

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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June 24, 2009  
Start: 10:17am  
Recess: 12:54pm

HELD AT: Council Chambers  
City Hall

B E F O R E:  
HELEN D. FOSTER  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Elizabeth Crowley  
Letitia James  
Helen Sears

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

Jack Linn  
Assistant Commissioner and Senior Counselor  
Department and Parks and Recreation

Mike Schnall  
Intergovernmental Affairs Director  
Department and Parks and Recreation

Edie Stone  
Director of GreenThumb  
Department and Parks and Recreation

Asia Joyner  
Student  
PS/IS 155

Jamel Williams  
Student  
PS/IS 155

Todd Abbott  
Teacher  
PS/IS 155

Karen Washington  
Head Gardener, Garden of Happiness  
President, New York City Community Garden Coalition

Ursula Chanse  
Director  
Bronx Green Up and Community Horticulture  
New York Botanical Garden

Sheelah Feinberg  
Director of Government and External Relations  
New Yorkers for Parks

Aresh Javadi  
Co-founder, More Gardens  
Board Member, New York City Garden Coalition

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

Devanie Jackson  
Reverend  
Brooklyn Rescue Mission and Bed-Stuy Farm

Sarita Daftary  
Project Director  
East New York Farms Project

Rhoma Mostel  
Member  
LaGuardia Corner Gardens

Ajja Worley  
Representative, New York City Community Garden  
Coalition and Project Harmony Incorporated  
Co-director, Joseph Daniel Wilson Garden, Memorial  
Garden

Johanna E. Willens  
Cofounder  
Urban Garden of East New York

Peter Kramer  
Representative  
Le Petit Versailles Garden

Kendall Morrison  
Representative, Woodbine Street Block Association  
Garden, Linden Bushwick Block Association Garden  
Director, Earth Matter New York

Lynne Serpe  
Representative  
Two Coves Community Garden in Astoria

Susan Howard  
Community Garden Activist

Ellen Belcher  
Community Gardener and Community Garden Activist

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

Philip Rossman  
Resident, Community Gardener  
Washington Heights

Pat McCarty  
Community Gardener  
Warren Street St. Mark's Community Garden

Yetta Kurland  
Resident  
Third District, Manhattan

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2                   CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Good morning,  
3 I'm Council Member--Oh, you ready? We're good.  
4 Okay. Good morning, Council Member Helen Diane  
5 Foster, Chair of the Parks and Recreation  
6 Committee. Today, we will be having a hearing  
7 dealing with the update on community gardens. I'm  
8 very excited about this hearing, as I am excited  
9 about community gardens, and the unique touch that  
10 it brings to New York City. And every year that I  
11 go to the gardeners forum or meet with my  
12 gardeners, there's something new I learn. So I'm  
13 very excited to see, number one, hear an update,  
14 and see what we can do as a City to help preserve  
15 these community gardens. At the same time, with  
16 this, in conjunction with this meeting, we will  
17 actually be conducting a vote on the street  
18 renamings. So, if anybody is interested in  
19 speaking on the street renamings, please make sure  
20 to sign up. If anybody is interested in speaking  
21 about the community gardens, make sure that you've  
22 filled out one of these and give it, given it to  
23 the sergeant-at-arms. There are a number of  
24 committee meetings going on, so members will be  
25 coming in as they come over from across the

1 street. I am joined by staff to the Committee,  
2 Lyle Frank, who is Counsel to the Committee, and  
3 Patrick, Patrick, I just couldn't remember  
4 Patrick's, Patrick's my go-to person, but I can't  
5 remember his name. Mulvihill. And I don't know,  
6 sorry that we don't have any more seats, as you  
7 can see, they're trying to make sure that the room  
8 doesn't fall on, you know, we don't drop. So,  
9 there's stuff holding us up. That being said, I'm  
10 very excited to have Edie Stone, Director of  
11 GreenThumbs with us. Edie always has that great  
12 forum at Hostos [phonetic] and I really do learn  
13 something new every year, it's very exciting, of  
14 course. Assistant Commissioner Jack Linn and our,  
15 our go-to person at the Parks Department, Mike  
16 Schnall. That being said, please feel free--Oh,  
17 and yes, thank you, Lyle. And having to do with  
18 Reso 1890, which is having community gardens  
19 mapped as parkland, we will be discussing all of  
20 that today. So, let's sit back, get ready to talk  
21 about community gardens. Let me just see--Is  
22 there a hearing next door? Can we move next door  
23 or no? [off mic: I'll find out] Could you?  
24 Just so we might be able to accommodate everyone.  
25

1  
2 Okay. We're going to find out, but why don't we  
3 start in the interim, and if we get to move next  
4 door so everybody can sit and be comfortable,  
5 we'll just quickly take a pause and run, and run  
6 across the hallway. [off mic] Yes, please.

7 JACK LINN: Good morning, Chair  
8 Foster, members of the Committee, I am Jack Linn,  
9 Assistant Commissioner and Senior Counselor for  
10 the Department and Parks and Recreation. With me  
11 today on my left, is Mike Schnall, our  
12 Intergovernmental Affairs Director, and on my  
13 right is Edie Stone, the Director of GreenThumb.  
14 On behalf of Mayor Bloomberg, First Deputy Mayor  
15 Harris, and Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe,  
16 thank you for allowing me to update you on our  
17 community gardens. During the nearly eight years  
18 of this administration, the Parks Department and  
19 its GreenThumb division have been strong and  
20 consistent partners of community gardens. There  
21 are about 700 community gardens located throughout  
22 the City, which serve nearly 50,000 New York City  
23 residents. After three decades, GreenThumb  
24 remains the nation's largest urban gardening  
25 program. A community garden can be a critical

1  
2 setting for urban agriculture, allowing GreenThumb  
3 gardeners to grow fresh, healthy foods for the  
4 communities they serve; or a garden can focus on  
5 producing beauty instead of food. Either way,  
6 community gardens increase civic participation and  
7 spur neighborhood revitalization. [cheer] Since  
8 1978, GreenThumb gardeners have successfully  
9 transformed vacant, unattractive and unsafe plots  
10 of public and private land throughout the five  
11 boroughs into thriving blooming gardens. The role  
12 of the community garden is particularly important  
13 in a city like New York. It's not uncommon that  
14 New Yorkers who live in apartments do not know  
15 their neighbors down the hall. Community gardens  
16 break down this anonymity. They serve as common  
17 ground and meeting place. GreenThumb gardens have  
18 a track record of community involvement and  
19 accomplishment. All GreenThumb gardens are  
20 expected to provide public programming, which  
21 brings together neighbors of all ages. GreenThumb  
22 Gardens also provide vital environmental and  
23 health benefits. Trees and plants reduce air  
24 pollution, lower energy costs, and help manage  
25 storm water. In fact, in some gardens, we harvest



1 rainwater runoff from adjacent roofs. Gardens  
2 encourage an active lifestyle, by providing easily  
3 accessibly recreational opportunities. The  
4 Department of Parks and Recreation are proud of  
5 what has been accomplished since 2002, to benefit  
6 GreenThumb gardens. The most notable examples  
7 are: the Garden Settlement of 2002, which  
8 resolved a dispute dating from the previous  
9 administration, which attempted to sell off  
10 GreenThumb gardens; the elimination of the  
11 requirement that GreenThumb gardens pay for  
12 private liability insurance; the substantial  
13 investment the city has made in new fences and new  
14 sidewalks for GreenThumb gardens; and the  
15 installation of now nearly 42, we'll finish the 42  
16 this summer, installation of 42 rainwater  
17 harvesting systems in community gardens. Through  
18 a partnership including the Council on the  
19 Environment, the Green Gorillas, the New York  
20 Restoration Project, the Trust for Public Land,  
21 the New York Botanical Garden, and the Brooklyn  
22 Botanic Garden, and others who participate in the  
23 Water Resources Working Group, which GreenThumb  
24 cofounded several years ago. Today, we are  
25

1  
2 pleased to participate in the discussion between  
3 members of the community gardening family: the  
4 gardeners, the City Council members who support  
5 gardeners, and an Administration which support  
6 gardeners. In national polls, gardening ranks as  
7 one of the most popular leisure time activities;  
8 indeed it has received an increase of positive  
9 attention through the garden planted recently by  
10 First Lady, Michelle Obama, on the White House  
11 lawn. [applause] We're clearly hitting the big  
12 time here. [laughs]

13 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Yes.

