



Hearing before the New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Oversight: Int 0384-2014 A- A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to an annual report on non-governmental funding for New York City parks.

January 29, 2015

Testimony By: Alessandro G. Olivieri, General Counsel

Good afternoon, Chairman Levine and members of the Parks and Recreation Committee. My name is Alessandro Olivieri, and I am the General Counsel for the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. Joining me on this panel is our Chief of Community Outreach and Partnership Development, Kate Spellman. Thank you for allowing me to speak before you today about the proposed amendment to Local Law 28 of 2008, which is codified in the City Administrative Code at Title 18: Section 18-134.

The Parks Department is supportive of the proposed amendment and is strongly aligned with the Council in seeking to provide greater transparency on the role conservancies play in helping the Department care for parks throughout the City. The additional reporting required by the proposed amendment should provide more consistent and more useful data on conservancies' annual expenditures in maintaining and improving parks. We have worked cooperatively with Council staff on the amendment, and appreciate how productive these discussions were to foster an improved report.

The Parks Department has active license agreements with non-profit partners large and small who maintain and operate parks or portions of parks. These partners range from well-known groups like the Prospect Park Alliance, to smaller groups like Socrates Sculpture Park, but as a collective these partners invest significant financial resources and sweat equity in parks throughout the City. While our partners are already required, in most instances, to submit their audited financial statements to the Department and most make their 990 Income Tax Forms available on their websites, this financial information is made available to the Department at different points throughout the year, covers different fiscal years, and requires interpretation on the part of agency staff to develop comparable data. The proposed bill would help the agency establish a clear and consistent report that can be easily compared and should be useful to both the Parks Department and the Council.

The Parks Department has had preliminary discussions with the conservancies about the requirements of this amendment. All of our partners have expressed support for the goals of improved transparency and have indicated a willingness to begin reporting this information voluntarily. That said, we will also make this reporting mandatory when agreements are renewed and new agreements are created, and also work with our partners to amend their respective agreements in advance of renewal where feasible, so this requirement can be contractually obligated as soon as reasonably possible.

Our work with the City Council on Intro 384 is just one in a series of efforts underway to improve the way we manage and support our conservancy partners going forward. Under the leadership of Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Silver, the Parks Department has renewed its focus on compliance and transparency by introducing a new Commissioner-level position for compliance oversight at the agency. Specifically, Commissioner Silver has appointed John Luisi as the new

Assistant Commissioner for Agency Compliance. In this role, Commissioner Luisi will coordinate compliance with administrative codes, mayoral directives, and local laws, including Administrative Code Section 18-134.

In addition, the Parks Department is building on its current conservancy management framework by incorporating Partnership Development into the portfolio of a senior level employee who reports directly to the Commissioner. Kate Spellman will oversee our efforts to grow the capacity of local stewards and institutions to care for and advocate for their parks, develop strategies for leveraging private support for under-served parks, and create new partnerships for parks with the greatest needs.

To support Ms. Spellman in this role, we are in the final stages of hiring a Director of Partnership Development who will focus on improving the Department's management of its conservancy partners. The Director will work to improve the way the agency communicates its priorities to the conservancies, identify opportunities to align the conservancies' work with those priorities, provide clear and streamlined reporting structures, and create forums for sharing best practices among the network of park partners. We look forward to continued collaboration with the City Council to implement a useful and transparent report on the support provided by park conservancies, and we will update you as we make progress in our broader efforts to improve the way we work with our conservancy partners going forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this afternoon. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



DANIEL SQUADRON
SENATOR, 26TH DISTRICT

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**Testimony of State Senator Daniel Squadron
to New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation Regarding Intro. 384-A**

January 29, 2015

My name is Daniel Squadron, and I represent the 26th District in the New York State Senate. My district includes the Manhattan neighborhoods of Tribeca, Battery Park City, the Lower East Side, Chinatown, the Financial District, Greenwich Village, Little Italy, SoHo and the East Village and the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Greenpoint, Williamsburg, Vinegar Hill, DUMBO, Fulton Ferry, Brooklyn Heights, Cobble Hill, and Carroll Gardens.

I would like to thank Parks Committee Chair Mark Levine for convening this hearing, and for the opportunity to testify on the ongoing issue of parks equity.

As I have said before, local parks in some of the wealthiest parts of the city are doing very well, which in many respects is to the great credit of parks conservancies. But that has meant that New Yorkers who live near these parks are not faced with the reality that the overall parks system has not received the care and funding it needs. As a result, the disinvestment in the parks system of the past years has not registered with many of those living in some of the most powerful parts of the city. Our marquee parks are doing better than ever, but we cannot let most parks fall behind while others thrive.

