



**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committee on Parks & Recreation
Oversight Hearing: Equity Initiatives**

February 28, 2018

Testimony By: Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP, Commissioner

Good afternoon, Chair Grodenchik, and members of the Committee on Parks & Recreation. Congratulations to those Council Members who have been newly elected or appointed to this committee. I am Mitchell Silver, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. Thank you for inviting me here today to provide an update on our agency's Equity Initiatives.

Equity means fairness, which serves as a guiding principle for this administration, as reflected in the well-publicized efforts to build and preserve affordable housing, provide Universal Pre-K and 3-K, and keep our streets safer through Vision Zero. But this commitment to equity also infuses and informs everything we do as an agency here at NYC Parks. For many years, the benefits of our park system, so vital for our city's health and happiness, were not enjoyed equally by all New Yorkers. For many of us, our city parks serve as our front yard, back yard, and vacation destination. Thanks to the leadership of Mayor de Blasio and through a strong partnership with the City Council and Borough Presidents, we've made tremendous progress over the past four years in fulfilling our commitment to a more inclusive and innovative park system.

We demonstrated our commitment to equity early on in this administration. In the Fall of 2014, shortly after my arrival as Commissioner, NYC Parks announced the strategic framework which embodies these priority values: our Framework for an Equitable Future. This framework outlined our commitment to create and care for thriving, vibrant public spaces for all New Yorkers, provide programming for neighborhoods in need, standardize our maintenance efforts across the park system, and expand public access to green and open space. The Framework for an Equitable Future continues to serve as our agency's "blueprint," guiding our efforts to protect the investments in parks that we have already made, while improving the quality, accessibility, resiliency and sustainability of the overall park system that serves New York City's diverse neighborhoods. It has also spurred our efforts to prioritize public input and increase community and stakeholder engagement, so we can hear directly from the users and visitors that benefit from these parks, and develop innovative and data-driven approaches to design, plan, develop, and care for our parks.

Most notably, the Framework called for the strategic allocation of City capital investment to benefit high-need communities and park properties that had seen little to no investment in decades. To accomplish this goal, the Framework for an Equitable Future included a signature program-- the Community Parks Initiative, also known as CPI. Since launching in late 2014, the City has allocated more than \$318 million dollars in Mayoral funding through the Community Parks Initiative, dedicated to delivering capital improvements, enhanced programming, maintenance, and community partnership development to the neighborhood parks that need it the most, in a way that is inclusive and equitable.

The amazingly transformative impact of CPI is already being felt in communities all over New York City, as New Yorkers see parks that had been ignored and unloved become the amazing green and open spaces that all New Yorkers deserve. Through CPI, we are fully reconstructing 67 neighborhood parks and playgrounds. Where traditional capital projects often focus on replacing a singular park feature or amenity, CPI has allowed us to completely re-imagine these parks, some of which resembled parking lots more than parks, with the help of community members to create accessible, multi-generational spaces for all New Yorkers. Building on our broader commitment to streamline the capital process and

keep parks projects moving, I'm pleased to update you that all these major projects are all well underway—14 CPI projects are already complete and have re-opened to the public with additional sites re-opening very soon. In fact, on Tuesday, March 20th, we will be holding a "Ribbon-Cutting Relay"-- ceremonies in five CPI parks across the city, one in each borough, during an exciting all-day sprint across the city. We invite you all to join us for this exciting day!

The first neighborhood playground to be fully reconstructed and reopened as a part of this initiative, Van Alst Playground in Astoria, was completed ahead of schedule in June 2017, after an investment of \$3.5 million dollars. It is now a major amenity for the community and adjacent PS 171. Another striking example of a reconstructed CPI site is Thomas Boyland Park in Bushwick. As the presentation on the screen shows, the site saw dramatic improvements including a reconstructed baseball diamond and a resurfaced and updated basketball court.

These 67 projects were identified with a data-driven approach that prioritized equity. At the outset of the program in 2014, we took a close look at the City's historic capital investment in parks, and discovered that this investment did not always reach the communities that needed it most, identifying the parks and playgrounds that received less than \$250,000 in capital investment during the previous 20 years. We then used demographic data to define high-need communities with above average rates of population growth, density and percentage of residents living below the federal poverty line. In this manner, we developed a target list of public spaces that fit within these criteria.

Through CPI, we have also been able to use in-house crews to provide targeted physical improvements in additional priority parks and playgrounds, such as repainting playground equipment and handball courts, sports-coating basketball courts, and replanting garden areas. The targeted improvements was our way of letting communities with parks that lacked investment know we care and we are committed to making immediate improvements while the CPI capital process runs its course.