14 JACK LINN: The 700 community  
15 gardens in New York City are more than in any  
16 other city in the country. By comparison, the  
17 next largest program is in Philadelphia, where the  
18 Horticulture Society of Philadelphia manages about  
19 300 gardens. Boston has more than 200 gardens,  
20 mostly managed through private, not-for-profit  
21 land trusts. Just looking at numbers alone,  
22 GreenThumb's gardens are impressive. There are  
23 10,486 names in the GreenThumb volunteer gardener  
24 database. In 2008, between March 15<sup>th</sup> and November  
25 15<sup>th</sup>, which is the 32 weeks growing season, those

1 gardeners logged over 1,350,000 volunteer hours.  
2 And GreenThumb gardens, GreenThumb, I'm sorry,  
3 partners with many groups, both nongovernmental  
4 organizations, and government agencies. To name a  
5 few: Brooklyn Botanic Garden's Green Bridge  
6 program, the New York Botanical Garden's Green Up  
7 Program, the Council on the Environment of the  
8 City of New York, Just Food, Green Gorillas, the  
9 Manhattan Land Trust, the Bronx Land Trust, the  
10 Brooklyn/Queens Land Trust, the Trust for Public  
11 Land (which created those land trusts), the New  
12 York Restoration Project, the New York Community  
13 Garden Coalition, More Gardens, Cornell  
14 Cooperative Extension, Cornell University  
15 Department's of Waste Management and Soil  
16 Sciences, the New York City Departments of  
17 Sanitation, Health and Mental Health,  
18 Environmental Protection and Cultural Affairs, and  
19 the New York State Department of Agriculture and  
20 Markets, and many more. Along with financial and  
21 infrastructural support GreenThumb has provided  
22 these past 30 years, is it ahead of the curve on  
23 smart environmental and social initiatives for  
24 land management. Our focus on rainwater  
25

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2 harvesting and water conservation, native plants,  
3 street tree stewardship, nutrition education, food  
4 security and health food access, youth education,  
5 composting, heirloom and non-genetically modified  
6 seeds, are only a few of our initiatives over  
7 recent years that are now becoming mainstream.

8 The number I gave you as the total for community  
9 gardens in New York City was about 700, because  
10 there are different types of community gardens in  
11 our City. So let me run through that list. The  
12 New York City Housing Authority, for example, has  
13 60 children's gardens, with multiple participants,  
14 as well as 540 additional gardens. This is just  
15 the Housing Authority. There are gardens at about  
16 half of Housing Authority projects. Many of  
17 these, what they're defining as gardens, are  
18 tended by either individuals or particular  
19 families, and are more like the individual plots  
20 within our traditional GreenThumb gardens, which  
21 typically have ten or twelve such plots. If my  
22 impression of the Housing Authority program is  
23 accurate, then they have the equivalent of perhaps  
24 54 GreenThumb gardens, in addition to the 60  
25 children's gardens, for a grand total of 114 of

1  
2 what I will call "garden equivalents." It's a  
3 very, very large program, and of course they are  
4 active in exactly the same neighborhoods in which  
5 GreenThumb is active, which is the poorest  
6 neighborhoods in the City. There are 28 community  
7 gardens on private property. Most of those, a  
8 little more than half, are incorporated into  
9 Section VIII housing developments. There are  
10 another eleven active gardens remaining in HPD's  
11 jurisdiction, and labeled "subject to  
12 development." This year, GreenThumb provided  
13 gardening assistance to 115 school gardens on  
14 Department of Education property, and there are an  
15 additional 21 gardens at playgrounds that are  
16 jointly operated by the Department of Education  
17 and the Parks Department. There are 27 community  
18 gardens on the property of other agencies, other  
19 government agencies, including DCAS, DEP, DHS  
20 (Homeless Services), DOT, HRA and the MTA. There  
21 are 62 community gardens, of course, which are now  
22 owned by land trusts, created by the Trust for  
23 Public Land, and there are 50 gardens owned by the  
24 New York Restoration Project. These are gardens  
25 which TPL and NYRP saved in 1998, by purchasing

1  
2 them from the City at auction. And then there are  
3 the 282 GreenThumb gardens on land under the  
4 jurisdiction of the Parks Department. GreenThumb  
5 offers cooperation and assistance to gardens in  
6 all of the categories enumerated above. The 282  
7 GreenThumb gardens on land under the jurisdiction  
8 of Parks, are nearly all located in three  
9 boroughs: The Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan.  
10 Concentrated in the South Bronx, north  
11 Brooklyn/East New York, actually in an arc  
12 stretching from Williamsburg through Bed-Stuy,  
13 Brownsville and East New York; and in Manhattan,  
14 the Lower East Side, and Harlem and East Harlem.  
15 Although Queens has very few community gardens, it  
16 does have the three largest: the Kissena Corridor  
17 Park Community Garden is nearly five acres in  
18 size, and has 170 individual plots. The Roy  
19 Wilkins Park Community Garden is nearly four acres  
20 in size, with 195 plots. And the Floyd Bennett  
21 Field Community Garden on land which is now part  
22 of Gateway National Recreation Area, but which  
23 belonged to the City Parks Department until the  
24 fiscal crisis of the 1970s, is more than three  
25 acres and has 309 plots. Staten Island has only

two small gardens. The geographic concentration of community gardens was produced by a combination of history and funding source. GreenThumb was created in response to the City's fiscal crisis of the 1970s, when private owners stopped paying their property taxes, and surrendered their land to the City, leaving the City with more land and yet fewer dollars with which to maintain it. The majority of GreenThumb gardens were derelict vacant lots, renovated by volunteers. These community gardens, now managed by neighborhood residents, can provide important green space and serve an important community, as important community resources. What the gardeners did during the fiscal crisis was they relieved the City of most of the burden of maintaining this new inventory of property, for which the City was not funded. And that has continued to be true until this very day. GreenThumb gardens offer public programs that improve the quality of life for residents of all ages, so gardens may offer educational workshops, children's programs, food pantries, or community building events like block parties. Active garden sites create a stable

1  
2 force in the community that serves as an anchor  
3 for our area redevelopment initiatives, while  
4 making the City safer, healthier and cleaner. The  
5 Bloomberg Administration is committed to the  
6 success of these gardens, and has already taken  
7 steps to ensure their success. The federal  
8 community development program has been the primary  
9 funder of Parks community gardens. Two years ago,  
10 Commissioner Benepe agreed to make the first City  
11 tax levy dollars available to GreenThumb, since by  
12 then a few of our GreenThumb gardens were located  
13 in areas which were no longer eligible to receive  
14 federal community development funds, because  
15 changing demographics had raised the median  
16 incomes of those areas. During the 1990s, the  
17 city began selling off community gardens; but in  
18 2002, an agreement was reached with the State  
19 Attorney General that enabled the City to proceed  
20 with plans for the construction of more than 3,000  
21 units of affordable housing, while preserving  
22 almost 200 GreenThumb gardens. It created a  
23 process to ensure that existing City owned gardens  
24 are considered in land use decisions; previously  
25 they had not been. And that gardens on property



