



Hearing before the New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation  
Int 0629-2015- A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to the length of the season for city beaches and pools.

April 22, 2015

Testimony By: Liam Kavanagh, Deputy Commissioner, NYC Parks

Good morning, Chairman Levine and members of the Parks and Recreation Committee, I am Liam Kavanagh, First Deputy Commissioner at the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. Joining me on this panel are \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you for inviting me to testify today regarding Intro 629, regarding the length of the season for city beaches and pools.

As you're aware, in addition to more than 1,900 parks and 1,000 playgrounds, NYC Parks oversees more than 14 miles of public beaches, and 55 outdoor pools throughout the city. Each year, New York City's beaches and pools serve millions of residents and visitors across the five boroughs.

Our beaches are a precious source of outdoor recreation and relaxation for millions of New Yorkers and other visitors every summer, from Orchard Beach in the Bronx and the Rockaways in Queens, all the way to Coney Island and Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, down to the beaches on the eastern shore of Staten Island. Many of our childhood memories are forged on the beaches and boardwalks of New York, and NYC Parks considers these beaches to be a precious resource, and we work hard to maintain their condition and offer safe, enjoyable recreation that's available to all New Yorkers.

For children and families who can't make it out to the beach when it's warm, our outdoor pools throughout the city are a great way to take a refreshing swim and enjoy a beautiful day. These outdoor pools are a convenient and accessible source of vital recreation, and our staff is dedicated to making sure the pools are clean, well-maintained and most of all, safe for everyone.

Water safety is a top priority for NYC Parks. To protect the lives of the millions of beachgoers and pool visitors each summer, we hire and train approximately 1500 lifeguards, who are dedicated to making sure that everyone can enjoy summertime swimming and outdoor activity while remaining safe. We only hire lifeguards certified by the NYC Municipal Lifeguard Training Program, to ensure that our lifeguards are ready for this tremendous responsibility.

Recruitment for new lifeguards starts in December with qualifying tests held citywide until early January. To qualify to participate in the Municipal Lifeguard Training Program, a lifeguard must complete a swim test, fulfill a vision requirement, and be at least 16 years at the start of their employment. Qualified applicants go through a 16-week training program, mainly held at the Chelsea Recreation Center in Manhattan, with a few satellite locations around the city, such as Far Rockaway High School and Curtis High School in Staten Island. At the end of the training program, they complete final tests, including an additional 300-yard open water swim test for lifeguards who qualify for a beach assignment. Successful candidates who pass the tests are then hired.

Returning lifeguards are contacted in the spring to determine whether they plan to come back for the upcoming season and when they would be available. They undergo a shorter recertification process when they return.

Traditionally, our beaches open on Memorial Day weekend in May, and our pools open in late June, after the end of the school year. In expectation of the beginning of the new school year, we traditionally close our beaches and pools after Labor Day weekend in September.

Due to annual shifts in the calendar, such as last summer's Labor Day, which fell especially early on September 1st, this can result in warm stretches of weather in early September during which our beaches and pools are closed. By way of comparison, Labor Day this year will fall nearly a full week later, on September 7. As we discussed during the preliminary budget hearing in March, NYC Parks recognizes the interest in extending the season for our city's beaches and pools past Labor Day through the end of September, and we have been examining and exploring the feasibility of this concept. It's important to note that there are certain factors that could make this a complicated and costly enterprise.

One significant challenge in extending the beach season late into September would be retaining the appropriate lifeguard workforce to make sure that people can safely use our beaches and pools. As noted, we hire about 650 beach lifeguards and 850 pool lifeguards each summer, about 50% of whom are students, whose availability may be severely limited after Labor Day. On our beaches, though we open the season on Memorial Day weekend, our lifeguard staffing levels do not peak until the end of June after school ends. Our workforce then remains steady until the last two weeks of August, when a large portion of our lifeguards begin to return to school. Our pool lifeguard workforce represents a similar pattern of availability, as well.

Similarly, if we were to significantly extend the season, we would also have to retain our seasonal maintenance staff to keep pools, beaches and boardwalks clean and comfort stations functioning. We would also have to maintain a substantial Parks security and enforcement presence to comply with New York City Health Code requirements that beach sections closed for swimming be actively patrolled to prevent unsupervised swimming and bathing. Between safety, security and maintenance staff, each week of operating our pools and beaches costs approximately \$2.4 million dollars, and any extension of the season beyond Labor Day would reflect this additional cost.