When we started the focus on parks equity nearly two years ago, it was clear that there was a limited understanding, and scant data, about the significant role conservancies play in our parks system. This bill would provide important information by requiring the Department of Parks & Recreation to gather regular information from conservancies that have contracts with the City on their total expenditures for maintenance and operation of their respective parks.

Beyond the obvious benefits of transparency, Intro 384-A would also force stakeholders to truly understand the costs, and stark realities of government disinvestment, of current park operation. The conservancies are playing an important part in maintaining these parks, and a reminder of the extent to which they have been forced to fill government funding gaps is important to understanding our parks equity crisis.

While this information will certainly identify some our system's funding failures, it does not link individual conservancies to the larger system or provide funding to make up the gap for under-resourced parks. Significant public dissemination and discussion of the information is critical, so it serves the goal of allowing the public, elected officials, parks advocates, and the conservancies themselves, to understand the impact different conservancies have, identify who is doing more with less, and help point to the most efficient and effective ways to improve parks throughout the system -- those with conservancies and without.

However, this bill need not be passed for conservancies to play a more meaningful role in expanding the impact of the Mayor's Community Parks Initiative, which the conservancies have clearly communicated their enthusiasm to do. At the CPI announcement on October 7th last year the mayor was clear in his commitment to "turn to the major parks conservancies and ask them to make a contribution as part of this process." I look forward to that voluntary role for large conservancies becoming a reality, and being fairly reflected in the data if the proposal before us becomes law.

I look forward to continuing to work with Mayor de Blasio, Commissioner Silver, Chair Levine, advocates, and the conservancies to ensure we have a unified, improving and vital parks system across the city. Intro. 384 and CPI are important first steps, and we must continue our commitment to do more.



**New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
Hearing on Proposed Int. 384-A
January 29, 2015**

Testimony of Tupper Thomas, Executive Director, New Yorkers for Parks

Good afternoon Chairman Levine and members of the Parks Committee. I'm Tupper Thomas, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks, the city's independent parks research and advocacy nonprofit. I thank the committee for inviting us to talk about what we can learn from conservancies' financial records for the betterment of the whole park system.

We appreciate conservancies' work in attracting resources to the parks they support, and in creating management methods that all parks might be able to use. Conservancies combine neighborhood groups' civic energy with the capacity for institutional fundraising. New Yorkers for Parks recognizes their contributions to our city's overall park system with dollars that public sources cannot or will not provide.

At the same time, we appreciate the Council's need for thorough reporting about where conservancies get their money, and about how their funding affects the overall health of the park system. This could help dispel the notion that parks with conservancy funding redirect resources away from needier parks. New Yorkers for Parks has long held that organizations in public-private partnerships with the Parks Department should report annual revenues, expenses and other critical financial information in a simple, consistent manner to be shared on the Department's website.

The question is: how can such information stay current enough to be useful to the Council?

As it stands, conservancies create their expense budgets prior to their next fiscal year. This budget, and the final financial statements, can show where money was spent and how it was raised. There may be more user-friendly formats for this data, which the Council might explore. Listing the various sources of giving- such as individual, foundation, corporation and government- would provide transparent information on funders. Gifts totaling over a threshold amount could be listed specifically by donor. Any capital funds could be reported separately by project.

The city would need to partner in this reporting, by providing similar numbers on its spending in each park. This would help clarify what it takes to fund operations and programming, as well as what would be necessary to keep all parks as well-maintained as the ones we are looking at today. Remember that the conservancies' dollars support parks that draw millions of visitors from throughout the city and the world. More park-to-park comparisons of conservancy spending with Parks Department spending can help the Council assess the true cost of first-rate parks at a variety of scales. Clear, precise categories and reporting will show that conservancy support serves the overall parks system without a heavy hit to the taxpayer.

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For over 100 years, New Yorkers for Parks has built, protected and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. More information: www.ny4p.org

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Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

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Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Date: 1/29/15

Name: John Luisi (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 830 5th Ave

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: Central Park

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Name: Lucy Koteen (PLEASE PRINT)

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Name: Johanna Cleanfield (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 573 Sixth St, 11215

I represent: Urban Wildlife Coalition

Address: Brooklyn 11215

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Name: Jérôme BARTH (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: ~~820 Washington Street~~ 216 17th St. Brooklyn

I represent: Friends of the High Line

Address: 820 Washington Street, The DUF Building
NY NY 10014

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Name: Tupper Thomas (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: New Yorks for Parks

Address: 55 Broad St

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Date: 1/29/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kate Spellman

Address: 830 5th Ave

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: Central Park

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Appearance Card

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alessandro Olivieri

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks + Recreation

Address: 930 Fifth Ave, NY, NY 10005

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 384 Res. No. _____

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Name: Geoffrey Craft

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Park Advocates

Address: _____

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