudable, but only if you spell out clearly no

19 ifs and buts that donations will only be accepted

20 on a philanthropic basic. They get nothing from

21 the park except a nameplate recognition. You have

22 thus far refused to do that, and without it, your

23 proposal is nothing more than the same old, same

24 old parks for sale. You owe an answer to the

1  
2 public. How about it? Will you agree no  
3 donations to the park except on a philanthropic  
4 basis? It doesn't take much to figure that out.

5 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Sir,  
6 sir. This is a hearing. You can ask your  
7 questions. We will not be responding. That is  
8 not the format. You can feel free to submit it.  
9 We have all the testimony for record. - - .  
10 Thank you.

11 BEN HABER: As far as I am  
12 concerned 85 years in the city tells me very  
13 clearly no answer means no. It's a joke. You are  
14 not interested in what the public has to say. Now  
15 you are talking about this park, money for this  
16 park. Are you aware that years ago we asked the  
17 Mets to put 25 cents on the ticket for money to go  
18 to the park? They refused. The USTA was obliged  
19 to put up a trust fund. They kept the principal.  
20 The interest was supposed to go for maintenance to  
21 the park. Helen Marshall dissipated that fund  
22 with maintenance for that swimming pool complex  
23 that cost hundreds of millions of dollars. You  
24 didn't ask the important question of Ms.  
25 Lewandowski. How much money has been spent on

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2 passive use [phonetic] for that park? Nothing.  
3 In the decades that I have been involved with that  
4 park there are no benches around the lake, it  
5 floods, the concrete is broken, cars are parked on  
6 the grass, and all you care about is Terrace in  
7 the Park, the Mets Stadium. That is a joke. That  
8 is a joke. Now what I don't understand is this.  
9 100 years ago Frederick Law Olmsted [phonetic] the  
10 genius who created Central Park, Prospect Park  
11 said as follows: the survival of our park system  
12 requires the exclusion for management of real  
13 estate dealers and politicians and that the first  
14 duty of our park trustees is to hand down from own  
15 generation to the next the treasure of scenery  
16 which the city placed in their care. He didn't  
17 mean it is okay to dump on our park with stadiums.  
18 You are the trustee. You are asking us what we  
19 should do to maintain the park. You have got it  
20 wrong. We ask you what have you been doing for  
21 that park, and don't tell us about money being  
22 spent on structures. I want to know what have you  
23 been doing about passive use of the park.

24 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Mr.

25 Haber, I had indicated at the beginning that we

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have the limit--

BEN HABER: [interposing] You let everybody else talk all they want to. Okay. I will stop talking because I know you are afraid for the public to hear it. Marvelous.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: We have your testimony submitted for the record.

BEN HABER: [off mic] This is a joke. They don't care what the public has to say. Shame on you. You are wasting your time.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you for coming. Have a good afternoon.

BEN HABER: No. Too late.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So we will continue with the testimony.

ANTHONY NG: Hello. Good afternoon. My name is Anthony Ng, and I am with the Jackson Heights Green Alliance and also a resident of Jackson Heights. Thank you for holding this hearing, Chair Mark-Viverito, and good to see you, Council Member Ferreras as well. As you know, Jackson Heights is a very diverse mixed income community with a substantial immigrant population. It is very dense and once

1  
2 of the city's most park starved areas. Being part  
3 of Council District 25, Jackson Heights rank 49  
4 out of 51 council districts in parkland acres per  
5 resident and 50 out of 51 in parkland acres per  
6 child. The lack of public open space in our  
7 neighborhood isn't just an issue of health and  
8 wellness, but also an issue of fairness and equity  
9 for our community's families, children, youth, low  
10 income residents and elderly residents. That is  
11 why it is so important the Flushing Meadows Corona  
12 Park be better maintained and beautified. As we  
13 all know, the nearby communities to the park make  
14 great use of the park, especially the immigrant  
15 families; however, the park's current condition  
16 don't honor the importance that its users bestow  
17 on it. For example, pathways need repaving,  
18 grassy fields can be unkempt and need to be better  
19 manicured, cleanliness is an ongoing issue, - -  
20 highways traverse the park, and it is difficult to  
21 get into and get around Flushing Meadows, signage  
22 and - - systems are confusing. It is clear the  
23 underinvestment and poor staffing and cuts in the  
24 park's budget has led to these conditions and  
25 there is no reason why Flushing Meadows can't be a

