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NYC Parks

**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committee on Parks & Recreation
Oversight: Community Parks Initiative (CPI)
November 5, 2014**

Testimony By: Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP, Commissioner

Good morning, Chair Levine and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation, I am Mitchell J. Silver, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. Joining me on this panel is our Director of Project Development, Jennifer Sun and our current Chief of Staff, Kate Spellman. It is a pleasure to be here with you this morning to discuss the Community Parks Initiative which represents an exciting first phase in our new Framework for an Equitable Future.

On October 7, 2014, I joined Mayor de Blasio at Bowne Playground in Flushing, Queens to mark the kick-off of the Community Parks Initiative. The event brought to the forefront the priorities laid out by Mayor de Blasio for increased equity, innovation and resiliency across the park system. That was my commitment to the Mayor when he asked me to be Parks Commissioner and it's our commitment at Parks to the people of New York City.

Our charge is to create and maintain vibrant parks and public spaces in all five boroughs for all New Yorkers and for the millions who visit our city each year. To accomplish these goals, we have created a framework with a set of nine wide-reaching initiatives that will generate near-term milestones.

The Community Parks Initiative is the first in this series of initiatives and represents a commitment of over \$178 million in capital and expense funding from the Mayor, City Council and Borough Presidents. We thank you for your steadfast support of this effort. These funds are sparking an immediate investment in neighborhoods that we have identified as both under-resourced from a parks perspective and high-need from a demographic one.

Each priority community, or Community Parks Initiative Zone, will be the focus of the initiative's full suite of components: capital investment, extended recreational programs, increased maintenance staffing, enhanced community outreach and physical park repairs. Clustered at multiple sites within CPI zones, improvements will create visible results for neighborhoods, creating a cleaner, greener and more resilient city.

CPI brings together the basic building blocks of sustainable park development: capital investment, programming and maintenance, and community engagement.

This is not just be about patching and repairing open spaces and then coming back a few years later to do the same thing. Rather, we are engaging communities in a participatory process to re-create their local parks, increasing green space, adding resilient features and improving access. We are bringing new recreational opportunities to neighborhoods, enhancing our maintenance efforts and deploying dedicated outreach staff to engage community stakeholders in their parks, yielding a new generation of park stewards.

The sites selected to be part of this initiative were chosen through an analysis of the entire park system. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the steps we took in planning the Community Parks Initiative.

To put NYC Parks' recent capital work in context we currently have more than 400 active capital projects, across all five boroughs, totaling more than \$740 million. Over the past two decades, Parks spent about \$5.7 billion on capital improvements. But by taking a closer look at our historic capital investment, we discovered that this investment did not always reach the communities that needed it most; in fact, some 215 parks across the city received less than \$250,000 in capital investment during those 20 years.

We zoned in on those 215 parks that had been sorely under-resourced, and then used demographic data to screen for neighborhoods with high need. For this program, we defined high-need communities as geographic areas with above average rates of population growth, density and percentage of residents living below the federal poverty line.

Using these demographic screens, we were able to narrow the target from 215 to 134 parks that had not only received less than \$250,000 in capital funds over the past 20 years, but were also located within a quarter-mile of census tracts with two or more of the demographic criteria.

Beyond merely crunching the numbers, Parks staff deployed to all 134 parks to survey the sites. We honed our priority list by looking at more qualitative data. For example, we focused on sites that are adjacent to highly trafficked community institutions such as schools and NYCHA developments. This proximity provides the opportunity for the development of strong constituencies to be involved in the programming and care of their local parks.

With these qualitative screens, we narrowed down the scope to the 35 parks that are being targeted for full capital renovation. These sites are just the first phase in our plan for a more equitable park system.

To complement our capital reconstruction projects and deliver more immediate improvements in these neighborhoods, we will bring smaller-scale, targeted physical improvement projects to 55 additional sites within CPI zones, using existing Parks resources. Parks staff will complete painting projects, fix fencing and equipment; do landscape improvements and much more.

CPI is not only a program where individual sites will be improved; it is a program that will benefit entire communities. Each capital project is being supported by a Community Outreach Coordinator whose job is to facilitate communications with NYC Parks' design team, support community engagement, and develop long-term local partners and friends-of-groups. Our successful Partnerships for Parks program, a joint program of NYC Parks and the City Parks Foundation, is offering resources to our CPI community partners thanks to an annual Mayoral investment of \$781,000 for outreach and technical assistance, including 14 new staff members. In addition, \$750,000 in City Council funding to the City Parks Foundation will be used, in part, to support grants for local organizations and technical assistance in the CPI zones.