1  
2 being developed will be offered--gardeners on  
3 property being developed, will be offered  
4 alternate gardening space where available. A  
5 major burden on community gardeners was relieved  
6 when in 2006, it was announced that gardeners  
7 would no longer be required to pay for private  
8 insurance, the cost of which had skyrocketed to  
9 more than \$400 a year, when it was available at  
10 all. And we were having extraordinary  
11 difficulties in finding a carrier who was willing,  
12 at any price, at that time, to continue the  
13 coverage. The Parks Department has nearly  
14 completed an initiative to upgrade the physical  
15 conditions in community gardens. New fencing has  
16 been installed at 49 sites, and either whole  
17 sidewalks or sections have been replaced at 48  
18 sites, at a total cost of \$700,000. In addition,  
19 we defend community gardens from being infringed  
20 upon when construction work is being done on  
21 adjacent properties, which of course in recent  
22 years has been quite common, and very threatening  
23 and potentially damaging to the gardens. Parks  
24 has negotiated many settlements with contractors  
25 to protect and preserve the gardens in the best

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2 interests of the community. And sometimes of  
3 course we were actually also negotiating with  
4 other government agencies who were doing  
5 construction work, either in or near a garden.  
6 Under the provisions of the 2002 agreement, we  
7 register and license gardeners every two years.  
8 Groups send a representative to a GreenThumb  
9 registration session, where they are given an  
10 orientation to the program's requirements,  
11 provided with information, and given assistance  
12 with filling out paperwork. Through registration  
13 and licensing, the City provides support to help  
14 strengthen gardens, strengthen gardeners skills,  
15 and strengthen communities. GreenThumb's services  
16 take the form of materials and technical  
17 assistance, including many educational workshops.  
18 We do at least 50 each year, to which the  
19 gardeners are invited. In our process, first the  
20 garden group fills out a garden survey, and  
21 provides contact information and provides contact  
22 information, a membership procedure, bylaws  
23 really, and a membership list. The garden must  
24 sign the GreenThumb registration agreement,  
25 committing the gardeners to following GreenThumb

1 rules, which require the posting of information  
2 signage, for instance, and mandates that each  
3 garden be open for at least 20 hours per week to  
4 the public, and that a key be provided to the  
5 GreenThumb program office in case of emergency. I  
6 will add parenthetically, because I mentioned the  
7 20 hours per week, the, I've been talking about  
8 the things that the City has done. The gardeners  
9 have been meeting us halfway and then some, since  
10 the very beginning of the program. And the most  
11 recent example involves this 20 hours per week.  
12 We talked to the gardeners last winter about  
13 increasing the hours. For years, the minimum had  
14 been ten hours of open time during the gardening  
15 season, that was required of every garden. And  
16 what we came up with in discussions with the  
17 gardeners was that it was in the interest of  
18 everyone to increase those hours of public access,  
19 that the gardens would be more popular in their  
20 own communities, and public support--public  
21 support is really the most essential ingredient in  
22 protecting and preserving community gardens. The  
23 gardeners agreed, and this is difficult, these are  
24 volunteers, it's not easy for them to maintain  
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1  
2 these kinds of open hours, but they agreed to do  
3 it. And I think it's good for the gardens, good  
4 for the City, good for the neighbors. The next  
5 step in this registration and licensing process is  
6 that the group leader must attend a garden  
7 registration session. These sessions include  
8 opportunities to meet fellow gardeners and  
9 GreenThumb staff, to learn about GreenThumb  
10 services, and to submit registration materials.  
11 Lastly, licenses are issued to eligible gardens  
12 upon submission of completed registration  
13 materials. Gardens now on property under the  
14 jurisdiction of Parks and Recreation, are not  
15 eligible for licenses. We only issue licenses for  
16 the properties on, gardens on our property. But  
17 registration is required of all gardens which wish  
18 to receive either staff services or material.  
19 That is, supplies, from the GreenThumb program.  
20 So there are many gardens that benefit from  
21 GreenThumb through registration, that do not get  
22 licensed by the Parks Department. Moving forward.  
23 Our plan is to extend the two year licenses, which  
24 we have been executing this spring, for another  
25 two years, making them in effect four year

1 licenses. We would have to send out some  
2 additional paperwork to accomplish that. It saves  
3 us at the Parks Department a substantial amount of  
4 staff time that's required to do the meetings and  
5 to process all the paperwork, and it saves the  
6 gardeners of that same burden, a lot of their  
7 time, in their case it's not just meeting time and  
8 paperwork time, it's travel time, to get to the  
9 central locations where we do the registration  
10 process. So, by extending the existing  
11 agreements, which are two year agreements, and  
12 we've just about finished, not quite, executing  
13 this round, which otherwise would have expired in  
14 2011, they will now extend to 2013. Thanks to the  
15 labor of garden advocates, community gardening has  
16 come a long way in New York City, from the days  
17 when it was officially classified as an interim  
18 use of City property. With increased focus and  
19 attention on the importance of gardening and  
20 sustainability, we must continually think about  
21 how to help community gardens to be vital  
22 neighborhood institutions now and for many years  
23 to come. Among--although the popular image of New  
24 York City is that it is a place of steel and  
25

1  
2 stone, it is also a place of tulips and turnips.  
3 Together, we can keep it that way. I'm happy to  
4 answer any questions you may have.

5 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

6 We're ready. What we're going to do before we get  
7 in questions, is head next door where there's more  
8 room, so if we can get up and just get situated,  
9 and we'll start in about four minutes. Thank you.

10 [new audio file] Good? Okay. That's a little  
11 better, everybody can sit down, we have more room.

12 We've been joined by Council Member Letitia James  
13 from Brooklyn. Let me just ask a few questions.

14 Edie, you're not making a statement, you're just  
15 here in case we have questions. Okay. What is  
16 the Parks Department's position on the attorney  
17 general's agreement that runs out next year?

18 JACK LINN: I'm not sure I  
19 understand the question.

20 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: The agreement  
21 that preserves--goodness, these lights, now I feel  
22 like, what is it, "Give me my close up, Mr.  
23 DeMille," or whatever it is. [laughs] The  
24 attorney general's agreement that preserved these  
25 community gardens, and also created the affordable

1  
2 housing; as you know, the agreement runs out, and  
3 so therefore, we are looking to make sure that we  
4 permanently protect these community gardens. So  
5 my question is does the Parks Department have a  
6 opinion on the running out of that agreement, and  
7 what should happen to these community gardens?

8 JACK LINN: I had hoped that I had  
9 answered that by indicating that we are right now  
10 going through a garden registration and licensing  
11 process, that had, before I spoke, a two year  
12 term, which would carry the expiration of those  
13 agreements past--

14 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Right.

15 JACK LINN: --the expiration date  
16 of the attorney general's and mayor's settlement.  
17 And so what we've already done today carries  
18 beyond that, and I think as a fairly clear  
19 declaration of intent, if you will, about the  
20 future of the gardens in our view. And I then  
21 added to that, the intention on our part of adding  
22 an additional two years, which would run through  
23 2013, exactly four years from now; again, a  
24 further declaration of intent, if you will, and  
25 declaration of support for the gardens.

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2                   CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you. I  
3 just needed you to specifically say it. I got it  
4 through the testimony, but it's important that  
5 it's preserved for the record. And in terms of  
6 community gardens being mapped as parkland, does  
7 the Department have a position on that?

8                   JACK LINN: We're open to  
9 conducting an assessment of the gardens to  
10 determine the feasibility and the implications of  
11 mapping each garden as City parkland, and we look  
12 forward to working with the Council and the  
13 gardeners to make the best policy decision.

14                   CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you. I  
15 know we're all excited, this is a good happy, not  
16 a--so we can let them make a little noise, okay?  
17 [applause, cheers] Because we're all happy about  
18 community gardens, like this is--it seems kind of--  
19 -I remember when I first got into the Council,  
20 community gardens were kind of like the stepchild  
21 of gardens or the Cinderella, and I think we're  
22 coming full circle in terms of understanding the  
23 importance of community gardens for and in  
24 communities. Let me just ask some questions about  
25 your testimony, just for my own edification. Non-



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genetically modified seeds. What's that?