Equity didn't only guide our approach to allocating these resources, it also shaped our design approach to determine which capital improvements should be made at these parks. To create our CPI project designs, we listened to the voices that needed to be heard—the local community members and park users that rely on these parks, so they could tell us how these reimagined parks could best meet their needs. In the past, public input sessions for park projects were often held during the day, resulting in very few attendees, and leaving most local residents feeling like they weren't included in the conversation about their public parks. So we moved the sessions to the evening, when more people could attend, and CPI funds were used so that Partnerships for Parks Outreach Coordinators could actively target community organizations to help get the word out and encourage local park users to attend. We set up special "Kids' Tables" at the sessions, so younger park users could brainstorm and provide valuable creative input, and they demonstrated that they had just as much to contribute to the process as us stodgy adults.

At one of these sessions, where we gathered public input for the CPI design for Stapleton Playground next to P.S. 75 in Staten Island, one of the attendees was a father who had grown up in the neighborhood playing there, and whose children now use the park constantly. As inspiring as energetic conversations were going on among the breakout groups, led by Parks facilitators, encouraging everyone to share their vision and creative ideas for the future of the park, the father approached me, in tears, and said that until this meeting, "I didn't think anybody cared." Lafayette Playground in South Brooklyn is enjoyed by a diverse mix of park users from different ethnic backgrounds and walks of life—young kids who love basketball, as well as older residents who use the open park space to practice Tai Chi every morning. At the public input session for its CPI project, the attendees naturally gravitated into clusters, as people often tend to do in public meetings, with students from the nearby school in one corner and the members of the Asian community in the other. You

could tell people were nervous about whether common ground could be found. As the students got up to present their ideas for the park, they were excited about space for basketball, but they also strongly expressed that the older park users needed space to sit and relax, and that open space for Tai Chi needed to remain a central portion of the park's layout. It was as if a fog lifted from the room, leading everyone to appreciate that our parks are for all New Yorkers to enjoy. CPI isn't just reconnecting New Yorkers to their local parks, we're strengthening the connections within our communities.

I'm pleased to report that over 2,600 community representatives participated in the community input sessions that informed the CPI project designs, allowing park users, neighborhood leaders, Community Board members, and elected officials to provide input on the design of the parks and playgrounds funded for renovation. Since the CPI approach has been so successful in engaging local community groups and encouraging participation, we have adopted these practices for all of our capital design community input sessions, so more park users can have an opportunity to contribute to the shape and feel of their local parks and playgrounds.

Though keeping our parks in a state of good repair is a priority, it's equally important that a park is active and programmed, fulfilling its potential within a connected community. Great parks are not simply reconstructed, but require great care, stewardship, and activation. This is why Mayor de Blasio has dedicated baseline expense funds to staff increased public programming and maintenance, as well as community partner capacity building. Through CPI, we are bringing enhanced public programming to parks and playgrounds serving high-need communities, including youth games and sports through our expanded "Kids In Motion" and "Summer Sports Experience" programs, Urban Park Ranger "Natural Classroom" programs, introducing kids from CPI neighborhoods to the wonder of New York City's natural areas, our "Shape Up" fitness classes for adults, mobile libraries and more. 1.5 million younger park visitors have especially benefitted from this expanded new programming over the past 3 years, thanks to the CPI-funded Playground Associates we have deployed to these neighborhoods—and this summer we will continue to provide free youth programming throughout the five boroughs.

We recognize that parks are brought to life by the communities that use them, so to engage the local advocates and champions that surround our parks through CPI, our Partnerships for Parks Outreach Coordinators have supported 300 community partners in CPI neighborhoods, providing resources and capacity building training for sustained stewardship efforts. Through this partnership with the City Parks Foundation, we have engaged nearly 38,000 park volunteers in over 1,200 stewardship projects within CPI neighborhoods, for park clean-up projects and community events, bringing parks to life and cultivating valuable dedicated partners that can help us care for these parks in a sustained and supportive manner.

I'm pleased to offer updates about some other major Parks capital initiatives influenced by our Framework for an Equitable Future. Given the needs of a fast-growing city, a commitment to equity means we need to continue improving our parks and playgrounds in all neighborhoods, especially those parks acting as "anchors" to their surrounding communities by providing large, diverse recreational resources. In August 2016, Mayor de Blasio joined NYC Parks in announcing the Anchor Parks Initiative, an investment of \$150 million dollars for major improvements at five large parks, one in each borough. Through Anchor Parks, we will invest in new resources like soccer fields, comfort stations, running tracks and walking paths, transforming these parks for the 750,000 New Yorkers who live in the neighborhoods that surround them, and make these older parks feel new again. The five Anchor Parks, each slated to receive \$30 million in major improvements, are St. Mary's Park in the Bronx, Betsy Head Park in Brooklyn, Highbridge Park in Manhattan, Astoria Park in Queens, and Freshkills Park on Staten Island. The five projects are on schedule, as phases of significant work in each park are underway. On the screen you can see some of the impact these sites will have, including;

- Astoria Park
- Highbridge Park

Our focus on equity also led us to find ways to maximize the impact and utility of our park properties, by focusing on portions of our parks that were being under-utilized, namely the entrances, edges and adjacent areas. Parks represents 14% on New York City's land area and streets and sidewalks represents 26%. In other words, 40% of the city is in the public realm. In the past, we failed to maximize the potential of our City-owned land, since the edges and sidewalks surrounding a park were an after-thought and rarely considered a true part of our parks. But in 2015, we launched the "Parks Without Borders" initiative, reflecting a new approach to park design, with the entire public realm in mind. It focuses on the accessibility and connectivity of sections where parks and the surrounding neighborhoods interact most directly, so we can better activate sidewalks and edges of our parks, make the park entrances more welcoming and improve sight-lines into and out of our parks, connecting them more seamlessly to the surrounding communities that depend on them for recreation and relaxation.