1  
2 crown jewel in the city's park system. Flushing  
3 Meadows is a public asset to the city, but it  
4 hasn't been treated that way, and while we welcome  
5 the idea of a strengthened or new conservancy to  
6 leverage private investment, it can't be a  
7 substitute for the city's own direct investment.  
8 It cannot. We urge that more funding is included  
9 in the city budget for Flushing Meadows  
10 maintenance, upkeep, investment and staffing. We  
11 also urge that a long term vision for the park is  
12 developed with extensive community input. As  
13 folks have mentioned too this vision should  
14 include a review of the Mayor's own strategic plan  
15 that he has developed--the 2008 plan, and there is  
16 some good goals there that we would support.  
17 Because resources have been expended we shouldn't  
18 waste that effort. Let's revisit these findings  
19 and recommendations in a new planning process to  
20 create a long term vision for the park that is  
21 developed in partnership with all the communities  
22 of Queens, especially those that live nearby. You  
23 know, at the Jackson Heights Green Alliance we are  
24 very proud of the work we have done locally to  
25 expand open space and park space. We have been

1  
2 sponsors of the 78<sup>th</sup> Street Play Street. We have  
3 worked with Council Member Dromm with the Jackson  
4 Heights Beautification Group to secure and buy a  
5 private playground and turn it into park space, so  
6 we are very happy about those efforts and I think  
7 the community appreciates that, but we know that  
8 our success locally would be severely diminished  
9 if Flushing Meadows Corona Park is not better  
10 maintained or improved and towards this end we  
11 oppose any loss of parkland by private developers  
12 seeking to build on Flushing Meadows Corona Park.  
13 It has been said often, we will say it again,  
14 Queens needs every inch of its parkland , and we  
15 should all be working to augment and improve the  
16 park space in Flushing Meadows, not take it away.  
17 So I'll conclude by thanking you for the  
18 opportunity to testify today and we look forward  
19 to continuing to work with the Council and the  
20 mayor to improve Flushing Meadows and make park  
21 space top quality all throughout the borough and  
22 the city. Thank you.

23 ELAINA CONTIE: Hello. Can you  
24 hear me? Hi. I am Elaina Contie, and I am with  
25 the Pratt Center for Community Development

1  
2 affiliated with Pratt Institute. For 50 years we  
3 have been serving low and moderate income  
4 communities helping them plan for and realize  
5 their visions for health and equitable  
6 neighborhoods. Thank you so much for convening  
7 this hearing on a super important topic. I also  
8 want to note that in the spring semester of this  
9 year Pratt Center, my organization, partnering  
10 with a team of graduate students at Pratt  
11 Institutes programs and sustainable planning and  
12 development in a studio that had the Fairness  
13 Coalition of Queens as its client, and our  
14 testimony represents a combination of that  
15 research along with Pratt Center's own  
16 recommendations. There is a lot in the packet,  
17 the pretty colorful slides are from our students,  
18 so I hope that that will be informative to you. I  
19 also think that the need for the park has been  
20 very clearly articulated thus far today, so I just  
21 want to raise a couple systemic issues, and then I  
22 will just go to the recommendations. So system  
23 wide, right, we have a situation where parks that  
24 are in low income and communities of color are not  
25 receiving their fair share and the core of that

1  
2 issue begins with just access to information, so  
3 right now we learned and heard today how difficult  
4 it is to obtain accurate information about the  
5 level of maintenance that park receives and you  
6 know, how Parks Department arrives at its decision  
7 to allocate maintenance funding to this park and  
8 all others. Capital projects here as our  
9 colleagues in New Yorkers for Parks have noted as  
10 the case throughout the entire system are not part  
11 of a departmental discretionary capital budget and  
12 therefore can't be meaningfully planned for or  
13 tracked and that is an obstacle, so we would like  
14 to see that happen. In terms of recommendations,  
15 given the critical function of the park, the  
16 inequity of the public resources that the park and  
17 its local users have received and the threats  
18 pending against the integrity of the park, we call  
19 upon the City Council to do the following: first,  
20 protect against further privatization of the park  
21 by using its role in land use review to reject  
22 alienation unless no other land is available to  
23 serve an essential public need. Parkland that is  
24 taken for an essential public need should be  
25 required to be replaced at a minimum of a one to

1  
2 one ration. Greater ratios are justified and  
3 should be called for in areas with existing  
4 insufficient open space access and with  
5 populations that experience a disproportionate  
6 environmental health issue, including obesity.  
7 Regardless of any potential public private  
8 partnership that might be created or expanded to  
9 serve the park, City Council should ensure that  
10 parks document its current level of public  
11 contribution to upkeep and demonstrate that that  
12 level of public effort is continued going forward.  
13 Information about the allocation of all public and  
14 private resources that are generated in or devoted  
15 to the parks should be clear, transparent,  
16 accessible and available on an annual basis. It  
17 should be coupled with an explanation of how those  
18 resources actually meet the needs of local  
19 residents in the borough and the city at large and  
20 if they fall short in articulation of the unmet  
21 needs should be included the same level that the  
22 disclosure should apply to any existing or future  
23 public private partnerships. Particularly if the  
24 City Council plays a role in the creation of a  
25 public private partnership it should do so in

1  
2 consultation with community based organizations  
3 and work with these organizations to make sure  
4 that the decision-making structure of any entity  
5 has a controlling majority that solely represents  
6 the public interest and has no conflict with the  
7 private interest and has meaningful representation  
8 of community voices, and then finally very  
9 quickly, innovative ways to think about how  
10 private contributions could be structured  
11 including something that might like a bid  
12 assessment for these holders where it is  
13 automatically done as opposed to in some sort of a  
14 tradeoff kind of arrangement should be explored.  
15 Thank you so much for the opportunity.