EDIE STONE: They're, it's one of the things also that Michelle Obama was talking about, that a lot of the large seed companies are owned by chemical companies who alter them in order to package them with pesticides or some other things, which have been questioned by many people as not being environmentally sound. So the seeds that GreenThumb provides are all non-GMO, or non-genetically modified seeds, and the seeds, plant starts that we give out are also grown out from non-genetically modified seeds. So although, you know, officially, there's not declaration that those are bad, because some people are concerned about them, we stay away from that.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Can you just state your name for the record, please?

EDIE STONE: I'm Edie Stone, I'm the Director of GreenThumb.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: So, genetically modified seeds, there's a way to have seeds that, in the planting, pesticides are already incorporated in them?

EDIE STONE: It's not that the

1 pesticides are incorporated in them, it's that the  
2 seeds are modified to tolerate very large  
3 quantities of certain pesticides that are  
4 manufactured by the same companies that sell the  
5 seeds, so that it encourages farmers to buy more,  
6 and use more pesticides, which--

8 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: It's a way to  
9 generate more business type of thing.

10 EDIE STONE: I'm not going to  
11 comment on that. [laughs]

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay.

13 JACK LINN: [laughs] In defense of  
14 Monsanto [laughs] the reason why these things are  
15 created--

16 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay.

17 JACK LINN: --is in an effort to  
18 find ways of providing more food for more people  
19 on the planet; whether this is the right way or  
20 not, is certainly, you know, worthy of debate.  
21 But I wouldn't write off this whole effort  
22 [laughs]

23 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: No, I was  
24 just, I was just making a connection, I might've  
25 missed a few dots in between, but--The eleven

1  
2 active gardens that remain subject to development,  
3 can you tell me what those gardens are, or where  
4 they are by borough?

5 EDIE STONE: You want to know the  
6 specific names or just where they're located?

7 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Both, if you  
8 could provide it, please.

9 EDIE STONE: It'll take me a second  
10 to find the right piece of paper.

11 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay.

12 EDIE STONE: I could tell you most  
13 of them from my head, but--

14 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay.

15 EDIE STONE: Most of those are  
16 located in The Bronx, and/or in East Harlem.  
17 There are two major developments that are going on  
18 now, that haven't been, haven't proceeded.  
19 There's on particular one that's in between Park  
20 Avenue and Madis--and Lexington Avenue, no sorry,  
21 Madison Avenue. It's an entire block, and on that  
22 block there are five or six gardens that are still  
23 in HPD jurisdiction. It's most likely that some  
24 of those gardens will end up being preserved, but  
25 the RFP hasn't even been issued yet for that

1  
2 development. So, right now HPD is going to  
3 continue to license them. The gar--the few HPD  
4 active gardens that are in The Bronx, still, all  
5 of them, they're all in Melrose, and some, I think  
6 that out of the ones that are in Melrose, there's  
7 only two that are still going to be developed, the  
8 other two are going to be, other three, are going  
9 to be preserved through some other mechanisms.  
10 And I still didn't find the list of the names, but  
11 I can find it, if you give me a minute.

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I sure will,  
13 'cause I'd be interested in knowing. I can move  
14 on to my next question. The 27 community gardens  
15 that are on other agency properties, who's  
16 responsible for caring for those? Do they, do you  
17 actually have community gardeners, or is that done  
18 by--?

19 JACK LINN: No, it's done by  
20 community gardeners, yes.

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay, cool.  
22 [pause] And the 27 that are on these other  
23 agencies, are those licensed and protected the  
24 same way as community gardens that aren't on  
25 agency land?

1  
2 JACK LINN: They are registered,  
3 not licensed, not by us, not by us.

4 EDIE STONE: Some, yeah, out of  
5 those gardens, the State DOT has created a  
6 licensing document, I mean the City DOT. There's  
7 a couple of gardens that may be on State DOT  
8 property, and City DOT and State DOT are still  
9 talking about it. The other agencies as far as I  
10 know don't have a licensing program, but just to  
11 give an example, the HRA gardens are almost always  
12 connected to or on the grounds of an ACS facility,  
13 so that the gardens are actually integrated into  
14 their property.

15 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay.

16 EDIE STONE: Or Department of  
17 Homeless Services, it's almost always at a  
18 facility that's operated by the agency, so same  
19 thing with Department of Education. The gardens  
20 aren't licensed separately currently, but it's on  
21 Department of Education Open Space property.

22 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And so it's  
23 highly likely that those community gardens are  
24 protected and will be preserved.

25 EDIE STONE: Obviously, I don't

1  
2 know what the intentions of other agencies are,  
3 but they're mostly located in open space that's  
4 already part of a development, so it would seem  
5 unlikely that they would be constructed on.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay, great.  
7 We are going to just take a break for a minute, to  
8 vote on the street renamings, which is--  
9 Preconsidered Intro, do we have a number yet? No.  
10 Preconsidered Intro on 41 thoroughfares and public  
11 places, street renaming. We've been joined by  
12 Helen Sears from Queens. When you're ready, oh,  
13 when you're ready, you can call the roll. Thank  
14 you.

15 CLERK: William Martin, Committee  
16 Clerk, roll call in the Committee on Parks and  
17 Recreation, Preconsidered Introduction. Council  
18 Member Foster.

19 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Aye.

20 CLERK: Sears.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Aye.

22 CLERK: James.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Yes.

24 CLERK: By a vote of three in the  
25 affirmative, zero in the negative, and no

1  
2 abstentions, item is adopted, members please sign  
3 the Committee report. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very  
5 much. Were you able to find the--

6 EDIE STONE: Just reading--

7 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay, alright,  
8 alright.

9 EDIE STONE: I can tell you.

10 JACK LINN: She's marking up my  
11 copy of the list. [laughs]

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Yesterday we  
13 had a hearing in Community Development, about the  
14 lack of access to healthy foods in certain  
15 communities, and something I brought up when  
16 speaking to DOH, was working with our community  
17 gardeners. And it was my understanding that those  
18 conversations had occurred. Is there anything  
19 from your standpoint that we as a City Council can  
20 encourage other agencies to do to get people more  
21 involved in healthy eating, you know, accessing  
22 food from the gardeners or the green cards or the  
23 farmers markets?

24 JACK LINN: Well, there is a great  
25 deal being done right now on those things. The

1  
2 Health Department has indicated their interest in  
3 expanding on the initiatives that previously  
4 existed. The New York State Department of  
5 Agriculture and Markets does a lot of work in  
6 helping to establish green markets in the City,  
7 farmers markets in the City, I'm sorry. There are  
8 more than 80 farmers markets in New York City  
9 today, about half of them are under the green  
10 market label, which means they are organized  
11 through the Council on the Environment. The  
12 others are not part of green market, but they  
13 relate to the State Department of Agriculture and  
14 markets. And people can not only purchase good  
15 food, but they can use things like win coupons,  
16 issued by the government, to help make those  
17 purchases. So you've got more than 80 of them,  
18 half of those by the way are on Parks Department  
19 property, and some of them are either inside of or  
20 just outside of, on the sidewalk and at the curb,  
21 of some of our gardens. So, at our gardens, you  
22 can learn about good nutrition, you can grow  
23 healthy food, and you can buy healthy food. And  
24 you don't need necessarily a green market to do  
25 that, to do the buying, but they're also CSAs, the



1  
2 Community Supported Agriculture, where you can  
3 purchase a share of some farmer's harvest. And  
4 he'll come in every week, with a delivery of  
5 whatever's ready that week, and you can  
6 participate with him almost as if you were living  
7 in his spare room on the farm. So, there's a  
8 great deal that's being done that is part of an  
9 expanding initiative on many fronts, to make it  
10 much more possible for all of us here in the City  
11 to get better, more nutritious food.