In addition to this focus on design, the initiative included \$50 million dollars in Mayoral funding, \$10 million of which was applied towards projects already underway, and \$40 million of which were dedicated towards eight showcase projects receiving large-scale capital redesigns. Embodying the spirit of fairness and equity, we selected the showcase projects by gathering direct input from New Yorkers, who know these parks best. We received over 6,100 nominations, for close to 700 different parks, roughly one-third of our park system, spread across all 59 Community Boards. NYC Parks evaluated the most popular park choices, to determine locations that had the most potential to benefit from this design approach. Our eight showcase Parks Without Borders projects are:

- In the Bronx: Van Cortlandt Park and Hugh J. Grant Circle/Virginia Park
- In Queens: Flushing Meadows Corona Park
- On Staten Island: Faber Park
- In Brooklyn, Fort Greene Park and Prospect Park
- And in Manhattan: Seward Park and Jackie Robinson Park

At this time, all eight projects have had their designs finalized and approved by the Public Design Commission or Landmarks Preservation Commission. 3 are undergoing procurement to identify a construction contractor, and the remaining 5 will enter procurement this spring. Pending a successful bidding process, we expect that all 8 sites will be in construction by early 2019 and completed in 2020. On the screen, are some wonderful renderings for;

- Prospect Park
- Seward Park

Beyond these Mayoral initiatives, equity will continue to be a lens through which we view capital expenditure decisions. In hopes of continuing to allocate City capital resources where they are most needed, we would like to partner with you as you consider making discretionary capital allocations for Parks projects in upcoming Fiscal Years. As you make those allocation decisions, we can help identify projects that prioritize the state of good repair of your district parks, taking historical investment data and other key metrics into account.

The spirit of fairness helps inform many of our other efforts beyond capital improvement. Equity also means that all New Yorkers can have access to quality green and open space. A major goal of NYC Parks and the OneNYC plan is to have 85% of New Yorkers living within a walk from a park by 2030, and we have made major strides since 2014, increasing

our park system "Walk To A Park" score to 81.5%. There are many ways to increase this access for New Yorkers, such as our expanded "Schoolyards to Playgrounds" partnership with the NYC Department of Education, opening more schoolyards to the public. We are also creating new parkland, such as the development of Chelsea Green, a new park in Manhattan that will bring roughly 3,000 more New Yorkers within a walk to a park. The City has also acquired the CitiStorage site, which will become part of Bushwick Inlet Park in Brooklyn, and the conversion of the Brookfield landfill to Brookfield Park in Staten Island signified the crossing of the 30,000-acre mark for City parkland.

Through our Parks Without Borders design approach, we welcome the opportunity to consider new entrances for a park, which can greatly increase the access for nearby residents that otherwise could have to walk around the entire perimeter of the park to enter. We've also clarified signage in some of our parks and playgrounds, to ensure that senior citizens and other adults have access to parks amenities like comfort stations, chess tables and benches. Though we do designate that, in specific children's play areas, an adult has to be accompanied by a child to be present in that area, we are clarifying confusing or conflicting signage about our park rules, which previously led senior citizens and other adults to believe they weren't welcome in an entire park property, as opposed to a specific children's play area.

We also believe that equity means that all of our parks should be kept in the cleanest and best condition possible, so we have standardized our maintenance efforts across the City, and improved our management practices to provide a more enjoyable park experience for all New Yorkers. For example, we all know our parks and playgrounds are being used seven days a week, but in previous years, they were only being cleaned *five* days per week, resulting in overflowing garbage bins and litter strewn throughout parks come Monday morning. In this administration, we have reconfigured staffing patterns to provide additional maintenance on the weekends, and the Mayor has provided expanded baseline funding for increased seasonal maintenance staffing increases, ensuring that our parks and playgrounds stay clean and welcoming, even throughout a busy weekend.

As I hope we've demonstrated today, fairness and equity are guiding principles for this administration and this agency, and this spirit infuses and informs everything we seek to accomplish. Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today and for all your great advocacy for Parks via your work on this committee. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.



**New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Hearing: Oversight – Update on the Parks Department’s Equity Initiatives
February 28, 2018
Lynn Kelly, Executive Director**

Good morning, my name is Lynn Kelly, and I am the Executive Director for New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P). I would like to thank the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation for inviting us to speak on this important issue today and congratulate its new Chair, Council Member Barry Grodenchik. As the citywide independent organization committed to research and advocacy for parks and open spaces we are supportive of the City Parks Initiative (CPI) and Anchor Parks Initiative, its progress thus far, and hopeful for its future.