16 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
17 you for your testimony. Thank you for coming here  
18 today. The next panel is Jean Silver [phonetic],  
19 Mezita Udin [phonetic], and then Sara--I am sorry,  
20 I cannot see the last name. I guess they might  
21 have left.

22 [foreign language]

23 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: - -  
24 Martinez. Three members of Make the Road.

25 JEAN SILVER: Hi. My name is Jean

1  
2 Silver, and I am president of the Flushing Meadow  
3 Corona Park, and thank you for this invitation  
4 today to come and speak. The flushing Meadows  
5 Corona Park has as of this part several major  
6 projects that are going on, and we the community  
7 are very concerned about the directions that they  
8 are taking and the directions that they are not  
9 taking. It is important that the proposals that  
10 have been placed out in front of us all are taken  
11 seriously because it is going to affect so many  
12 thousands if not millions of people over the next  
13 several decades, and we want to make sure that the  
14 park is used properly and is funded correctly. I  
15 have met with--I am sorry. I am not following my  
16 statement. I want to talk from my heart. You can  
17 read the statement. It really is very short, but  
18 I know everybody here basically we are here for  
19 the same reason for the Flushing Meadows Corona  
20 Park. I just want to explain that the conservancy  
21 has been around since 2002. Not too many people  
22 know about us, and that is okay 'cause when we  
23 were started we were new like any - - group and we  
24 have been trudging along and we started to work  
25 with the Parks Department. At that part - -

1  
2 killed in a car accident two years ago, and  
3 through her foresight and insight and connections  
4 with all the community groups that she was  
5 involved with and the City Council Members and - -  
6 we did receive some grant money that we did make  
7 two bird lines [phonetic] one over at Meadow Lake,  
8 one over at Willow Lake. We did do restorations  
9 which Dottie alluded to earlier today. We have  
10 also managed to get some money for a boat for - -  
11 , call it a - - boat. Senator - - , former  
12 Senator - - and some other state senators have  
13 been very generous in helping us out. I wanted to  
14 thank personally Julissa and Senator Squadron who  
15 recently just had a press release this past Sunday  
16 about organizing a group. The conservancy - - and  
17 Julissa knows wants to be involved completely and  
18 as much as to share the information that we know  
19 and that we - - over the years. we want to  
20 welcome all the groups out there, but we want it  
21 to be known that the conservancy backs New Yorkers  
22 for Parks 100 percent on alienation of parkland.  
23 It should not be done, period, simple, out of  
24 question. We love our park. - - was the essence  
25 of purity of a neighborhood person who worked and

1  
2 developed her time, effort and energy. She lived  
3 only a few blocks away and truly Flushing Meadow  
4 was her backyard. Willow Lake has been our pride  
5 and joy for many years. we have worked over  
6 there. Like I said we just recently two years ago  
7 put in a bird line, but we run canoe trips over  
8 there, and there is nothing like having 88 people,  
9 kids, families, single people, people who are  
10 handicapped come out literally crawling to a canoe  
11 'cause they had never been in it before and take  
12 just a ride around Willow Lake. You cannot  
13 believe how quiet it is on that lake. We also  
14 have one bird line bird watching and nature tours.  
15 There is a wonderful - - variety of animals and  
16 bird life that is around that park, and we really  
17 need to develop it. I was really pleased to hear  
18 from Dorothy about our commissioner that they are  
19 planning to do some of these things. in closing,  
20 I just want to thank you again for having this  
21 meeting, having all the groups together, and I  
22 just wanted to let you know that the conservancy  
23 understands where you are coming from and I hope  
24 you understand where we are coming from. I thank  
25 you very much.