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you,  
13 we've been join--just hold on one just second.

14 EDIE STONE: - - could I just add  
15 one--sorry.

16 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: We've been  
17 joined by Council Member Elizabeth Crowley. We're  
18 going to allow her to vote.

19 CLERK: Council Member Crowley.

20 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: On the street  
21 renaming. Mmhm.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Aye on  
23 all.

24 CLERK: Vote now stands at four in  
25 the affirmative.

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CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

EDIE STONE: I was just going to add that some of the most successful nutrition education programs are the ones that are youth entrepreneurship programs, as well. There are a bunch of excellent programs. One is run by Brooklyn Rescue Mission, I think someone is here from there. There's also one at Added Value in Brooklyn, and some, a couple of other ones throughout the City, East New York Farms, where they're actually training local youth to grow and then sell the food at market. So another way that I think would be really helpful would be if Department of Youth Services could get more directly connected with those kind of programs, so that the youth funding can also be used for healthy food and nutrition. [applause]

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: That is, that, I like that. If we can make sure, Lyle, to follow up with Edie and work with whomever the attorney is for youth services, because we've been talking, even as we were doing this budget process, we were looking, and have continued to look for ways to, number one, get children younger and younger

1  
2 involved in just, you know, and I said it all the  
3 time, just knowing where food comes from, you  
4 know, for me black eyed peas came in a can, or was  
5 a group. Now, now I know. Those type of things  
6 that I think we're better off putting money at the  
7 front end than in the back end when, for whatever  
8 reason, they're not, they're in trouble, we rather  
9 catch them early. So that's a very good idea. If  
10 you could give, if you have a breakdown of  
11 community gardens by council district, that would  
12 be great. I obviously as Park Chair know a lot of  
13 the community gardens, but I think it would be  
14 very helpful for other council members, numbers  
15 one, to know that they're there, and if that can  
16 be done.

17 EDIE STONE: Yeah, we don't, we--

18 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay.

19 EDIE STONE: We can definitely  
20 provide that, but we have to, we need to follow  
21 up, 'cause

22 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh, yeah,  
23 yeah, not, not right now.

24 EDIE STONE: Okay.

25 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: But that would

1  
2 be great to begin a dialogue with council members  
3 as to the community gardens in their districts and  
4 actually what they're producing, whether it's a,  
5 you know, a vegetable community garden or a  
6 pretty, you know, a flowery one.

7 EDIE STONE: Okay. He said we'll  
8 give you the, for the 282 sites that are on our  
9 property--

10 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay.

11 EDIE STONE: We can follow up.

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: That's great.  
13 Thank you. [whispered] There was something else I  
14 was just going to ask. [pause]

15 EDIE STONE: I have the list, if  
16 you--

17 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh, yes, thank  
18 you.

19 EDIE STONE: Okay. Manhattan Board  
20 Ten, there is one garden that's still potentially  
21 threatened, it's called Truce Garden, it's on St.  
22 Nicholas Avenue, 145 St. Nicholas Avenue. In  
23 Community Board Eleven, this is Manhattan, sorry.

24 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Mhm.

25 EDIE STONE: There are, this is

1  
2 that one big, giant, block site. Friendly Garden,  
3 Villa Center - - , Villa Center - - Two, Genchitos  
4 [phonetic] Mission, Magic, which is not on that  
5 block, actually, and El Gayo [phonetic] Social  
6 Club--and I would mention that El Gayo Social Club  
7 is in the process of being transferred to the  
8 Parks Department as a permanent site. And in  
9 Manhattan Community Board Eleven, also, there's  
10 Jackie Robinson Tenants Association, which is--

11 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh, I'm sorry,  
12 wait, the Park Avenue Madison, that whole, that  
13 whole cluster of community gardens, what street is  
14 that? Do you know?

15 EDIE STONE: It's between Madison  
16 and Park, and 112<sup>th</sup> and 111<sup>th</sup>, I think. Is that  
17 right?

18 JACK LINN: Yes, that's correct.

19 EDIE STONE: [laughs] Sorry.

20 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay.

21 EDIE STONE: I don't want to be  
22 wrong.

23 JACK LINN: There's a baseball  
24 field right in the middle of the park.

25 EDIE STONE: Right.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay.

EDIE STONE: Which actually the community gardens are providing water for the baseball field there, so it's nice collection. Alright, Jackie Robinson Tenants Association, which is in community board eleven, there's an, that, that's actually on, partially on EDC property, so if this doesn't add up to eleven, 'cause the EDC ones are on here. Rincon Criollo which is a garden in The Bronx, is in the process of being transferred to private ownership of the Rincon Criollo organization. There's just, it has to go through ULURP, and it's not finished. There's a garden also in The Bronx, in Soundview, called Havemeyer Garden, which is also in the process of it being in an EDC development. Part of the garden will be preserved, but I don't know the whole story of that yet. In Bed-Stuy in Brooklyn, on Hart Street, there's a part of a garden called Hart to Hart, which is still under HPD's jurisdiction; that's in the process of being transferred to the Parks Department as well. In Coney Island, Surfside Garden in, is, and Senior Citizens Block Association of Mermaid Avenue, and

1  
2 Unity Tower Tenants Association, are all still  
3 under HPD jurisdiction and I don't, there's so  
4 many things going on in Coney Island, I, I don't--

5 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Right.

6 EDIE STONE: [laughs]

7 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Stay out of  
8 that one. [laughs]

9 EDIE STONE: And then there's one  
10 other garden that's on Rockaway Avenue in  
11 Community Board 16, which is also part of an EDC  
12 development project.

13 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And when you  
14 say that it is in the process of being transferred  
15 to Parks, what, define that for me.

16 EDIE STONE: In most cases, it  
17 means that the commitment to transfer it to Parks  
18 has already been made by the Housing Department,  
19 but there's some process that has to be completed  
20 before that can happen, some land use process,  
21 something to do with the adjacent development or  
22 something like that. But the commitment has  
23 already been made.

24 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And so when  
25 it's transferred to Parks' jurisdiction, that

1  
2 means it, and I know I'm taking baby steps, but  
3 that means it is under the purview of the Parks  
4 Department.

5 EDIE STONE: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And that when  
7 we're able to get community gardens mapped as  
8 parkland, it will be included as part of the Parks  
9 and their jurisdiction.

10 JACK LINN: Let me elaborate on a  
11 story that you may not be entirely familiar with.

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay.

13 JACK LINN: And it's been an  
14 extraordinary success story, and a story of  
15 extraordinary cooperation between two City  
16 agencies, HPD and Parks. And it's played out over  
17 the last now seven years, since the garden  
18 settlement. And has involved the Law Department,  
19 and has involved the State Attorney General, as  
20 well. There have been a whole series of swaps of  
21 property where we had a parcel that was protected  
22 by the garden settlement, but which was not being  
23 actively gardened. And HPD had a beautiful garden  
24 that was not protected, that was designated for  
25 development, where it was possible. And over a



1  
2 period of time, it proved to be possible in a  
3 number of cases. We traded land, and it was done  
4 in a way, very carefully, very skillfully, and  
5 this was Edie, it was Holly Light and her  
6 predecessor Mary Bolton and HPD, and Charlie  
7 Marcus at HPD, and just a bunch of old pros  
8 getting together. They preserved, they preserved  
9 HPD's goals of maximizing the housing units to be  
10 built on these sites, and yet still preserved more  
11 gardens than had been contemplated before, more  
12 active gardens, particularly useful in places like  
13 East New York, where virtually all of the quality  
14 gardens could have been wiped out. You know, so  
15 the garden settlement in a sense didn't really end  
16 as one event in 2002, but it has continued as a  
17 process, right up until today, and there's still a  
18 few swaps that are pending between the agencies,  
19 although we're, there's less to work with in that  
20 process now. But it's an extraordinary example,  
21 as I said, of cooperation between government  
22 agencies, and it's been one of the hallmarks of  
23 this administration, that agencies were, are  
24 expected to cooperate, and in this case have done  
25 so, and I think to the great benefit of the

1 gardening movement.