We have previously supported past phases of the CPI and Anchor Parks and we are pleased to see the Committee recognizes the importance of and value in this initiative. However, NY4P remains concerned that despite recent changes NYC Parks has made to the capital process, it still remains a broken one, and the topics being discussed today reflects that deep frustration shared by every day New Yorkers, members of the City Council, and the agency itself.

NYC Parks’ effort with the Capital Tracker Tool deserves praise in its attempts to be transparent regarding the capital process. This tool provides invaluable information to the public and helps them understand the process of how a park is built, what to expect in terms of timing, and when they can see their park project completed. However, we would encourage NYC Parks to make this tool more easily accessible to all, particularly by putting it prominently on the homepage of the NYC Parks website, as it is currently not clear where to find this tool within the site. In addition to this step, we would encourage that NYC Parks update its CPI and Anchor Parks website page. While this page is helpful in that it provides a brief summary of this program, it has not been updated in some time.

NY4P is also concerned with another key aspect of the CPI and Anchor Parks program as well. As one can see from the Capital Tracker there are many small and neighborhood-sized parks that are in great need of improvement and may even be in the project pipeline but do not receive the injection of funding or priority focus due to the strains on NYC Parks’ budget. We would like to see real resources brought to NYC Parks so that they can immediately address the backlog for capital projects on these smaller parks.

Commissioner Silver has made it clear that it behooves the City to better maintain its existing open spaces rather than create new ones. NY4P does not disagree but we believe that any

capital infusion in a park no matter how large or small is moot unless a comparable maintenance allocation is made in the budget for NYC Parks to properly staff and care for these beloved spaces.

Before concluding, NY4P would like to note that unfortunately the newly formed Parks Committee no longer represents our City's parks users or its executive management as there are no women on this committee. Did you know that most of the City's largest parks are run by women? In fact, nearly 25 of the City's largest parks, programmatic entities, park improvement and advocacy organizations are all run by women. We are aware that the Council has less women than previously but we would hope to work with this Committee going forward to ensure that all New Yorkers are adequately represented.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak and I welcome any questions you may have.

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For over 100 years, New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P) 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. www.ny4p.org



**New York City Council
Committee on Parks and Recreation
Oversight Hearing – February 28, 2018
'Update on the Parks Department's Equity Initiatives'**

Deborah Marton, Executive Director, New York Restoration Project:

New York Restoration Project (NYRP) applauds NYC Parks for their vision in leading groundbreaking equity-driven initiatives such as the Community Parks Initiative and the Anchor Parks Initiative. We particularly thank Commissioner Silver, Mayor de Blasio, and former Parks Chair Council Member Levine for their leadership on these important strategies. We also welcome Council Member Grodenchik and thank him for his commitment to our city's parks and gardens. NYRP's work is driven by the belief that access to high quality open space is a fundamental right of every New Yorker. It's not just pretty or good for recreation. Every day, more scientific evidence accumulates, proving that access to nature and open space improves mental and physical health, reduces crime, and encourages economic growth. Because of all of this, our city's shared land is the very foundation from which equity grows.

As active participants in both the Highbridge and St. Mary's Anchor Park visioning, we have seen firsthand the incredible commitment fellow community partners have lent to the process. The Parks Department has dutifully responded to community priorities in both processes. At Highbridge, they are addressing issues such as deteriorating infrastructure, poor pathways, and problematic entrances. At St. Mary's, they are investing in more programming spaces, enhanced recreation facilities, and signage.

As the conservancy on record in Highbridge Park, we are working closely with the Parks Department on their Anchor Parks implementation strategy. We are also an active member of the Healthy and Livable Mott Haven partnership (HLMH), which remains heavily involved in St. Mary's Park's visioning and outreach. Led by BronxWorks, HLMH is a coalition of over 15 community based organizations such as NYRP, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, New York Road Runners, Randall's Island Park Alliance, Bronx is Blooming, NYC Parks, Partnership for Parks, and more. The group promotes more active park use at St. Mary's by delivering shared programs year-round and a monthly 'Second Saturdays' program from May to October each year.

Anchor Parks has made great strides to improve park infrastructure and facilities but groups like the HLMH are critical to sustaining local ownership of these spaces. We urge our colleagues in City Council and this administration not to stop with physical improvements. There are many ways that you can support these coalitions to continue building momentum far beyond the capital renovation.

Programming and coalition building are ultimately the most critical drivers of park use. Recent studies by the RAND Corporation demonstrate a strong link between parks programming and increases in usership, as well as increased interaction between neighbors and increased perceptions of safety.



Groups like HLMH critically enhance parks programming and should be supported to continue to grow through new funding sources. We recommend that the City and the Council develop a new funding initiative, much like Parks Equity or A Greener NYC, to help sustain their work in these spaces once capital renovations are completed. This investment would demonstrate a clear commitment to the vision of CPI and Anchor Parks in the long-term and the CBOs who drive them.