With an annual Mayoral commitment of \$1.4 million, we are hiring 70 new staffers to provide recreation programs and enhance our maintenance resources within the CPI zones. Ramping up again this spring, Playground Associates will offer seasonal programming for kids and adults, such as Kids in Motion and Shape Up NYC. While expanding our sports and fitness programs, we are encouraging local partners to join us in developing new activities that will meet the needs and interests of communities throughout the five boroughs.

To encourage all New Yorkers to be instrumental in the planning of their local parks we are inviting all residents to participate in public scoping meetings. Our first public scope meeting was held on October 29 at Bowne Playground in Queens. The meeting was a wonderful opportunity for members of the community to take a hands on approach to envisioning a new future for Bowne Playground. Bowne playground was just the first of our CPI public scope meetings. Our goal is to have all 35 public scope meetings complete by the end of January 2015.

Rather than wait for the ribbon cuttings on these projects to deliver improvements, the CPI zones will receive immediate attention. Outreach Coordinators from Partnerships for Parks have already been deployed to these areas to begin the process of engaging with local constituencies. In the Spring, we will have Playground Associates in the parks actively

engaging park patrons. And City Park Workers and Gardeners will bring enhanced maintenance and horticultural programming into these areas.

As Mayor de Blasio stated at Bowne Playground, this is an “all hands on deck” dynamic. NYC Parks will bring together resources from across the agency in addition to leveraging investments from elected officials and agency partners to create a wholly new and robust approach to planning, building, and stewarding our parks.

We have enlisted the assistance of our sister agencies to support CPI. For example, through its Green Infrastructure Initiative, the Department of Environmental Protection has committed more than \$36 million in stormwater management funds to the CPI communities. These funds will create improvements such as bioswales and other stormwater drainage methods that follow some of the nations’ best practices for green infrastructure. This ensures that the revitalized park spaces also manage stormwater effectively thus reducing the environmental impact of stormwater runoff.

Besides agency partners, we are working with our conservancies who we expect to play a vital role in supporting the Community Parks Initiative. NYC Parks has been the beneficiary of a dedicated group of park, non-profit partners who help to maintain some of our most high profile open spaces. We value their expertise and applaud the passion with which they support our parks. Throughout the CPI planning stages, our conservancy partners have consistently praised the program and its’ goals. Some of our partners are already doing significant work in the CPI zones. For example, the Central Park Conservancy just last month launched a new Five Borough Crew which, at our direction, will be completing turf improvement and landscape maintenance projects at 7 sites within the CPI zones. Each of the conservancies has been receptive to taking their work a step further, and we look forward to announcing their commitments to the program soon.

The Community Parks Initiative is just the first step towards a more equitable park system. But it’s a big first step.

To give you a sense of its scope, we estimate that the Community Parks Initiative will:

- Provide improved park amenities and access to 220,000 New Yorkers who live within a 10-minute walk of these parks.
- Improve more than 65 acres of urban parkland.
- And reach more than 3.2 million New Yorkers – 36 percent of whom live below the federal poverty line, 41 percent of who are under the age of 18.

And as we said, the Framework for an Equitable Future which was released last month, encompasses much more than this first initiative focusing on community parks.

While we take on another major capital program in the Community Parks Initiative, I want to be clear that we are keenly aware that we need to streamline our capital process to deliver projects to the public more quickly and efficiently. We have heard loud and clear that our capital process takes too long, we agree, and we are committed to doing better. Since taking office in May, I have convened an extensive series of meetings designed to improve efficiencies in all aspects of a project’s timeline from design to procurement to construction.

As an important first step, we are fostering a culture of increased transparency by recently releasing a publicly accessible capital projects tracker on our website. The Capital Project Tracker is an online, searchable tool that allows anyone interested in Parks’ capital projects to learn more about the active, completed and proposed projects in their neighborhoods.

New Yorkers are now able to track the status of the capital projects from start to finish by visiting the NYC Parks' website.