2  
3 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Yes, I do  
4 agree, and am familiar with it. I was able to do,  
5 work closely with HPD to do some swapping and  
6 saving of my own community gardens in my district.  
7 My concern, obviously, is just making sure that  
8 going forward these community gardens are  
9 preserved, because we know, especially in The  
10 Bronx, that when people fled and we've always  
11 talked, you know, about when The Bronx is burning,  
12 the people that invested in these community  
13 gardens are the ones that are still there. So, I  
14 keep beating home the point because I would hate  
15 for it ever to come a time that we are under a new  
16 administration where everything is development,  
17 development, development, and we don't see the  
18 need to preserve these community gardens.

19 JACK LINN: The gardens swapped  
20 back to Parks are now indistinguishable from the  
21 original 198, because their presence on the list  
22 has been blessed by the State Attorney General and  
23 the City's Law Department. So they are now part  
24 of that list of, offered for preservation gardens.

25 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: That's great.

1  
2 We have been joined by kids, fifth graders, from  
3 PS 321 in Brooklyn. How are you? [cheers,  
4 applause] Where in Brooklyn? [off mic: Park  
5 Slope] Park Slope. Okay. Well, we have Council  
6 Member James, wave Council Member James. She's  
7 from Brooklyn. So that's kind of cool, you get a  
8 school trip right before school closes, huh? What  
9 class is it? Is it just--[off mic] Oh, so you're  
10 the leadership in the school. Who's the student  
11 council president? [off mic] They're all equal.  
12 That's great. [applause] I like that. We're  
13 having a hearing on community gardens, and what we  
14 can do as a city to help preserve them, and make  
15 sure that for years to come, we'll all have nice  
16 little community gardens in the midst of our, you  
17 know, booming metropolis. So thank you for coming  
18 to join us, if you have any question, just raise  
19 your hand, okay? Good. They're like, "Yeah, we  
20 don't have any questions." So I lost my train of  
21 thought.

22 JACK LINN: We've been talking  
23 about swaps.

24 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Yes. That's  
25 great, so what we want to do, thank you, is make

1  
2 sure that for years and years to come, these  
3 gardens are preserved. I'm sorry, Council Member  
4 James has a question.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: First let me  
6 welcome 321, that's where I grew up, and so I  
7 salute you and the egalitarian nature of your  
8 school and the wider Park Slope community. I had  
9 the good fortune of attending a street fair this  
10 weekend in my district, in Prospect Heights on  
11 Vanderbilt Avenue, and I was introduced to some  
12 worms.

13 JACK LINN: [laughs]

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: [applause]  
15 Yes, yes. They were part of a compost composite.  
16 And so my constituents introduced me to my other  
17 constituents, and they did have some names. And  
18 we went around and we visited our gardens, the  
19 garden on St. Mark's Place, and a number of other  
20 gardens in the community that I represent. So,  
21 and I'm also very much concerned about the gardens  
22 that in, in and around the proposed project that I  
23 dare not mention, but I have to mention it,  
24 Atlantic Yards, the Bears [hissing] yessss, the  
25 Bears Garden, and other gardens that will be

1  
2 threatened as a result of this overdevelopment,  
3 because these gardens will now be in the shadow.  
4 So, is there any discussion with regards to how  
5 these gardens will survive, if in fact that  
6 monstrosity is built, which would, which  
7 represents, which is an entire City, and consists  
8 of 16 skyscrapers?

9 JACK LINN: It's an area well  
10 beyond our purview.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Okay. Fair  
12 enough. I had the good fortune of being in the  
13 Attorney General's office at the time that this  
14 agreement was negotiated. My question to you is  
15 in 2010 in September, it will expire. Do you  
16 anticipate renewing it, or do you anticipate  
17 renegotiating the terms?

18 JACK LINN: What we had discussed  
19 before you were able to join us--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Yes.

21 JACK LINN: --was that we are  
22 prepared now to extend the term of the licenses  
23 which we have been executing this spring, which  
24 hare already two year licenses, which means they  
25 go past the date of the expiration of the

1  
2 settlement, to 2011, and that we're prepared now  
3 to extend them for an additional two years,  
4 without any further action, which would take them  
5 out to 2013. Procedurally beyond that, there are  
6 elements of the garden settlement. For instance,  
7 the Garden Review Statement.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Yes.

9 JACK LINN: Which has been an  
10 invaluable part of the public review of the status  
11 of properties within neighborhoods. That has  
12 worked rather well. And no one has, to this date  
13 that I'm aware of, made any decision as to whether  
14 or not that particular procedural aspect would  
15 continue. I think it's only because that date is  
16 still somewhat distant before we would need to  
17 decide that. But the people who've participated  
18 in the use of that, creation of the document, the  
19 use of the document, I think have found it useful,  
20 and I think the community boards have found it  
21 useful. One could continue that without any other  
22 paperwork, you could simply say that, as a matter  
23 of policy, this is something useful, so we will  
24 keep doing it.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Given the

1  
2 development pressures in the City of New York, and  
3 particularly in my district, do you believe that  
4 that garden review process should be renewed? I  
5 mean, should be strengthened, and/or substituted  
6 by the ULURP process?

7 JACK LINN: It doesn't substitute  
8 for the ULURP process, it's intended to add  
9 something to it.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: In addition  
11 to. So, do you support that?

12 JACK LINN: Like I said, it's  
13 worked so far. But I say that's not a decision  
14 that we would be making.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Do you, do  
16 you support the resolution that's been put forth  
17 by the chair?

18 JACK LINN: My comment related to  
19 that--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Yes.

21 JACK LINN: --was that we are open  
22 to exploring the possibility of mapping gardens.  
23 It is indeed a complex issue. The process itself  
24 is very time consuming and potentially very  
25 expensive, so what we had said today about

1  
2 extending the terms of license agreements is  
3 something that we can do right now. That I hope  
4 and expect gives some sense of administration  
5 intent with regard to the gardens, to, even if we  
6 were to decide today, if we have that power, that  
7 we could all decide today, that yes we're going to  
8 map all of the community gardens, that process  
9 would take a very long time from today, to  
10 accomplish.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: No, I  
12 understand that, but at the same time, since this  
13 is the silver lining in this recession is that  
14 development has been slowed down. And so it  
15 appears that we have time on our hands. And so I  
16 would hope that, I know you do not have a position  
17 today, but I would hope that the administration  
18 would support the resolution sponsored by the  
19 chair, and that we would work to protect these  
20 gardens, given the development pressures that may  
21 come back once we rebound from this recession.  
22 [applause] And my last comment is, to what extent  
23 and what role do you see, do gardeners play, and  
24 other public members play, in regards to the  
25 operation of the GreenThumb gardens, is their role



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advisory? Is their role--what is their role in all of this?

JACK LINN: They are the GreenThumb gardens.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: So they have, they maintain it? They have decision making power?

JACK LINN: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: Yes?