NYRP works under the conviction that environmental justice and social justice are inseparable and codependent. A truly equitable community is built on a foundation of partnership that begins with our shared spaces and these spaces are strongest when communities themselves lead stewardship and programming. We strongly encourage our City Council colleagues to invest in these programs and the local leaders who make them possible.

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February 28, 2018

MAS Comments to New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation regarding the Parks Department Equity Initiatives

Position

The Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS) believes that Jointly Operated Playgrounds (JOPs) are crucial to the provision of quality and accessible parks and open space in the city, particularly in underserved neighborhoods. The City has consistently acknowledged the importance of playgrounds in achieving its long-term open space goals and improving park equity.

Contrary to these efforts, a recent development initiated and approved by the City at the Marx Brothers Playground in East Harlem, sets a dangerous precedent that may put JOPs at risk throughout the five boroughs. In response, MAS urges the City Council to uphold the City's long-term vision, treating parks and open space as essential components of New York's neighborhoods.

Community Parks Initiative

The Community Parks Initiative (CPI) is the City's most important park equity program. According to the Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks), the initiative is an investment in neighborhood parks with the greatest needs. Parks selected under the CPI program are in low-income, densely populated, and growing neighborhoods. These are the communities that need parks the most.

There are 853 parks totaling more than 2,500 acres within CPI zones. 116 of those parks are classified as JOPs, and provide 144.3 acres of open space and recreation opportunities (see Figure 1). About a dozen JOPs within the CPI zones receive capital funding under the program.

Based on the latest available census data and the parks properties dataset¹, the open space ratio—an indicator of the degree to which neighborhoods are served by open space—is 0.93 acres per 1,000 residents within the CPI zones. This is 38 percent below the city median of 1.5 acres per 1,000 residents and 63 percent below the City's goal of 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents. Without JOPs, these neighborhoods would be further underserved by open space, which would have long-lasting adverse impacts on the quality of life for residents and widen the gap for the City to achieve its open space goals.

Citywide Policy

JOPs have figured prominently in the City's open space policy and have been continuously identified as key infrastructure necessary to accomplish citywide and long-term open space goals. *OneNYC* identifies playgrounds as having an important role in creating neighborhoods that promote an active and healthy lifestyle. JOPs make an indispensable contribution to *OneNYC's* objective of increasing the percentage of adults and high school students that meet recommended levels of physical activity.

Similarly, under the Schoolyards to Playgrounds Program, hundreds of schoolyards were renovated and opened to the public during non-school hours. According to the Trust for Public Land in association with its ParkServe campaign, this brought more than one quarter million more New Yorkers within a 10-minute walk of a park.

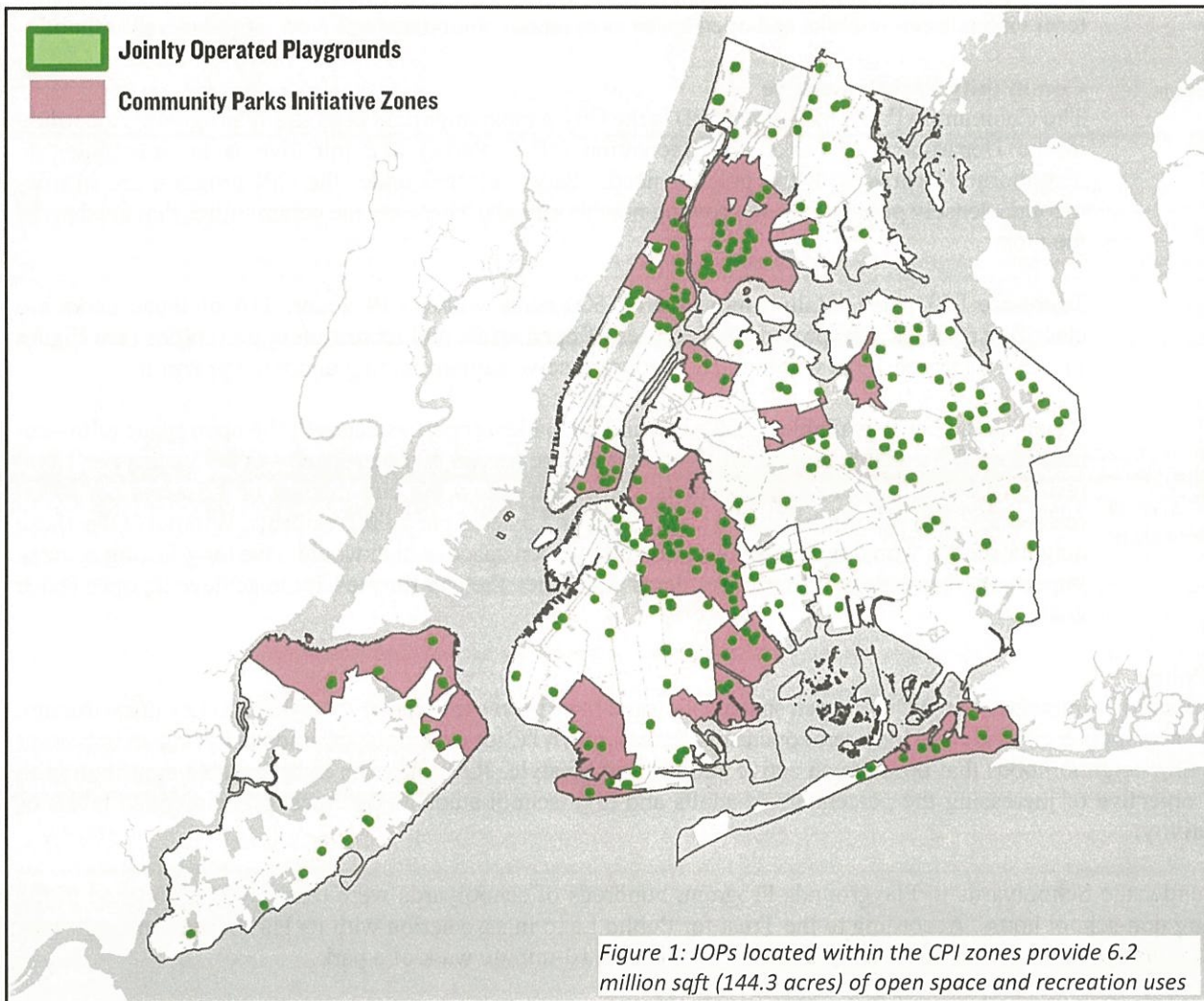
¹ American Community Survey 2016 Five year estimates for population and NYC Open Data Parks Properties (identifies City property under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks).