1  
2                   MEZITA UDIN: Thank you. I am here  
3 for just to save our park because it is important  
4 for our community and Queens has largest Asian  
5 community in New York City, third largest park in  
6 New York City must be saved. To the honorable  
7 City Council Members, my name is Mezita Udin - -  
8 American, who has been - - of Asian immigrant  
9 population particularly south Asian immigrants - -  
10 and to - - . - - involve myself in - - assist  
11 people in need. I have been active in justice  
12 equality for the last 27 years. I am very  
13 concerned about the situation at Flushing Meadow  
14 Corona Park in Queens. As you know it is the  
15 third largest park in New York City, spanning more  
16 than 1,250 acres. It is my understand that - -  
17 park - - . This would be a very tragic situation  
18 - - benefit that - - improve our quality of life.  
19 This park is a safe - - children to flee and our  
20 senior citizens to relax. - - city would be lost  
21 forever if - - business - - or an apartment  
22 complex. Here is a list of nine reasons why park  
23 - - of our neighborhood. Residents park - - means  
24 investment in our community. Is it a good idea  
25 for our community? I am asking all the City

1  
2 Council - - . Is it a good idea to invest our  
3 residents? Park means our residents, community  
4 park. It is free. Queens is most middle class  
5 people living in this city and - - free park. It  
6 is free - - expensive - - local neighborhood parks  
7 are free - - . - - public open space is not an  
8 expense, but an investment - - economic benefits.  
9 Studies have shown that - - hospital emergency  
10 room - - when kids are given a safe alternative to  
11 playing in the street parking lots - - opportunity  
12 for our community is an important to our quality  
13 of life.

14 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
15 you very much.

16 SARA JARAMILLO: I'd like to  
17 introduce myself. My name is Sara Jaramillo  
18 [phonetic]. I also want to begin giving the  
19 thanks for you gave us the chance to listen to us  
20 and take your time that is also very valuable. I  
21 understand. Also, I have to apologize because my  
22 English is not so perfectly. I - - understand  
23 what I am going to read. Thank you. Good  
24 afternoon. My name is Sara Jaramillo. I live in  
25 Jackson Heights, Queens. I am a member of Make

1  
2 the Road New York and the Partnership for a  
3 Healthier Queens. The Partnership for a Healthier  
4 Queens is a coalition of community members working  
5 to reduce obesity and chronic disease by making  
6 the healthy choice the easy choice in our  
7 neighborhoods. We are part of a citywide  
8 initiative, the Partnership for a Healthier New  
9 York City, founded by a community transformation  
10 grant from the Center for Disease Control.

11 Healthier Queens engages community members in four  
12 focus areas: healthy eating, active living,  
13 reducing tobacco and alcohol exposure. We have  
14 been meeting with community members over the last  
15 couple of months to identify ways to design and  
16 increase access to the existing public spaces and  
17 identify new ones to encourage an active lifestyle  
18 where we live, work and play. Flushing Meadows  
19 Corona Park has been part of the center of many of  
20 our discussions. It is where our community takes  
21 a moment to spend time together and to participate  
22 in recreational activities. It is where parents  
23 take their children and where I take my autistic  
24 son, who is 11 years old to run free. I enjoy the  
25 outdoors to enjoy the quiet, safe and open space,

1  
2 but it is lacking in many neighborhoods across  
3 Queens. For autistic children like my son, being  
4 in Flushing near the park is the best therapy - -  
5 natural environment protects him from injuries,  
6 especially when he falls down. It is better than  
7 the alternative, which is playing video games at  
8 home because my son is obesity too. Currently  
9 only one out of five--I will be finished--New York  
10 City public high school students meet the national  
11 standard for physical activity, 60 minutes per day  
12 and - - . Adults only - - and overweight. I -  
13 - like some recommendations from the community are  
14 to improve maintenance of the park, increase green  
15 space, planting more trees and improve bike access  
16 to the park. Thank you again. I am sorry.

17 [applause]

18 [foreign language]

19 JOEL MARTINEZ (THROUGH  
20 INTERPRETER): Good afternoon. My name is Joel  
21 Martinez. I am a member of Make the Road New York  
22 and a resident of East Elmhurst Queens. I have  
23 been living here for four years. Flushing Meadows  
24 Park is like my backyard, for me and many other  
25 residents of my community, the park is where I go

1  
2 for recreation because we live in such small  
3 apartments. We go to the park because there isn't  
4 anywhere else to go. I am a marathon runner, and  
5 I run in the park every day, twice a day. As I  
6 run I see people, all kinds of people of different  
7 socioeconomic classes using the park for many  
8 different activities. Some people are walking,  
9 others are hanging out with their children.  
10 Others are playing with their dogs. We all go to  
11 Flushing Park because it is the only big space in  
12 Queens. We also call the park the lungs of  
13 Queens. If my lungs are damaged, I can't breathe,  
14 and it is the same with the park because the trees  
15 keep the air clean. If we keep cutting down  
16 trees, it will have a terrible impact on our  
17 environment and our health. Flushing Park is our  
18 park and it should be accessible to the public,  
19 but during the U.S. Open, it is not at all  
20 accessible for residents of the community. One  
21 day during the U.S. Open I was running through  
22 the park and I was stopped by a patrol of police  
23 and USTA security. They yelled at me and told me  
24 I couldn't pass. They changed the logistics from  
25 one day to the next. One day they tell me I can't