For each active project, the tracker lists the location of the park, the level of funding, the source of the funding, and the current phase of the project. It also includes the estimated completion date of the current phase of the project, as well as an adjusted completion date if the project has been delayed. The launch of the Capital Tracker was a significant step towards increasing transparency and holding our staff accountable to the public that they serve.

Beyond the Capital Tracker, we are moving ahead with many steps to improve the capital process. For example, we are standardizing our scope meetings. We are condensing internal design reviews and limiting design changes once a project is in construction. We are standardizing templates so we don't start from scratch each time a project begins. And we are in the process of hiring 55 additional staff members in our Capital division which will allow us to expedite our projects and tackle the backlog.

While it will take time to implement all of the proposed changes and for results to be apparent, these are all steps in the right direction to more efficiently delivering projects to the public.

I hope the first steps I have laid out for you today demonstrate this administration's commitment to create and maintain vibrant parks and public space in all five boroughs. With our Framework for an Equitable Future, we have a clear blueprint to work from in delivering on these commitments and aggressively tackling equity issues in our communities, a blueprint which marks a significant shift in the way the Parks Department makes investment decisions and supports our capital investments with maintenance, programming and partnership resources to enliven open space in a way that is sustainable in the long term.

I look forward to working with all of you as we plan and build a brighter and greener future for every New Yorker. Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today and I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.



**New York City Council
Committee on Parks & Recreation
Oversight Hearing – Examining the Department of Parks & Recreation’s
Community Parks Initiative
November 5, 2014**

**New York Restoration Project Testimony
By Deborah Marton
Executive Director**

Good morning, Chairman Levine, Committee members, and distinguished colleagues. I am Deborah Marton, Executive Director of New York Restoration Project (NYRP). I am honored to be here today to testify on how maintenance strategies and conservancies like NYRP can enhance the Community Parks Initiative.

First, thank you to all who made the Community Parks Initiative a reality, especially to Mayor de Blasio, Council Speaker Mark-Viverito, Council Member Levine, Commissioner Silver, and Commissioner Lloyd. I applaud the Community Parks Initiative for bringing care and attention to parks which haven’t seen significant investment in decades. Maintaining parks of any size, location, or use builds community over time. Well-maintained open spaces are also proven to reduce crime and increase physical activity, leading to better health outcomes at the neighborhood scale.

Given that New York City’s park system consists of over 1,700 parks, playgrounds, and recreation facilities, I hope that the Community Parks Initiative is only the beginning of a larger movement to provide high-quality maintenance to the system as a whole. Through NYRP’s work in parks and community gardens, we have witnessed over the past 19 years how the sustainability of open space has more to do with holistic maintenance than ribbon cuttings. We have found that the presence of NYRP’s field staff in the parks and gardens we maintain sends a message to local communities that we care for their neighborhood. Over the long-term, the day-to-day conversations between our field staff and

community members increases the use of the spaces, builds a sense of ownership, and fosters community. Put simply, a family is more likely to use a playground if they feel protected in the space than if a new slide was just installed. The Community Parks Initiative provides an opportunity to think long-term about the balance between capital and maintenance. While capital improvements need to happen, it is the day-to-day maintenance that turns parks into community parks.

The Community Parks Initiative also provides an opportunity for conservancies like NYRP to help bring much-needed improvements to other city parks. Today, NYRP provides daily stewardship to approximately 73 acres of public park land—including Sherman Creek and Highbridge Parks—and over 2 miles of the Harlem River shoreline. In addition to daily maintenance, NYRP works on design, development, and environmental restoration, while providing youth education programs and free public events to engage the surrounding community.

The conservancy model NYRP applies in Sherman Creek and Highbridge Parks is replicable in almost every city park, but there needs to be a mechanism within the Parks Department for conservancy partners to flourish. NYRP is fortunate to have partners at the Parks Department like Manhattan Borough Commissioner Bill Castro and Northern Manhattan Parks Administrator Jennifer Hoppa, who we've built strong relationships with over the years. However, partnerships like NYRP's should not be ad hoc, but rather embedded in the structure of the Parks Department. More specifically, there needs to be both a point person and a streamlined methodology for partnering as a conservancy, so that organizations like NYRP can work efficiently to dramatically improve green spaces in New York City communities.