Negative Precedent

Contrary to its own stated open space policy goals, the Marx Brothers Playground development, initiated and approved by the City, has the potential to put many JOPs at risk. MAS, in partnership with several other prominent civic organizations, has filed a lawsuit to prevent the alienation of Marx Brothers Playground, a public park, and allowing a private developer to construct a 700-foot residential tower on the site.

The project sets a dangerous precedent with city-wide implications, putting 266 playgrounds across the five boroughs, including the 116 located in underserved neighborhoods, at risk of a similar fate.

MAS strongly believes that parks and open space are vital to livable neighborhoods. We urge the City Council to hold true to the City's stated long-term vision and protect JOPs for the neighborhoods most in need of accessible and quality open space.



Seabury Park

Bronx

FOR THE RECORD

I have lived, worked,shopped and raised children and now grand children in this community, Community Board 3, for over 35 years. When I first moved here Seabury Park was nice and well maintained by the parks department. Seabury Daycare Center was next door and we used to take the babies there daily on nice days. Over the past 30 years I have worked with the community, my children, my grand children and the parks department to beautify, clean and host events in the park. Our first annual Health and Wellness Day was held there; Theme "Building A Healthier Bronx". Here are some pictures of some events where we worked with the community. We have worked several community based organizations over the years to build our community such as but not limited to, Synergi Urban Garden, Future Star Productions, Wedhco, Mid Bronx Desparados and more. We have hosted events and activities to get the community involved, informed and provide them with resources.

We have worked with several park managers in the past who have supplied us with paint, new locks, scrapers, seedlings, mulch, garbage bags and a variety of other supplies to help us to support the park and community. We have participated, highlighted or supported the park in a variety of ways such as working with Whedco to bring the Boogie Down Booth in front of the park.

We also worked with MBD and the local farmers market to supply fresh fruit and vegetables to our community every summer for at least five years. Our students worked with the market as part of a partnership with MBD. Our community service students helped to set up and clean up after the market was closed for the day. We severed that partnership with the farmers market due to them starting to present food that was not fresh. We served the Seniors who were housed in MBD apartments and were bused to the farmers market.

We were honored to be one of the recipients of the Community Visioning Cohort 2017, which allowed us to purchase products to help our local garden, Synergi Urban Garden 2.0, which had been abandoned for two years. We were able to host a, it's my park day, have music and activities for the community. We also commissioned a local artist to put a mural on the wall you see next month.

We also received a Neighborhood Grant 2016 and with those funds I was able to support several events in the community such as Rita Jones annual Block Party, Synergi Garden, Annual Health and Wellness Day where we used the Puppet Mobile, supported Father's event, "The Soul of a Man" and more. We are grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with people like Ismael

Guzman, Rita Jones, John Dudley, Derrick Lovett, Barbara Nikonorow, NYC
Parks Commissioner Mitchell J. Silver, Bronx Borough Commissioner Iris
Rodriguez- Rosa and our Principal Sarah Scrogin our Parent Ambassadors and
community members to name a few.