1  
2 run there. The next day they tell me I have to  
3 change my route again. I felt like I was under  
4 surveillance. When I train, I wear athletic  
5 clothing, and I couldn't have been carrying a  
6 bomb, but they treated me as if I was some kind of  
7 threat. I felt like it was a question of  
8 classism, but they just don't want to have poor  
9 people there during the event. Flushing Park is a  
10 beautiful place and we want it to stay that way,  
11 but we also want to make sure that the park is  
12 getting more resources. We want to make sure that  
13 the park is properly maintained so that future  
14 generations could enjoy the park too. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

16 [foreign language] Thank you for participating and  
17 for the testimony. Move on to the next panel. We  
18 have Ed Wesley [phonetic]. Are you here? Yes.  
19 We have Jeffrey Croft [phonetic] and Richard  
20 Helenbrecht [phonetic]. Are you here? Richard?  
21 I can just ask if these last two are here as well.  
22 Is Diane Drozak here [phonetic], Andrea Jacon  
23 [phonetic]? Okay it looks like they are not.  
24 That takes care of that. It looks like Diane is  
25 not here. Okay. Go ahead.

1  
2 ED WESLEY: Good afternoon and  
3 thank you for having this hearing that did shed a  
4 lot of light on questions that we needed answered.  
5 It is unfortunate that we have to wait until Parks  
6 Committee holds a hearing to put lights on what we  
7 all in Corona and Jackson Heights and East  
8 Elmhurst have been asking for the last several  
9 months. I should that I am Ed Wesley. I am  
10 president of the Jackson Heights Beautification  
11 Group, and also part of the Coalition for Fairness  
12 on the Parks. I started my day with Councilman  
13 Vallone. We had a press conference that talked to  
14 the same issue, and now I am pleased to end my day  
15 with Councilwoman Ferreras. We are in a struggle  
16 to preserve our park. This is a park best stated  
17 by the Councilwoman at a dedication that she  
18 attended when we did work with the Green Alliance  
19 when we established a play street in our  
20 neighborhood in Jackson Heights, and she said, and  
21 it stuck with me ever since, this park is used as  
22 vacations for our children. That is pretty  
23 powerful. Where most of us are fortunate enough  
24 to get away and get of our neighborhoods to  
25 refresh ourselves, many of our children can't do

1  
2 that, so if we look at our park, there are good  
3 things in our park happening. First of all, we  
4 have all said it is a flagship, and we need to pay  
5 attention to that. It is a flagship, and we need  
6 to budget it such that it is a flagship. We have  
7 good things going on in that park--the museum, the  
8 theater, the zoo, the carousel, the new aquatic  
9 center, the ice skating, the boat facility, the  
10 sailing club, the - - center. These are all  
11 wonderful things that need to continue, but what  
12 do we need to do? We need to establish a fair  
13 budget for the Department of Parks and Recreation  
14 coming from the city, not from an alliance or a  
15 conservancy or any other group. It needs to come  
16 from the city. An alliance, a conservancy  
17 whatever you call it is supplemental. It should  
18 not be responsible for this park because once you  
19 make it responsible for this park, the city walks  
20 away from it and private interest will take over  
21 because the conservancy will then be forced to add  
22 more commercialization of the park. We need to  
23 also complete the master plan with the commission  
24 with public members. We conducted a vision  
25 session on Flushing Meadows Corona Park, and we

1  
2 had about 150 people there. We are still  
3 digesting the information, and we need to do more  
4 of that and get it to our council people so they  
5 understand what is coming from the hearts of our  
6 neighborhood. Now what don't we want? We don't  
7 want further commercialization of our park. We do  
8 want the city to step up to the plate and give us  
9 a fair budget that we can manage and restore our  
10 park after decades of abuse. So thank you very  
11 much. I hope our elected do take this seriously.  
12 We certainly do in our neighborhood and we will  
13 press on. Thank you.

14 RICHARD HELENBRECHT: Good  
15 afternoon. My name is Richard Helenbrecht. I am  
16 president of the Queens Civic Congress. I am also  
17 the founding president of the Flushing Meadows  
18 Corona Park Conservancy with Pat Dolan, which was  
19 mentioned before, and I am also an executive board  
20 member of the TASCA, The American Small Craft  
21 Association, which runs the sailing school on  
22 Meadow Lake. I will skip three-quarters of my  
23 testimony, the first page here, and I will start--  
24 the number one problem is that city budgets  
25 shortchange this potentially wonderful park. The