In light of these staffing challenges, it would be wise to ensure that public demand merits this significant investment. Analysis of New York City temperatures in mid-and-late-September, combined with our internal review of usage patterns suggest that the dropping temperatures will not evoke significant demand for beach and pool recreation deep into the month. Over the last ten years, the average high temperatures for the first three weeks of September in New York City were 81, 78, and 74 degrees respectively, demonstrating a significant drop-off as the month continues. Our internal analysis of beach usage clearly shows that when temperatures fall below 75 degrees, our city beaches experience a 78% drop in attendance on the weekend and an 81% drop on weekdays.

We see similar decreases in demand at our outdoor swimming pools when temperatures fall. Our outdoor pools have a maximum capacity of only about 25,000 at any given time, and experience a similar attendance pattern to the beaches, both equally affected by temperature extremes. Average daily pool attendance drops 48% when temperatures dip below 80, and by 78% when lower than 75 degrees. Given the historical pattern of lower temperatures in late September, and the correlation of lower temperatures with lower demand, the use of significant resources to extend the beach and pool season deep into late September may not be an appropriate investment.

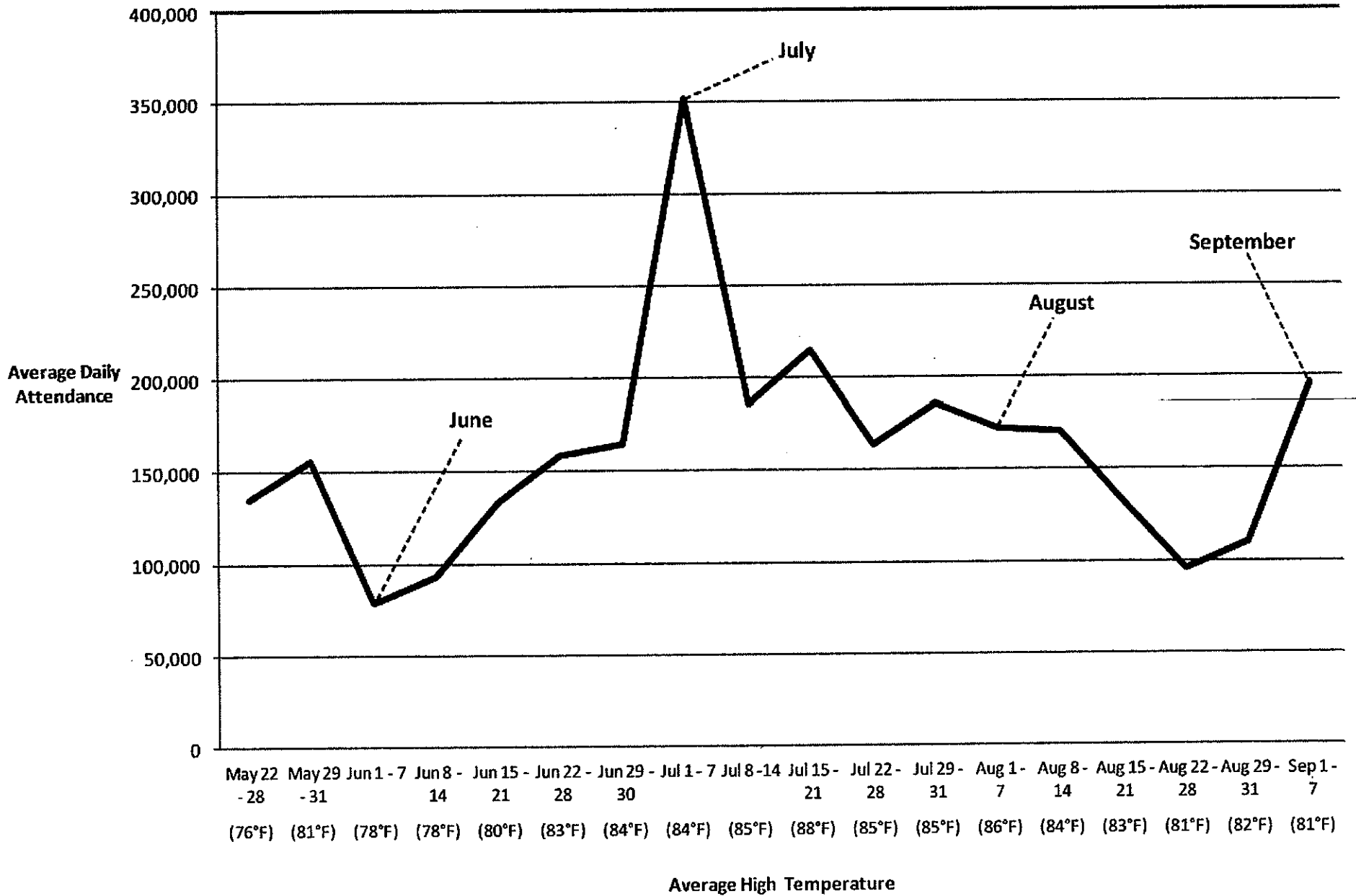
We should additionally note that our outdoor pools see a different usership pattern than our beaches as the summer continues. Beach attendance peaks on the July 4 weekend, and sees another usership spike during Labor Day. Unlike the beaches, however, pool attendance tends to gradually decline as the summer progresses, resulting in an average daily pool attendance of 11,550 at the end of the summer, as opposed to an average daily attendance of 200,000 at our beaches. If pools were to operate on weekends only in September, as the legislation suggests would be permitted at the Parks Commissioner's discretion, pool water quality and mechanical systems must still be monitored and maintained by staff constantly, including weekdays, and a 24-hour security presence will still be necessary.