FOR THE RECORD

21-36 47th Street 2nd Floor Astoria, NY 11105

February 26, 2018

Dear City Council Members,

Friends of Raimonda Park Community group started in 2012 shortly after an experience I had one night where I could not drive my car down the street adjacent to the park because the pavers (bricks) that decorated the areas around the trees in the park had been placed as a barrier across the street. As I removed the pavers from the street so I could drive down the road, I could see some kids in the park watching me. This experience prompted me to do something to address concerns like this and similar ones regarding the care and upkeep of the park. There was much need for the park to be repaired and to be cleaned up as the entrance of the park had become a dumping ground for discarded furniture.

At that time, Costa Constantinides was our District Leader and became involved immediately at the start of this group by touring the park, hearing our concerns and participating in our "It's My Park Day" events. He has since become our Councilmember for District 22 and has granted Friends of Raimonda Park allocation funds for the second year in a row this year and remains actively involved in our park events.

In 2015, the park was closed for renovation and in 2016, Denise Ryan and I teamed up. We attended and graduated Partnership for Parks' Fellowship Academy representing Friends of Raimonda Park. Paul Raimonda Park was reopened with a Ribbon Cutting ceremony on June 7th, 2016, and Friends of Raimonda Park threw a neighborhood Grand Re-Opening Celebration on July 16, 2017.

Through last year's PEI grant, we were able to host more than nine events such as a Bird Feeder Making Event, an Easter Egg Hunt, Earth Day Celebration and a Sidewalk Chalk Festival and purchased a shortage box, Imagination Playground Blocks and community board for posting fliers. Further park events included three "Big Reuse's" planting and composting events, three "It's My Park Day" events and four movie nights (through discretionary funding). We also hosted a Sing for Hope piano for three weeks in June 2017.

With this year's PEI funding/equity, we are planning a Spring Event, Theater in the Park, "Queens Rocks!" event, a Raimonda Day and more. We are also building a relationship between our park groups. We are looking forward to co-hosting more events with Friends of Astoria Heights such as the Pedal for Parks event in collaboration with Bike NY and Recreation.

We started with a handful of volunteers, and when we launched our Friends of Raimonda Facebook page in 2016, we had roughly 150 members, today we have over 400 members. Our past events have had a range of 60 to 200 people in attendance.

None of this would have been possible without the guidance of Partnership for Parks, collaboration with the New York City Parks Department and funding through the Parks Equity Initiative provided by our Councilmember, Costa Constantinides. Not only does this allow for our local community to come out to enjoy our park but it also brings our neighborhood together and fosters friendships and care and ownership of our park. With Paul Raimondas Park's beautiful new renovation, the care of the park has also improved; there has been a sense that if something is beautiful, then one treats it beautifully.

We are looking forward to spending time in our green space and hosting events, and as volunteers, we are grateful for the Parks Equity Initiative funding.

Thank you,

Friends of Raimonda Park,
Alberta Maineri-Burke and Denise Ryan

FOR THE RECORD

February 23, 2018

Dear Council Members,

My name is Lisa Ortega and I have lived in the Bronx and utilized Lyons Park (aka PS 75 Park) for over 24 years. In our South Bronx section of the Bronx Lyons Park represents many things to us.

Some of the history of Lyons park has not always been good. There has been many shootings and fights, and the park had been left to decay. My own son was shot in the face in that park at 19 while playing basketball, resulting in the loss of his right skull and his right eye. Even with horrific events such as this that have taken place there in the past..it has always been OUR park, regardless.

We , the community made memories there. Mixed in with some of the unfortunate events that took place there , we also had birthday parties, relaxed, enjoyed conversations while our children ran in the sprinklers and played with one another, etc.

Now more than ever this is a great opportunity for Lyons park to become a place of Healing, Reclaiming, Bonding and Rebuilding of our community ties. Since the park has been reopened , there has been a sense of hope that once again beautiful memories can be made there. Being able to have access to the Partnership for Parks Catalyst team members such as Dyaami, Leenda and Ted as been instrumental . They provided a space and facilitated meetings where we were able to come together and put forth our visions for our park. Many of us had different ideas and strong personalities, which the Catalyst team members help us to put into concrete short term and long term goals for our park. It was helpful and much needed. It gave us the opportunity to re-bond with one another and work as a unified force.

Realistically resources are needed to ensure we are able to have programming happening that engage our community in positive activities. The physical improvement are a priority as well. New , updated and safe equipment in our park is a must for us to fully utilize our park and feel safe with young children playing there. Often times in low income areas of color such as ours, we are forgotten and expected to make due with what we have. I suppose its because its what we already do , so we get overlooked. I am here to today to let Council Members know that our community and our children deserve to have access to the same monies and services that other more affluent neighborhoods have. Thank you for your time and your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Lisa Ortega

#Loving the
Bronx

FOR THE RECORD

1236 Virginia Ave, Bronx, NY 10472

February 26, 2018

Dear Sir/Madam:

Good morning. My name is Nilka Martell, founder of Loving the Bronx. We are the stewards of Virginia Park and Hugh Grant Circle, two beautiful parks within a Community Parks Initiative (CPI) zone. Since their reopening in 1956, the public has not had access to these fenced off parks. We are elated to know that both parks will be renovated through the Parks Without Borders Initiative.