I encourage City Council and the Parks Department to build off the momentum of the Community Parks Initiative to place an emphasis on maintenance and to make use of NYRP and other non-profit conservancies so that we can reach a broader spectrum of parks and their communities.

Thank you.

Wednesday, November 5, 2014
NYC Council Parks Committee
Community Parks Initiative Oversight Hearing

Testimony of Heather Lubov
Executive Director of City Parks Foundation

Good morning, my name is Heather Lubov and I am thrilled to be here on what is now my third day as Executive Director of City Parks Foundation. I would like to thank Chairman Levine and the committee for allowing me to testify today and the entire Council for its support of City Parks Foundation.

We are the only non-profit organization whose mission is to activate New York City's parks in all five boroughs by providing high quality arts, sports, educational and community building programs free of economic barriers to promote healthy and vibrant communities. Working closely with Parks Department, we look to promote public parks as positive spaces of lively community involvement.

We applaud the Mayor's and the Council's focus on parks equity and we wholly support the Commissioner's emphasis on maintenance and sustainability of parks. We are thrilled to be able to play a significant role in the parks equity and CPI effort, both by helping to build and facilitate sustainable community support as well as providing programming that activates parks.

First and foremost, our **Partnerships for Parks** program, a nearly 20-year public-private collaboration with the Parks Department, successfully supports and champions a growing network of leaders caring and advocating for neighborhood parks and green spaces, particularly in neighborhoods where resources are limited. Partnerships reaches more than 600 community organizations across the city and equips them with the skills and tools they need to transform their local green spaces into dynamic community assets. The Partnerships program directly addresses the Parks Department's desire to engage stakeholders and build stewards for sustainability.

The Partnerships' **Catalyst Program** supports the formation and builds the capacity of local community groups to serve as green space stewards, particularly in waterfront communities. Catalyst selects a targeted group of some of the highest need parks in which to focus significant resources. Catalyst starts with **building** potential partners through neighborhood outreach and organization; **connecting** communities to human, programmatic, and financial resources to support their park; and, finally, providing the tools needed to **sustain** that support once the Catalyst period has ended. Catalyst has been in place since 1995 and has worked in 13 park communities and engaged thousands of local residents seeking change in their parks. We are about to begin the fourth round of Catalyst sites, each of which is within an established CPI zone.

But that's not all that we do. Partnerships for Parks Outreach Coordinators support community involvement in neighborhood parks across all five boroughs, while staff provides significant

technical assistance, with an emphasis on the neediest communities. This year, with the help of the Council's Parks Equity funding:

- We will offer free, expert training to help 425 park group leaders – a 15% increase – to build community through our **Academy**. We will double the number of community groups we serve to 30 in our in-depth, six-month intensive **Fellowship** program. And through our annual conference, we will increase participation by 20%, recruiting parks volunteers and nonprofit and civic leaders to network, meet experts, share best practices, and learn about resources.
- We will expand our reach through **People Make Parks**, a joint effort with the Hester Street Collaborative, to provide information in New York's lowest income neighborhoods on how to engage in the creation and design of meaningful public spaces and we will provide guidance through local visioning processes.
- We will organize service projects for thousands of volunteers from corporate and nonprofit groups who help contribute annually to nearly 70 neighborhood parks in need.
- We will provide fiscal sponsorship and design services to over 40 "friends of" park groups; and
- We will double our Capacity Grant Fund to \$150,000, offering small grants to help support events, programming, group development, clean-up, and beautification projects.

In addition to our Partnerships program, we are currently reviewing the list of CPI Zones to determine how we can further activate these communities through summer arts programs, sports and recreation programs, and out-of-school time educational programs. Our programs already serve hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers in all five boroughs, so there is existing overlap with CPI Zones and we look forward to determining the feasibility of expanding our reach.

For more than 25 years, City Parks Foundation has been committed to providing free programs to underserved communities and partnering with the Parks Department to serve all neighborhoods. Thank you once again for the opportunity to testify.



New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation

Oversight – Examining the Department of Parks and Recreation's Community Parks Initiative

November 5, 2014

Testimony of New Yorkers for Parks

Good morning Chairman Levine, and members of the Parks Committee. I'm Tupper Thomas, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks.