JACK LINN: Yes. They can't, they couldn't build a building on top of one, they don't have that kind of decision making power. But--

COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: And hopefully we can take that power away from you, too. [laughter]

JACK LINN: For us, for us, our model, our model, of community gardening is one in which the word "community" is as important as the word "garden." Partly that's a function of the source of our funding from, for all these years, which is federal community development funds. And we have taken very seriously, the intent of that money. So, if you simply have a beautiful garden

1  
2 on the site, but no community members, that's not  
3 a community garden; if you have simply a gathering  
4 place, and no gardening, to us that's not a  
5 community gardening. The two coming together,  
6 that's the business that we are in, in our  
7 program. Both very important.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JAMES: I appreciate  
9 you for all of your work, and I understand that  
10 there are competing pressures. I do understand  
11 that there is a need, a desperate need in this  
12 City, for affordable housing. So I understand the  
13 complex issues of which you speak. But at the  
14 same time, I have, in my district, and as well as  
15 in the Chair's district, we have a significant  
16 number of children who are suffering from asthma.  
17 And so these children need open space, they need a  
18 place to play, and we need to do all that we can  
19 do to preserve these green gardens. And I also  
20 join the chair in supporting an initiative to put  
21 our young kids back to work, or to back to, back  
22 to work and to work, and working with the gardens,  
23 and working with the farmers, the green grocers,  
24 the CSAs, the co-ops, and the farmers markets in  
25 the City of New York. We have an initiative in my

1  
2 district called, it's entitled "Teens That Mean  
3 Business," and we are working to try to find  
4 opportunities for these young people. And this is  
5 an area that I join with the Chair in supporting,  
6 and hope that we could work on. Thank you.

7 [applause]

8 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you,  
9 Council Member. Council Member Sears?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: Thank you,  
11 Madam Chair. It's really a comment with a  
12 question. The problem with extensions and not  
13 really doing what the Reso calls for--

14 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Excuse me,  
15 just one minute. Thank you, PS 329, have a good  
16 rest--[off mic] Okay, good. Thank you.

17 [applause]

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SEARS: --is that it  
19 leaves future administrations to have the  
20 flexibility to do as they see fit with the  
21 gardens. So, it would behoove this Administration  
22 to look very seriously upon making their mark in  
23 having these community gardens turn over to  
24 parkland. And interestingly enough, we on the  
25 Committee here serve on the budget negotiating

1  
2 committee, and we're very much aware of the cost.  
3 We're very much aware of expenses, we're very much  
4 aware of what we have to cut, and those are very  
5 hard decisions. But at the same time, with  
6 development taking place, and we're having more  
7 and more concrete--and I speak as one who doesn't  
8 have one green park in her district, not one.  
9 We're a district of concrete and playgrounds, that  
10 it is essential to, and it's the responsibility of  
11 government to see that we have more and more of  
12 the greenery. And if something is written, and we  
13 pass this reso, and we work with Albany to do  
14 that, it doesn't give the flexibility of other  
15 administrations to do as they see fit. It should  
16 not be an arbitrary thing, it should be a  
17 reflection of the responsibility of the  
18 government. And we need to do that through  
19 legislation. So, I would just urge the  
20 Administration to look very seriously at this.  
21 Thank you. [applause]

22 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Council Member  
23 Crowley.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Hi, thank  
25 you, Chairperson Foster. This is interesting to

1  
2 me, this is my first committee meeting on this  
3 subject. And I live in a district in Queens where  
4 we have a fair share of green space; however we do  
5 have a lot of land that the MTA owns, that runs  
6 through the district, right away. Some of it  
7 hasn't been touched in years, tens of years. I'm  
8 curious to know how you work with the MTA, and  
9 have you worked with them in the past? And what  
10 would be the process? That, that's one question,  
11 and then what's the process of who's liable, if  
12 something was to happen on that land, if someone  
13 was to get hurt? Is there insurance that has to  
14 be carried?

15 JACK LINN: Are you referring to  
16 MTA property?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: I had a  
18 situation where they'd given it over for the  
19 GreenThumb program.

20 JACK LINN: For many years,  
21 GreenThumb gardeners were required to carry  
22 private liability insurance, in the event that  
23 something happened on the site that might create a  
24 financial issue. In 2006, the gardeners were  
25 relieved of that requirement, and now, should

1  
2 there be some kind of an accident, someone is  
3 injured on the property, if the gardeners of  
4 course have done something nuts, like they were  
5 running a whiskey still and a blew up, and someone  
6 got hurt, they of course would be liable for that  
7 one. But if they were simply gardening, they're  
8 treated no differently from ballplayers playing on  
9 one of our ball fields. If people use one of our  
10 facilities, and they are injured in the normal  
11 course of using that facility, the City assumes  
12 the liability. If the person does something  
13 extraordinarily foolish, then they themselves  
14 might end up with some liability.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: So it's  
16 the same liability you would have in a City  
17 playground.

18 JACK LINN: Yeah.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Okay. So  
20 then, the first question is back to the MTA, have  
21 you worked with the MTA to transfer land?

22 EDIE STONE: We, we have two  
23 gardens that are on MTA property now, one is in  
24 The Bronx and one is in Long Island City. As far  
25 as I know, the way that that has happened is that

1  
2 community organizations who wanted to start  
3 gardens approached the MTA, asked for permission  
4 to use the land, and simultaneously asked us to  
5 support them. As long as the MTA is willing to  
6 support the creation of a garden there, then  
7 GreenThumb is happy to support those gardens, and  
8 register them in our program. The, whether or not  
9 there's a license, that would be between the MTA  
10 and the garden group, and I don't actually know if  
11 there is one. Not one that I've seen. I think  
12 it's more like a memorandum of understanding or  
13 something with the community group that's managing  
14 that site.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: So you  
16 haven't had situations in the past where the MTA  
17 was willing to just give up the land to the  
18 community.

19 EDIE STONE: Not since I've been  
20 the Director, which is since 2001.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: And would  
22 your agency be able to help with the contacts, if  
23 a GreenThumb group reached out to your agency in  
24 setting up that dialogue with the MTA?

25 EDIE STONE: Sure. I mean,

1  
2 inasmuch as we know who to contact ourselves, we  
3 definitely, we do that a lot of times with, with  
4 all different agencies.

5 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.  
6 There being no more questions, I thank this panel.  
7 I would say that the Council is going to move  
8 forward with this resolution, and I would urge the  
9 community gardeners to continue to be organized  
10 and push this once it come through us, that it  
11 goes through the Assembly and the Senate whenever  
12 they decide to get back to work, so that we are  
13 protected permanently, and there isn't another  
14 time where we're looking at community gardens  
15 coming and being in risk of being developed once a  
16 license agreement expires or new administration  
17 decides that that's not something they're  
18 interested in preserving. If we go and make it  
19 mapped as parkland, then it will be permanently a  
20 part of parks and cannot be alienated or taken  
21 without some action by the government. So thank  
22 you very much. Our next panel, we have some  
23 students that have to get back to school that  
24 we're going to hear from: Janelle Williams, from  
25 Phoenix Garden, and Asia Joyner. [applause]



1  
2 Great. Oh, sure, you--they sure can. You go sit  
3 right down, sit right there [cheers]. Yeah, stand  
4 behind so we can see. And then, whomever's going  
5 first, say your name and age and your school, and  
6 then read your statement very loud, okay?

7 ASIA JOYNER: I'm Asia Joyner.

8 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Asia, I know  
9 you can speak louder than that.

10 ASIA JOYNER: I'm Asia Joyner, and  
11 I'm from class PS/IS 155.

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: What grade are  
13 you in?

14 ASIA JOYNER: Seventh.

15 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And how old  
16 are you?

17 ASIA JOYNER: Twelve.

18 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Twelve, okay.

19 ASIA JOYNER: To Whom It May  
20 Concern, the reason why we are writing this letter  
21 to you is we are concerned about what may happen  
22 to our garden. We are the students of PS/IS 155,  
23 and we work and play in the Phoenix Community  
24 Garden on Fulton Street and Rockaway Avenue in  
25 Brooklyn.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay, take your time. Tell us who you are.

JAMEL WILLIAMS: My name is Jamel--

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Jamel?

JAMEL WILLIAMS: --Williams.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Jamel Williams. Now I know you can speak louder than that.

JAMEL WILLIAMS: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay, thank you.