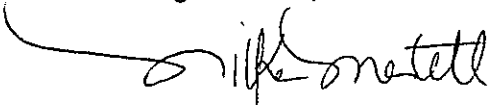
Last year, through the help of Partnerships for Park, Loving the Bronx received a \$5000 grant from our city council member's Parks Equity Initiative funds. We held a series of Fun Friday events, weekly themed programming providing free community events at Virginia Park. We were able to host 17 events and 2 *It's My Park* day service events.

Partnership for Parks also provided Loving the Bronx with an additional 23k from Parks Equity Initiative funds for this year's programming. We have over 20 events planned at Virginia Park and Hugh Grant Circle for 2018.

None of this would have been possible without the help of Partnership for Parks and the funds made available through the Parks Equity Initiative.

We look forward to further activating our local parks and green spaces to ensure that they are serving the public. And, as volunteers, we are grateful for the Parks Equity Initiative funds, so we can further enhance our parks and programming.

Loving the Bronx,



Nilka Martell

Testimony of Anita Reyes
On Lyons Square Park, Bronx, NY
New York City Council
Wednesday February 28, 2018

Honorable Representatives of the City Council: My name is Anita Reyes. Thank you for inviting me to testify today on the impact that Mayor DeBlasio's Community Parks Initiative (or CPI) has made on the neighborhood that I grew up in, and that today is still home to most of my family.

First, though, let me tell you a little about myself. Born in the Bronx in the early 1970s, I was the first American citizen in my family. Both my parents came from the Dominican Republic as teenagers and labored most of their lives in factory jobs to ensure my siblings and I got a good education. We lived near the corner of Faile and Aldus streets in what we then called the Morrisania section of the Bronx, a rough neighborhood if ever there was one. My sister was stabbed to death at 18; my brother died by a gunshot at 20. Today, fortunately, the neighborhood is a much friendlier place than it was when I was 19 or 20.

Lyons Square Park is one of the reasons why that's the case. The park, one square block in the shadow of the elevated Bruckner Expressway, has recently been renovated thanks to the Mayor's Community Parks Initiative. The park has been transformed from a desolate, crime-ridden patch of concrete buzzing with bullets into a bright spot in a neighborhood that now has hope. The physical improvements to the park inspire neighborhood residents to care about their community. I cannot tell you how important this is to me and my family. For immigrants from a different country, Lyons Square Park was our 'patio', or back yard. For all its problems and safety issues, it was still all we had. Today, it's still all there is for many people in the nearby area, but the CPI has made that "all there is" a whole lot better.

I, along with scores of residents and stakeholders, thanks to the Parks Department and Partnerships for Parks' Catalyst Program, have now begun the process of 'activating' the park, or in plain English: making sure that the community is organized, the park used properly, and that its programs serve the widest variety of people. Everyone doesn't always agree on what's best—we're New Yorkers, after all—but we do all agree that it can never go back to the way it was before. Thank you for your support of the CPI. On behalf of Lyons Square Park, I hope you'll see fit to continue and even increase your support for the park, and other parks like it in high-needs neighborhoods across the city.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 2-28-18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ANITA REYES

Address: 221 W. 251st #4A

I represent: CPI - Lyons Square Park

Address: Bryant Ave & Longfellow

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Appearance Card

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 in favor in opposition

Date: 2/28/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marilyn Johnson

Address: 1696 Vye Ave #3A

I represent: Community Member

Address: _____

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 in favor in opposition

Date: 2/28/2018

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marcel Negret

Address: 483 Madison Ave

I represent: Municipal Art Society (MAS)

Address: " "

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: 02/20/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nilka Marten

Address: 1236 Virginia Ave Bronx, NY

I represent: Loving the Bronx

Address: 1236 Virginia Ave Bronx, NY

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: 2-28-18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lucy Kotzen

Address: 138 Lafayette St

I represent: Friends of Fort Greene Park

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LYNN KELLY

Address: _____

I represent: NEW YORKERS FOR PARKS

Address: 55 Bond. NYC

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Date: 2/28/2018

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Fiverette Hamlette

Address: 105a Longfellow Ave Bronx NY 10459

I represent: Leave it Better

Address: 720 Greenwich street Manhattan

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in favor in opposition

Date: 2/28/2018

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Heather Lubov

Address: 830 5th Avenue

I represent: CITY PARKS FOUNDATION

Address: 830 5th Avenue

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Date: 2/28/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deborah Marton

Address: 254 W 31 St., New York, NY 10001

I represent: New York Restoration Project

Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Math Drury, Director of Govt. Relations

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

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

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Name: Mitchell J. Silver, Commissioner

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

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Date: 2/28/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lindsay Quartini

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: 2-28-18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LISA ORTEGA

Address: 1058 So. Blvd (#604) Bronx, NY 10458

I represent: Take Back The Bronx

Address: 970 Prospect Ave, Bx, NY 10454

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