Despite these complications, it should be noted that we may be able to scale the operations for these beaches and pools beyond Labor Day, to reflect our staff capacity and meet existing demand. At our beaches, we are able to scale the amount of beachfront swimming areas supervised by lifeguards throughout the season. Earlier in the summer, when our workforce is smaller, we can limit the stretches of beach at which swimming is permitted, corresponding with popular stretches of beach with major entry points and access to public transportation. Similarly, pools could be staffed with a limited lifeguard corps by either reducing swimming areas in pools using flotation demarcations, or through the strategic opening of specific pools, using usage statistics and the proximity of nearby pools as a guide. Additionally, city residents can always take advantage of our 35 recreation centers, which provide programming and activities in a climate-controlled facility, and New York children can enjoy the more than 750 spray showers throughout in our parks and playgrounds that are turned on whenever the temperature rises above 80 degrees.

While extending the season of our city's beaches and pools presents some significant challenges, we look forward to working with the City Council and the Administration to explore possible options to find an optimal solution. We thank Council Member Levine and his colleagues for beginning an important conversation with this proposed legislation. We agree that extending the beach season beyond Labor Day could be a popular addition to the outdoor swimming season in New York, provided we can operate a safe and substantive program that adequately serves the demand that exists, to ensure our parks and facilities can be enjoyed by as many New Yorkers as possible.