1  
2 small but dedicated maintenance staff struggles to  
3 keep up, but prove inadequate to the task. On a  
4 nice day, tens of thousands of people stream into  
5 the park by early morning and stay until late  
6 night, barbecues, soccer balls and boom boxes,  
7 some as large as the size of trucks are  
8 everywhere. Trash receptacles are hard to find  
9 and instantly overwhelmed. The narrow roads  
10 become impassable because of cars on one or both  
11 sides and joggers dangerously running sometimes in  
12 the same lanes. Roads and paths are horribly  
13 underserviced. Biking and jogging are dangerous  
14 on most paths particularly after rain when  
15 numerous and cavernous potholes can't be seen.  
16 Often roads are totally flooded with water from  
17 curbside to curbside as well and entering many of  
18 the parking lots. Restrooms are hard to find and  
19 frequently locked or not working. Visitors on the  
20 east side of Meadow Lake were happy to see new  
21 restrooms at the rebuilt boathouse, but others are  
22 not so lucky. The lack of maintenance gives the  
23 city every excuse to propose private commercial  
24 developments so that at least something nice,  
25 maybe even noteworthy is there. Sports venues

1  
2 physically consume a major portion of the park and  
3 in major events cars park on the grass, choke  
4 roadways in and around the park harming green  
5 space and crowd people out. The forever wild  
6 Willow Lake has occasional walking and canoe  
7 tours, but while it has great potential as a  
8 unique and valuable nature area, sadly, Willow  
9 Lake is generally uncared for and unknown.

10 Security is another problem and crime has grown  
11 over the past few years, but the park lacks its  
12 own police precinct. Only recently have  
13 additional park enforcement officers been promised  
14 bringing hope to people needing to walk around the  
15 park particularly late at evening. Great  
16 potential is lost without proper maintenance. The  
17 historic fountain of the planets has been allowed  
18 to degenerate into a murky cesspool inviting  
19 insane reuse proposals, such as the proposal to  
20 build a 35,000 seat soccer stadium rather than  
21 invest a few bucks and bring the fountain back to  
22 its potential. The fountain and major soccer  
23 stadium site sit on an underground river resulting  
24 in serious flooding and heavy rains. I daresay  
25 today you could more easily swim than walk in that

1  
2 area. The Flushing River should be exposed and  
3 maintained and someday I can imagine a river walk  
4 attractive and environmentally friendly. The New  
5 York State Pavilion is being painted only thanks  
6 to the volunteer effort of a few civilians who  
7 can't bear to see it scarred and graffiti covered.  
8 Meanwhile the grandeur of the building in its  
9 heyday it is lost probably forever without  
10 maintenance and investment. I must conclude by  
11 saying that I am embarrassed to bring friends from  
12 other cities to the flagship of Queens parks. Its  
13 shabby appearance and poorly maintained layout are  
14 not something to be proud of. I thank you.

15 JEFFREY CROFT: Good afternoon. My  
16 name is Jeffrey Croft. I am president of New York  
17 City Park Advocates. Before I read my testimony I  
18 just want to go over a couple of notes I made just  
19 during the testimony of Parks officials.  
20 Regarding Parks enforcement officers I was  
21 encouraged to call the park enforcement officers  
22 as the Parks official had stated that there are  
23 two dedicated park enforcement officers for  
24 Flushing Meadows. There are zero. There haven't  
25 been two for decades. It drives me crazy when

1  
2 they put those kinds of figures out there. There  
3 are six officers for Queens parks. There are four  
4 right now dedicated to Rockaway, including two  
5 supervisors, so again, we have six as we speak  
6 because now this is the summer, we have step ups.  
7 So again we have six dedicated for the borough of  
8 Queens available for patrol. Getting back to the  
9 11.6 million dollars in maintenance-- I am sorry,  
10 you asked Council Member about the maintenance.  
11 Again the 11.6 and this wasn't--you asked the  
12 question, but it was not properly addressed. The  
13 breakdown also includes things like the Queens Zoo  
14 and the marina, so you had asked about dedicated  
15 maintenance for the park. Those things are not  
16 dedicated maintenance for the park. Again, that  
17 11.2 goes down dramatically. Central Park, that  
18 came up just during the--Council Member Crowley  
19 was asking about that so again out of the Parks  
20 Department's--out of Central Park's 47 million  
21 dollar budget, the city allocates 15 percent of  
22 that 47 million dollars, so do the math. Yeah.  
23 So 15 percent of 47 million dollars. Getting back  
24 again it is a fine idea to have the public give  
25 their opinions about the inspection of the parks.