We want to first recognize and praise the City Council for their commitment to fighting for a more meaningful budget for parks. Your efforts have raised the level of discussion about how we fund our public spaces. While many details about the next several years in park life remain open for negotiation, we are lucky to be beginning the conversation with a shared conviction that parks matter for everyone.

We think the Community Parks Initiative is a well-thought-through plan: it creates new funding streams for maintenance and prioritizes community organizing in the target neighborhoods. This plan recognizes that small neighborhood parks are key community-builders, and essential civic infrastructure.

We want to also salute the de Blasio administration for building on the capital investment during the Bloomberg administration. We see this capital commitment as a major component of the Community Parks Initiative.

We especially welcome the increased funding for essential maintenance and operations positions. Parks needs to figure out how to make maintenance and operations more sustainable for employees and citizens, and we are eager to continue advocating for solutions to this challenge.

We are excited that the CPI includes over \$36 million from the Department of Environmental Protection for remediating and improving the sustainability of the parks targeted for improvements. This partnership between Parks and Environmental Protection is a natural fit as the city ramps up resiliency efforts post-Sandy.

But as you know, the CPI so far is only a start. Many parks that fit the CPI criteria for needing support will not receive funding. Those who rely on these parks need to know that their open spaces will receive investment and improvements in the near future. The mechanisms for community organizing also need clearer protocols and metrics. Within the next year, NY4P will begin to conduct an independent review of all CPI zones to assess impact. We hope that our findings can continue to guide the City in effectively improving parks citywide.

Equity is a concern in the Parks workforce, too. The agency has seen such consistent underfunding over the years that it now struggles to offer upward mobility. As maintenance workers retire, few

candidates come forward to replace them. City Park Workers and Zone Gardeners must become full-time positions, not just seasonal, so they become attractive professions. That can only happen with consistent, baselined funding for these crucial positions.

We also remain concerned about the essential mid-size parks, which are not included in this plan – they provide much needed open-space and relief for the communities they serve, and many are still in need of major capital investments and improvements. They matter intensely for low-income neighborhoods that lack access to open space.

Overall, we're confident because we see NYC Parks acknowledging through CPI that neighborhood parks can build community from a small footprint. It's also encouraging to see NYC Parks beginning to make the capital process more streamlined and transparent through the recent launch of the Capital Projects Tracker. We look forward to monitoring this project as it evolves.

Thank you for having us.

Testimonial on behalf of The Friends of Astoria Heights Park for CPI

Prepared by Lynn Kennedy, Chair of Friends of Astoria Heights Park

Astoria Heights Playground located at 45th street and 30th road, Astoria, NY 11103

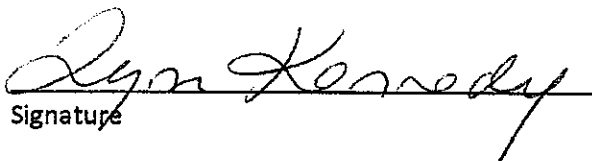
On behalf of the Friends of Astoria Heights Park, I would like to thank Mayor De Blasio and the New York City Parks and Recreation for advocating on behalf of 35 community parks, including ours, to tackle equity issues and decrease the disparity that has existed within parks.

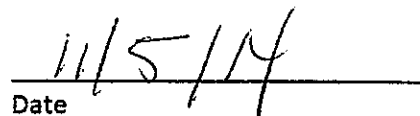
The investment in our park will complement the 1.6 million dollars in capital money that was advocated for by our group and Councilman Costantinides, and will make a tremendous impact upon the state of our park, which has been overlooked for many years.

Our group has acted as a catalyst for change. We originally petitioned the local Community Board 1 just over a year ago in September 2013 for erosion control, safety measures and age appropriate playground upgrades. We continue to act as stewards for our park, building our group in numbers and linking with other community groups to bring forth positive change to our community. Our group feels strongly about how the park will develop and we look forward to working with CPI specifically in regards to "good park development". CPI will reinforce the work that our group (FAHP) has done by creating an environment in which to work even more effectively. We would like to see capital dollars used efficiently. Our park is not only in need of upgrades to ensure safety such as erosion control measures, gates and equipment, but also maintenance and staffing to ensure that what is built lasts. The park also lacks adequate programming for children and teens with its high utilization rates; expansion of such programming, which we have already been advocating for, is a priority for youth, families and communities to excel. We are excited to hear as well that there will be more opportunities for capacity building grants and support to further strengthen our group and the work we do.