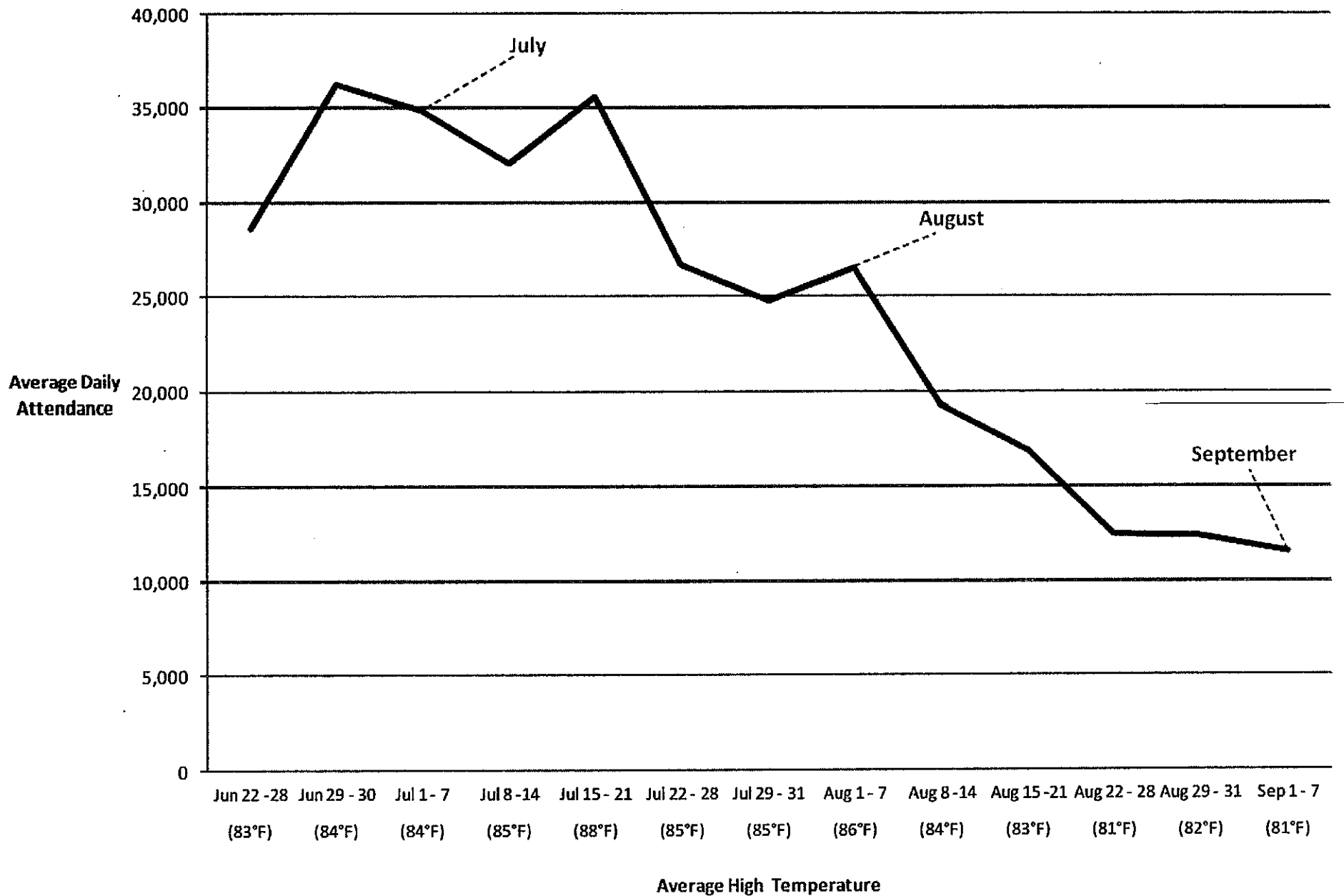
Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this afternoon. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