1  
2 - - the public giving their opinions about the  
3 conditions of the park. We need professionals to  
4 do that, so that is that. Concession revenues as  
5 Council Member Viverito has been again tremendous  
6 on the public private issue. Yes, Randall's  
7 Island is exclusively retaining that. Central  
8 Park has a different kind of deal, which they just  
9 signed a 12 year extension. They are being able  
10 to divert funds, which is illegal to covert  
11 concession of revenue from the city's general  
12 fund. We just filed our first lawsuit involving  
13 one of these deals in - - Park. We filed a  
14 lawsuit two weeks ago over the Lincoln Center.  
15 This is a very, very important issue. Melissa,  
16 you had asked about the ways that you can go about  
17 these public private partnerships without setting  
18 up a conservancy--and they have dozens of them;  
19 they are called trust in agency accounts. There  
20 is absolutely no reason under the sun to create  
21 another conservancy when you are already allowed  
22 besides the adopt a park program you can put  
23 something into a trust in agency account, and they  
24 have tens of millions of dollars that they are  
25 holding basically in escrow that only go to those

1  
2 parks. You, Mr. Vallone--I just want to again, I  
3 obviously we are on the same page with the  
4 abdication of the - - responsibility for - -  
5 parks. I definitely wish we would have talked  
6 beforehand just about the Daniel Squadron thing.  
7 However well-intentioned Dan is on this issue, it  
8 is misguided and irresponsible on a number of  
9 different levels. I have testimony to that.  
10 Again, it creates an enormous disparity, but you  
11 can't legislate where and how private donations  
12 are spent. You can't do that. Getting into the  
13 specific issue with the conservancy, Council  
14 Member, first as you know we definitely disagree  
15 with that plan, and I respect that and again, I  
16 wish you would have come to us to have a  
17 conversation about that stuff, but it is very  
18 different from the Central Park Conservancy and  
19 the Prospect Park Alliance. This is predicated in  
20 part on businesses already there hopefully at no  
21 future businesses, but again diverting money from  
22 our concessions - - and we don't want them to have  
23 that ability because it does create enormous  
24 disparity and that is one of the reasons why it is  
25 illegal to divert those funds. All of us, and you

1  
2 guys have made public statements about this stuff,  
3 it all is predicated on the lack of funding, and  
4 everyone here at this panel, so obviously come  
5 budget time, which you guys are responsible for  
6 and you have heard it from us a thousand times on  
7 this, we want you guys--right now, the mayor's  
8 budget is 283 million dollars in tax levy funds,  
9 283 for a 71 billion dollar budget. That is  
10 ridiculous. Your park and the other council  
11 members who are in Queens and of course Flushing  
12 Meadows is a flagship park, and it deserves the  
13 money. You will never ever be able to replicate  
14 what the Central Park Conservancy does. The  
15 wealthiest people on the face of the planet live  
16 around that park. No one is saying that private  
17 funds shouldn't be used to supplement parks. That  
18 is fine, but it is a very slippery slope when we  
19 start getting into allowing groups to take over  
20 parkland, which has happened, and be reliant upon  
21 concessions and commercial interests because then  
22 of course we are going to want to encourage more  
23 of those because no we are relying on those funds,  
24 and that is bad. So I encourage you guys--you  
25 guys hear it from us all the time on this stuff.

1  
2 I will say the only good thing to come out of this  
3 over the last year is finally Flushing Meadows  
4 Corona Park is getting some attention. So I again  
5 when the mayor and your Speaker sit down I  
6 encourage you, do not accept that budget that is  
7 currently allocated. We need to do a much better  
8 job of getting funds out there.

9 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank  
10 you, Jeffrey. I know that Council Member Vallone  
11 had a question.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Juts very  
13 quickly, thank you all for waiting this long. You  
14 have been here all day, and I know you have a lot  
15 of things to do, but that is how important this is  
16 to all three of you, and Jeff, you have been a  
17 huge help to me on every park issue, and I agree  
18 with just about everything that you said. I am  
19 not sure you are correct on the legalities of  
20 that. Dan Squadron is a pretty smart guy, and we  
21 are looking into it, but if you are, you are. I  
22 agree with everything you said about private  
23 money. I don't want it, but at this point, the  
24 city as abdicated its responsibility. As much as  
25 we have all yelled about it, we don't control it,

1  
2 and if they are going to do that, I can't sit by  
3 and watch 100 million go to one part and 5,000 to  
4 another, and it absolutely cannot replace the  
5 city's responsibility, and I am on the same page  
6 as all of you guys on that, that this shouldn't be  
7 used for upkeep of the park. It should be used  
8 for additional amenities to the park, and if I can  
9 find out, I know Julissa is looking into  
10 possibility co-sponsoring with me, if we can  
11 legally do it and it is done the right way, I  
12 think it is something that we should seriously  
13 consider, but I have all the same reservations  
14 that you mentioned and we don't want to turn our  
15 parks into moneymaking facilities as their main  
16 purpose. That would be outrageous, but I just  
17 can't for any longer sit back and watch 100  
18 million going to one park and 5,000 go to another  
19 park. But I understand everything you said.  
20 Don't get me wrong. I always appreciate your help  
21 - - 99 percent of the time, which is rare. - - .  
22 Only a few seconds, I can't give you a lot more  
23 time. They will get really mad at me.