We feel honored and appreciative of being a part of a larger Parks movement. All communities deserve to have parks that are amazing. Public spaces that are beautiful, green and meet needs, make for a healthier community. Parks are vital for quality of life. I will never forget what one member of our group said to me. She described since leaving her own country of Morocco, that the park and the people in the park she has since met since moving here have become family. Personally, I began my advocacy effort because I was unhappy going to my local park, which depressed me with its grayness, run down equipment, flooding and broken glass. My son and I would seek out other parks, often in LIC or Manhattan that were brighter, more engaging, cleaner, safer, and better staffed. So I began to ask for a change to happen in our own neighborhood, demanding more. Since then, we have been unstoppable and hopefully inspiring other park groups to do the same.

In closing, CPI is an asset to the city. We need accountability with capital funding. We need change that reflects the needs of the targeted communities. Large scale and small scale improvements will be beneficial on every level of Community development. The initiative empowers people to take ownership of their communities and creates hope, something that is necessary for all communities to thrive.


Signature


Date



Young Leaders Elementary School – PS 369

468 East 140 St., Bronx, N.Y. 10454

Ph-718-292-7391, Fax – 718-292-8535

Ms. Jaleelah Cooke, Principal

Mr. Anwar Zindani, Assistant Principal

Greetings,

My name is Ms. A. Aponte Parent Coordinator for Ps. 369 Young Leaders Elementary School. We share the building with 2 other school Ps. 179 and Ps. 352 a district 75 school.

Our play ground is not a representation of the diverse needs of our school community as well as our neighborhood.

As a member of the community I should not have to go to a different community such as Central Park to have my children play in a respectable playground. Many families cannot afford the train ride or the bus ride into the city it can be expensive.

We should be able to walk down the block and enjoy a color full, inviting and safe playground just as any other community.

Our families with children with special needs should and deserve not have to think about it twice to take their children to the park because there are no structures fitting to their needs.

Our children deserve a park that engages all of their family. It should make parents want to join them in going down the slide, play basketball in a colorful court, handball in a shaded area.

Our community deserves a water fountain for when we get thirsty playing in this park.

This Capital Improvement project is the start of a new turn in our community.

This is a start of showing our children to take charge in their community and that they do matter.

Thank you to all who are part of this wonderful project from the Young Leaders Elementary School!

Hi my name is Sandra Dejesus and i'm honored to be here on behalf of my community I would like to talk about the need for The Community Parks Initiative at our community park known as Hunts Point Park. CPI is an immediate investment in the local parks in New York City's lower income,most densely populated,and growing neighborhoods.The 35 community parks selected for CPI all have great potential to better serve the areas around them, but have not had sufficient recent investment or stewardship to thrive as great public places.

The CPI approach builds on the foundations of good park development, capital investment, programming partnerships and maintenance, CPI will grow the capacity of local stewards beyond the capital project phase. By engaging stakeholders on an ongoing basis and supplying expanded resources to both sustain existing and build new friends- of parks groups,the CPI will help community partners to build their own capacity to use program,and act as advocates for their local parks.

CPI communities will see an expansion of recreational programming and maintenance. As capital projects are completed.Parks will increase maintenance and gardening staff as well.

Through CPI,capital and targeted improvement projects, programming,partnerships,and maintenance efforts will reach 55 underserved neighborhoods throughout the five boroughs. In total, the CPI will serve New York City Community Districts with a total population of 3,270,000 New Yorkers. 36% of these citizens live under the federal poverty line, and 41% are under the age of 16

This is just a brief summary of what the CPI is and would love this for our park Thank You.

And as the Current Parent Association President of P.S. 48, that's door is only 50 feet from the entrance of the park, it would be an asset for the children of the school to be able to use the park during lunch hours, and great for kids who don't get to come out with their parents. The kids can share their experiences with them, which will lead to more parents coming with their children.

Thank You

Sandra Dejesus

November 5, 2014

Re: Oversight Hearing: Examining the Department of Parks and Recreation's Community Parks Initiative

Firstly, it is an honor yet again to represent the Woodside Neighborhood Association which has been invited for the third time in the past year to testify on issues concerning parks. We take this opportunity with the honor deserving of the critical issues of urban development and creating public spaces that reflect positively on our local society.