## Weekly Beach Attendance and High Temperatures Calendar Years 2005 - 2014

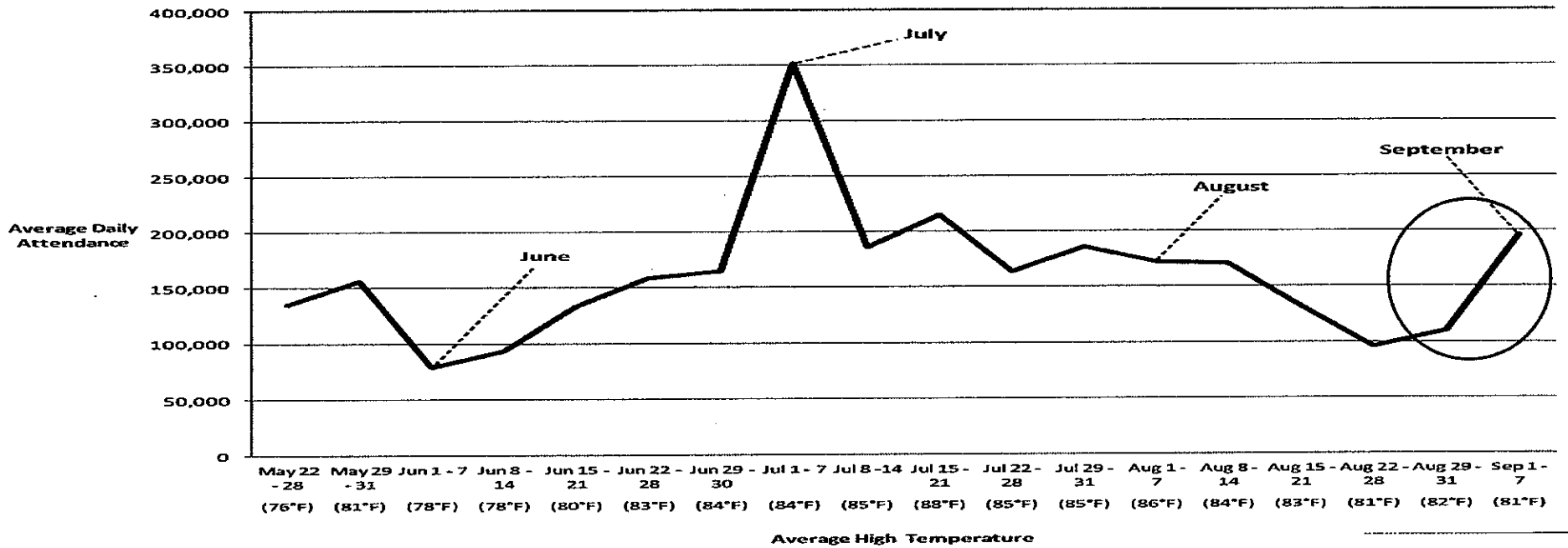


# Weekly Pool Attendance and High Temperatures

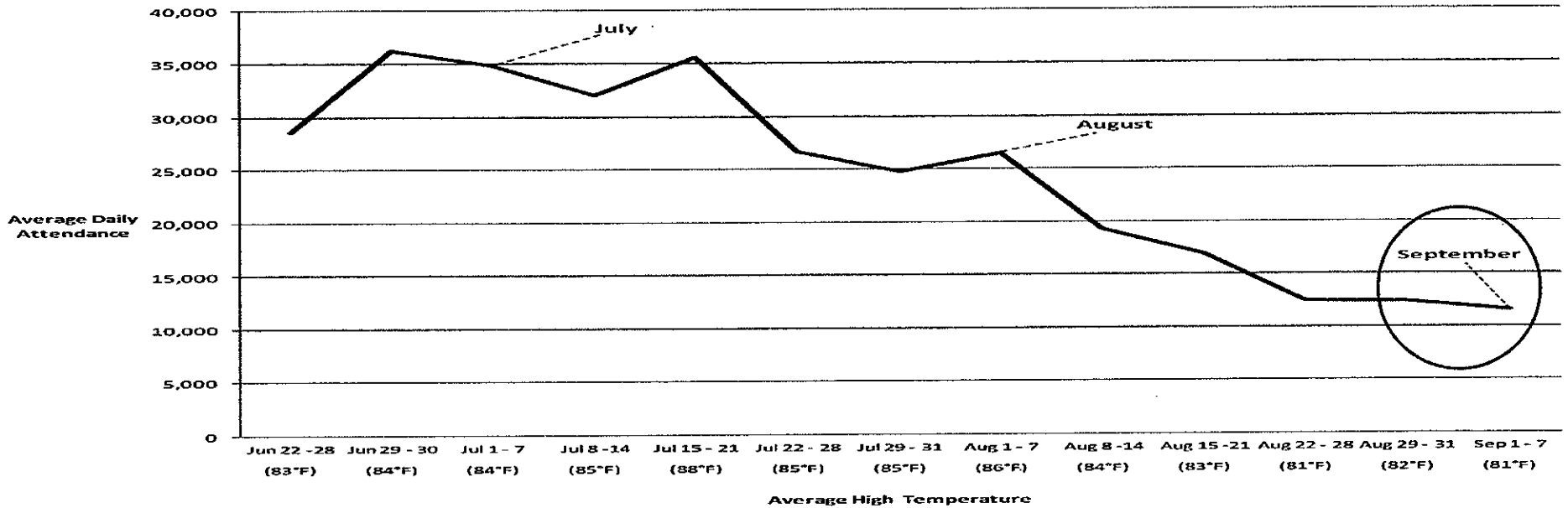
## Calendar Years 2005 - 2014



### Weekly Beach Attendance and High Temperatures Calendar Years 2005 - 2014



### Weekly Pool Attendance and High Temperatures Calendar Years 2005 - 2014



Testimony of Henry A. Garrido

Executive Director, District Council 37, AFSCME

Before the City Council Committee on Parks and  
Recreation

Hon. Melissa Mark-Viverito

Speaker of the Council

Hon. Mark D. Levene

Chair, Committee on Parks and Recreation

April 21, 2015

Good afternoon. My name is Henry Garrido. I'm the Executive Director of District Council 37, AFSCME, New York City's largest municipal employee union with over 100,000 members.