24 JEFFREY CROFT: Again, I just want  
25 to respond to that. We have the system error

1 [phonetic] and it is not just the mayor that is  
2 signing off on these budgets, and although yes,  
3 these 100 million dollar donations again create  
4 these enormous disparities, the solution is not to  
5 try to replicate that. Queens, you are never  
6 going to get those types of money and again, how  
7 do you legislate if you wanted to donate your  
8 private funds? How do you say 20 percent of that  
9 has to go to another park? The only other thing  
10 about the Squadron thing which we are definitely  
11 going to be addressing is that there are so few.  
12 You mentioned there are five conservancies that  
13 have this. The vast majority, 99 percent of these  
14 conservancies, are not "well financed." That is  
15 one of the problems with Squadron's thing, and we  
16 talked to him. They called us a day before that  
17 op-ed came out. I was astonished and actually  
18 appalled at the lack of information that they were  
19 relying on because again, on the surface, yes, 100  
20 million dollars is gigantic, but again, the  
21 solution is you know, is properly funding our  
22 public parks with tax levy funds.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: You are  
25 right. I just don't see it happening right now,

1  
2 but Dan Squadron's bill is a template and I am  
3 going to work with you to make it as good as we  
4 can because I may not even stick with the  
5 unsatisfactory for two years because there seems  
6 to be some debate as to whether Flushing Meadows  
7 was actually rated unsatisfactory for the last two  
8 years. I am not even sure.

9 JEFFREY CROFT: It needs hundreds  
10 of millions of dollars - - hundreds of millions of  
11 dollars.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: But we can  
13 get close. I am not saying it is going to solve  
14 all of our problems, but we are going to look into  
15 it, and I am going to make sure that you guys are  
16 right with us as we look into it. Even though  
17 those conservancies have really rich people, they  
18 don't have Julissa, they don't have Melissa, they  
19 don't have you guys, so we will be able to get it  
20 done.

21 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: This is  
22 very true. I just wanted to again thank Ed Wesley  
23 in particular for coming in and testifying. I am  
24 glad you pay attention when I speak at openings,  
25 but you are right, and it is the vacation for many

1  
2 of our young people in our neighborhoods. That is  
3 the getaway, and if we don't have our pools open,  
4 it is the fire hydrant where they go. I think  
5 that is very real for a person who grew up in  
6 Corona. And you know, I just wanted to briefly  
7 talk about the conservancy concept. Conversations  
8 with the administration, and we are looking at  
9 every--and the point you brought up of the trust  
10 and the other ways, those are conversations that  
11 we are also trying to figure out as we speak right  
12 now. But I just want to be clear, and I think  
13 that it has been kind of mentioned in several  
14 conversations and in different times. Any type of  
15 fundraising or any type of additional resources  
16 that are brought in the park are exactly that, and  
17 that is my intention. They are additional to  
18 whatever Parks Department is allotting. Is it  
19 enough? Absolutely not, and I think that was one  
20 of the reasons why I wanted to have this hearing.  
21 You have been part of the Parks Department's  
22 conversations for a long time, and I think it is  
23 the first time we actually got some numbers. Now  
24 we have to go reconfirm whether they are accurate  
25 or not, which is kind of what you did with the

1  
2 zero, so it is about engaging more of those  
3 conversations because even when they come and  
4 testify, they might not always be the accurate  
5 numbers. So we are in this process, we are doing  
6 this together, and I just I am very excited to see  
7 that so many of the community residents came out  
8 and testified and that this is a conversation that  
9 will continue. We are all kind of focused on the  
10 betterment of this park, of our park.

11 MALE VOICE: I wonder if I just  
12 might respond a little bit? The New York Times  
13 did an expose on these conservancies. They took  
14 the top three, and what happens over time is they  
15 all start out with good intentions, but what  
16 happens is the New York City reduces their  
17 commitment to that particular park because the  
18 conservancy then has to work harder to pick it up.  
19 I mean the perfect example was in Park Slope where  
20 they started out at 80 percent the city was  
21 funding it, and then the conservancy came along  
22 and they went down to 40 percent of funding that  
23 park, Prospect Park, so it has got its pit falls.  
24 That is all I am suggesting.

25 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: We are

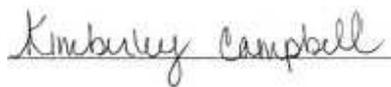
1  
2 looking to do an extensive hearing on the whole  
3 conservancies, models and I think there is a lot  
4 of room for reform in that area, obviously  
5 recommendations. It is extremely complicated  
6 because every arrangement is different, every set  
7 up is different and it is complicated, so we are  
8 looking to do an exhaustive hearing the fall, and  
9 so I want to thank everyone who came today. It is  
10 4:15. We are ending this hearing, but we had I  
11 think it was a good hearing, and I thank everyone  
12 for their time, and with that, this hearing is  
13 adjourned.

14 [gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Kimberley Campbell 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.

Signature

Handwritten signature of Kimberley Campbell in cursive script, written over a horizontal line.Date 7/10/13