The Woodside Neighborhood Association has had the pleasure of uniting our diverse community through programs developed in partnership particularly with the Partnership for Parks, under the Greening Western Queens Project, which is coming to completion by the 31st of December of this year, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, and a myriad of other greening affiliated organizations that have offered their expertise so that we could achieve multiple and overlapping greening projects across the entire Woodside community.

The essential progression of communication has emerged through neighbor after neighbor simply rolling up their sleeves and enjoying a morning together in the gardens. Through our partnerships we have created an environment where citizens turn to us to assist with everything from tutoring to family court to our second chance program.

With the guidance and the materials supplied from Partnership for Parks we have managed to evolve from small projects to sweeping changes encompassing the entire neighborhood of Woodside in good order.

The question being posed by this Committee is one that represents the results, not necessarily the causes of initiatives taken by the city agencies as well as volunteer and other NPO organizations - continuing their long-term efforts, sometimes without the funding or political support that might have realized more of the goals of all initiatives in a more immediate timeframe.

Nevertheless, the purpose of any new expenditures on parks and recreational facilities, based on our group's efforts in this area, indicate the criticality of maintaining what has already been achieved through tireless efforts, just as much as new capital expenditures on upgrading facilities or full redesigns. This is based squarely on not simply the cost of exotic and hard-to-maintain plantings that often result from renovations, where simpler, more cost-effective plant and tree species would have served the same beautification purposes, but it also reduces the opportunities for groups such as ours, as well as the many youth and school groups that have been involved in the work we have performed.

We have learned that, even with limited budgets, or no budget at all, there are many routes to procure essential greening supplies such as daffodil bulbs, to the tune of thousands, gardening tools, mulch at level in the thousands of tons waiting to be utilized but without the distribution channels available for active civic groups to readily and speedily procure them.

Our team has been fortunate to have developed a win-win relationship with many larger, professional urban greening organizations, and that has at the very least tended to allow us to procure supplies

faster and more efficiently than would have been possible were it not for this long-term relationship, yet, in light of the material supplies already available and being purchased by the city, we have a foundation for continued rehabilitation of green spaces in the few locations where citizens and residents can have a direct impact on the outcome, the shape, if you will, of their local environment, that merely spending for multimillion dollar renovations that will, inevitably, require much in terms of maintenance and care the moment the ribbon-cutting ceremony is over.

We have identified in previous testimony the inherent value of the smaller, yet more frequently utilized parks and green spaces in most of the communities of this city. In Woodside, for example, these locations provide convenience and accessibility, where our residents can interact, where at very little cost, verifiable improvements can be accomplished, thus saving the taxpayer and showing results. Moreover, when done in league with the local civic organizations which tend to these parks and green spaces on a regular schedule, maintenance and upkeep become less costly, freeing up manpower and future budgets to seek out those communities which have the least developed facilities, and focus city agencies and capital expenditures where they would have the greatest impact on the most number of our residents.

Thus, we are excited to offer our proposal to streamlining the procurement process for groups such as ours that can, given this level of support, cultivate deeper and broader relationships with local schools, houses of worship, individuals who have the will but not the means to become more involved in the life of the place they live and work.

Our group, for example, in just this past year, has seen numerous student volunteers from many schools such as PS 11, St. Sebastian's, IS 125, IS 145 the HS of Women's Leadership, and others all proving that, with simple requests for mulch, soil and shovels, everyone comes away with a sense of accomplishment because real work was performed that they and the community at large can hold in high esteem.

I thank the Committee for this gracious opportunity, and I, and we in the Woodside Neighborhood Association are looking forward to working with this Committee on developing practical, meaningful and cost-effective initiatives.

Elba Santiago
Board Member
Woodside Neighborhood Association

David Rosasco
Chair
Woodside Neighborhood Association



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**Testimony for the NYC Council Parks Committee on Parks and Recreation
November 5th, 2014**

Oversight Hearing: Examining the Department of Parks and Recreation's Community Parks Initiative

Good morning Parks Committee members, my name is Dylan House and I'm the Director of Community Design at Hester Street Collaborative, a non-profit organization that creates resources and tools for underserved communities to be engaged in how their neighborhoods are shaped. We have developed a track record of this work on the Lower East Side and have worked for many years with Partnerships for Parks around the issues of community engagement in the NYC Parks Capital process. Specifically, we have tackled the issue of how you can build capacity for community members and volunteer stewardship groups to effectively gather input and advocate for a community vision in their parks. Together we have developed an online toolkit, called People Make Parks, that breaks down the capital process in a step-by-step way, provides resources and activities for public engagement, and ultimately helps New Yorkers to participate in the design of their parks.