I'm here today to testify regarding the Parks Department Budget for Fiscal Year 2016, which begins on July 1, a little more than two months away.

The Council would like to extend the summer pool and beach season past the traditional Labor Day end of the summer season. District Council 37's members include the lifeguards and lifeguard supervisors, maintenance workers and PEP officers that make the pools and beaches safe for the millions of New Yorkers that use these facilities every summer.

We believe it's appropriate to extend the summer seasons at pools and beaches because September is often a hot month with many sunny days that extend past Labor Day. Young people are especially likely to go to the beach or to the nearest pool while the days are longer and also on weekends.

Remember that last year, the hottest day of the year was the day after Labor Day, when beaches and outdoor pools were officially closed. The City and



the Parks Department have an obligation to provide a safe bathing and recreation environment as long as people are using the beaches and the weather is warm.

#### Keeping the beaches and pools open past Labor Day

requires funding lifeguards, lifeguard supervisors and other supporting staff and titles, including Park Enforcement Police (PEPs) and City Park Workers (CPWs) who do the maintenance work. As of right now, the Fiscal Year 2016 Budget is short \$11.2 million that was provided by the Council in the current year's budget to support five Parks Department initiatives:

- \$3.7 million for parks maintenance;
- \$5 million for Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) officers;
- \$1 million for tree pruning;
- \$750 thousand for tree stumps removal and,
- \$750 thousand for gardeners for the Parks Equity Initiative program.

The Fiscal Year 2016 Preliminary Budget does not include any funding for these initiatives. If not restored, the lack of funds will result in the loss of approximately 230 workers including 80 PEP officers, 50 gardeners, and 100 City Park Workers (CPW).

We cannot separate the funding for extension of the summer season without also addressing the funding needs of other job titles that keep Parks, beaches, pools clean and safe.

These workers represent a large part of the Department's workforce responsible for park maintenance, cleanliness, and supervised recreation. Keeping these jobs in place and allowing for proper maintenance of parks, pools and beaches ultimately reduces the cost of maintenance of these vital City assets.

The loss of 230 jobs would be catastrophic to our hard-working Parks members but would also be a disaster for the Parks themselves. All our members at Parks work as a team to do the vital work that keep the Parks safe, clean and a properly supervised destination for millions of our fellow New Yorkers as well as visitors from around the world.

If the funding necessary to extend the summer season past Labor Day AND save the 230 member's jobs who could be laid off July 1<sup>st</sup> is not included in next year's budget, overwhelmingly, the members that stand to lose their jobs are African American and Latino. Job cuts to the Parks Department would be catastrophic to Black and Latino families and their neighborhoods. Our members live in the City and often in the very communities in which they work.

For every worker that is laid off, it costs the City more in healthcare costs, unemployment, food stamps, lost rent, and lost taxes than can possibly be saved on their salaries.

Firing people, cutting jobs, opportunity, and hope is NEVER the answer. Extend the summer bathing season AND restore the money needed to preserve our member's jobs.

Finally, this funding should be baselined so that we do not have to have this battle every year and we can bring some certainty to the folks who do this vital work, and to the maintenance and operations of the Parks Department.

Thank you for your time today. I'll be happy to answer any questions.

###

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/22/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tanith Pereira

Address: 235 Eldridge street Apt 1 NY NY 10002

I represent: NYC Lifeguards

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/22/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dannelly Rodriguez

Address: 20-45 9th st Apt 506

I represent: NYC Lifeguards

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/22/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Peter Stein

Address: 128 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: President, L 508, DC 37

Address: Lifeguard Supervisors

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

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Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/22/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Franklin Page

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: President, L461, DC37

Address: Lifeguard local

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marlena Giga (Rep)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Local 983

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 629 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/22/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Liam Kavanagh

Address: 830 5th Ave

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/22/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joe Puleo

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: President, L 983, DC37

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4.22.15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tupper Thomas

Address: 65 Broad St., 10004

I represent: New Yorkers for Parks

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 679 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 4/22/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kate Spellman

Address: 870 5th Ave

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Appearance Card

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

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Geoffrey Croft

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYC Parks Advocate

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 4/22/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Arthur Miller

Address: 154 Brighton 17th St. Bklyn 11235

I represent: DC-37

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 4/22/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Henry Garrido

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: Executive Director, DC37

Address: \_\_\_\_\_