I applaud the spirit of the Community Parks Initiative (CPI), the issue of equity in parks and funding capital improvements in underserved neighborhood parks is greatly important and necessary. However we believe that there is a missing piece to the CPI, and that tied to this capital investment there needs to be a social investment in the form of a deep community engagement process within each neighborhood. The timeline of the CPI only allows for surface level engagement at best, at worst community stakeholders will have no meaningful opportunity to weigh in on the design and planning of these capital improvements. When residents engage with government and weigh in on design, the City builds better parks because of local knowledge, and the public continues to care for places that they have helped to create. This process serves to build long-term community ownership of parks, and build the capacity for effective stewardship. Based on this idea, we believe that the CPI needs to allow for this deeper more genuine community engagement process.

Partnerships for Parks through People Make Parks has the ability to help facilitate collaboration in park design between invested communities and NYC Parks, but the Community Parks Initiative needs to allow for the space and time for this to take place. Spending the time needed to engage community leaders as partners will ultimately help ensure that community board review, and other parts of the process that require local support, are streamlined. Hester Street Collaborative looks forward to continuing to work with NYC Parks around community engagement and stewardship of NYC green space. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dylan House
Community Design Director
Hester Street Collaborative

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Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 11/5/14

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elba Santiago
Address: 61-20 Woodside Ave, Woodside NY 1137
I represent: Woodside Neighborhood Association
Address: _____

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Name: State Senator Daniel Squadron
Address: 250 BWAY
I represent: 26th Senate District NYC
Address: _____

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Name: MITCHELL SILVER
Address: KPSM A2
I represent: PARKS
Address: _____

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Name: Bates, Rollman

Address: 830 5th Ave

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

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Name: Jennifer Sun

Address: 830 5th Ave

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

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Name: Sandra DeJesus

Address: 859 Manida St Bx, NY 10474

I represent: Hunts Point Park

Address: 700 Hunts Point Ave

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Name: Deborah Alderson
Address: 1111 25th St, 10th Fl, NY, NY 10001
I represent: New York Restoration Project
Address: 700 Harts Bldg Ave

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Name: Johanna Clearfield
Address: 699 Ocean Ave #
I represent: Urban Wildlife Coalition
Address: 700 Harts Bldg Ave

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Name: Heather Walsh
Address: City Parks Foundation E40
I represent: NYC
Address: 10005

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Therese Thomas

Address: 55 Broad Street 10004

I represent: New York 9 Park

Address: same

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Name: LE Roy McLean

Address: 1191 Kensington Pl Brooklyn NY

I represent: Resident

Address: New York 9 Park

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Name: NANCY BRUNING

Address: 250 CABIN, BUON

I represent: Nancarrow + Fattiga Park

Address: same

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Date: _____

Name: SCOTT KEARNEY (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 633 11TH ST

I represent: TECHNICAL GUILD WORKERS

Address: NY LOCAL 375

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Date: 11/5/14

Name: Jenny Lando / Lynn Kennedy (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 4505 30TH AVENUE ASTORIA, NY 11103

I represent: Friends of Astoria Heights Park

Address: 45TH ST / 30TH ROAD ASTORIA, NY 11103

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Name: DYLAN HOUSE (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 37 VANDERBILT AVE BKLYN, NY

I represent: HESTER STREET COLLABORATIVE

Address: 113 HESTER ST. NEW YORK, NY

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Date: 11/5/14

Name: Markena Giga (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Local 983 Parks Maintenance + Per Diem

Address: 125 Barclay St

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Date: 11/5/14

Name: Geoffrey Craft (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks Advocates

Address: _____

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Date: 11.5.14

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aiowa Aponte

Address: _____

I represent: Parent Coordinator at PS 369

Address: _____

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Name: ISE Pineda (with MARIA GIBI)

Address: _____

I represent: DC 37 - DCA 983

Address: _____

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