JAMEL WILLIAMS: The reason why we like the garden is because we have, we can eat fresh health--we can eat fresh, healthy foods and the store only have junk food. Another reason is many of us has asthma and we need trees and plants to help clean the air so we can breathe. We need the garden because it is very important to us. If--it let us give back to our community. And make it a better place. We like that it gives us a place to jump around and play the, play and climb on the dirt piles. Another reason is we like the garden because we get to work and help our plans grow, and the plans grow, help us grow

1  
2 when we eat them. We also talk a lot in the  
3 garden. The garden is also like a job for us, and  
4 gives us a sense of accomplishment.

5 ASIA JOYNER: Please, please don't  
6 take our garden away from us, please protect that  
7 our garden and all gardens in the city are  
8 protected. Thank you so much for your time and  
9 consideration and reading our letter. Sincerely,  
10 the kids, the students of PS/IS 155. [applause]

11 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very  
12 much.

13 ASIA JOYNER: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: That was  
15 great. That takes a lot of courage. I'm going to  
16 ask a few questions, okay? What is your favorite  
17 vegetable or fruit that you've eaten from the  
18 garden?

19 ASIA JOYNER: My favorite vegetable  
20 is green bean.

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Green beans?

22 JAMEL WILLIAMS: My favorite  
23 vegetables is spinach.

24 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Is spinach?  
25 And you've gotten both the green beans and the

1  
2 spinach from the garden?

3 ASIA JOYNER: Yes.

4 JAMEL WILLIAMS: Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And what else  
6 have you gotten?

7 ASIA JOYNER: We have gotten  
8 collard greens, carrots, corn, eggplant and  
9 tomatoes.

10 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And--

11 ASIA JOYNER: And different  
12 vegetables, fruits.

13 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Are, have for  
14 some of 'em, was it your first time tasting these  
15 vegetables.

16 ASIA JOYNER: No.

17 JAMEL WILLIAMS: Yes.

18 ASIA JOYNER: Well, not for me.

19 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Not for you,  
20 but yes for you? What was the first time, what  
21 was the vegetable you tasted for the first time?

22 JAMEL WILLIAMS: The first, first  
23 time I tasted the beans--

24 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Mhm.

25 JAMEL WILLIAMS: And--the snow

1  
2 peas.

3 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh, wow. And  
4 you like them?

5 JAMEL WILLIAMS: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And how--do  
7 you take 'em home and cook them, or does your  
8 teacher cook them for you?

9 JAMEL WILLIAMS: No, I take 'em  
10 home.

11 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh, good. Oh,  
12 that's great. We are definitely going to make  
13 sure that that garden, and all gardens, are saved.  
14 Thank you guys for coming out, and teacher, what's  
15 your name? [off mic] Todd Abbott? And is this a  
16 specific class? [off mic] I'm sorry.

17 TODD ABBOTT: This is mostly  
18 members of our garden club. We meet Fridays after  
19 school throughout the year, and then on the  
20 weekends and over the summer I come in on my--we  
21 actually have a phone list and I'll call them up  
22 and we'll come depending on the weather. We've  
23 been there for about two years now, and I actually  
24 made the mistake of giving some of my students my  
25 phone number, and so now if I don't call them,

1  
2 they'll call me and tell me it's time to go to the  
3 garden. [laughter]

4 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Great. I love  
5 that. Thank you very much, and thank you all for  
6 coming out. This is a great end of school year  
7 trip, huh?

8 JAMEL WILLIAMS: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Are you going  
10 to get pizza or something now?

11 JAMEL WILLIAMS: No. [off mic]

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh, wow,  
13 'scuse me, [laughter] you got a nice healthy lunch  
14 with vegetables, huh? [applause]

15 JAMEL WILLIAMS: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very  
17 much for coming. Oh, I'm sorry, can you restate  
18 your name for the record.

19 TODD ABBOT: I'm sorry, my name is  
20 Todd Abbott, and I work at PS/IS 155.

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very  
22 much. You guys were great. [applause] Okay.  
23 Our next panel, I'm going to call in fours. Is  
24 that okay if we do it in fours? Our next pan--  
25 [off mic] Well, it could be pizza with tons of

1  
2 fresh vegetables on top. And not a lot of cheese,  
3 so it's a good, complex carbohydrate. [off mic]  
4 Aresh? Or what? [off mic: Whole wheat crust]  
5 Whole wheat crust, right? Aresh? Karen  
6 Washington. Aresh? Are you speaking, or are you-  
7 -? Oh, I knew you were speaking, Karen, but Aresh  
8 didn't move like--Sheelah Feinberg, 'scuse me, and  
9 Ursula--Ursula Chanis?

10 URSULA CHANSE: Chanse.

11 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Chanse? Did I  
12 say--Okay. You can start in whatever order and  
13 say your name for the record.

14 [pause, background noise]

15 KAREN WASHINGTON: Well, good  
16 morning, I think it's still morning. And thank  
17 you Councilwoman Foster, you've been a great  
18 advocate for community gardens, and like you said,  
19 at one time we were Cinderella with stepmother,  
20 but now I see that we have a silver lining, and  
21 we'll finally get our glass slipper. [laughter]  
22 My name is Karen Washington, and I run a garden in  
23 The Bronx called the Garden of Happiness. I am  
24 also the newly elected President of the New York  
25 City Community Garden Coalition. [applause] I

1  
2 feel compelled to support legislation that will  
3 preserve, protect and create more community  
4 gardens and urban farms citywide. As a community  
5 gardener/urban farmer for over 20 years, it seems  
6 not too long ago that the City was plagued by  
7 vacant lots and empty buildings, mostly in low  
8 income neighborhoods. Those who could not move  
9 stayed and turned those empty lots into community  
10 gardens. Through hard work, pride and dedication,  
11 these gardens proved to be the communities' answer  
12 against blight and decay. Today community gardens  
13 reflect what is right about the City. Early this  
14 spring, President Obama, I'm sorry, President  
15 Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama, and Mayor  
16 Bloomberg, launched a campaign for community  
17 service. Let it be known that community gardeners  
18 have always been at the forefront of community  
19 service, volunteering their time and energy to  
20 make their neighborhoods safe and beautiful,  
21 asking for nothing in return but the respect and  
22 acknowledgement that comes to those who have  
23 served to make this City a better place to live  
24 in. It has now been almost ten years since the  
25 agreement between the gardeners and the City was



1  
2 written. We as community gardeners are now  
3 looking ahead towards the future. We do not want  
4 to repeat the past. The scars of bulldozers, city  
5 auctions, and unscrupulous developers still  
6 linger. We must find a way to preserve our  
7 community gardens for the next generation. We can  
8 all agree the importance of community gardens and  
9 urban farms. Our history tells that many years  
10 ago most of New York City was farmland. As people  
11 in urban areas start to question their food and  
12 energy source, along with the environmental  
13 consequences of global warming, we as community  
14 gardeners are making connections nationwide and  
15 globally. Community gardeners are becoming,  
16 gardens are becoming resource centers, tackling  
17 not only gardening issues, but social issues, such  
18 as housing, voting rights, open space, education,  
19 crime, immigration, the environments, and health  
20 and nutrition. We are not only community  
21 gardeners, but leaders. We see ourselves sitting  
22 at the table with government and nonprofits, on  
23 talks of food justice and injustice, food access  
24 and lack of. We find ourselves moving in a new  
25 direction of sustainability, urban agriculture,

1  
2 urban farms, cooperative, social justice, farmers  
3 market and farm stand. These words not even  
4 spoken ten years ago are now commonplace. As  
5 gardeners, we always knew the importance of  
6 growing our own food, tasting the fruit of our  
7 labor, sharing with those who had none, knowing  
8 the correlation that to be healthy one must eat  
9 healthy. But let us not forget that not all  
10 community gardens grow food. Some are bird  
11 sanctuaries, meditation centers, flowers and rock  
12 garden; yet, what ties us together is community.  
13 We must work together with our local government to  
14 be part of building a healthy food system. With  
15 the health issues that are plaguing our City,  
16 manifesting itself in low income neighborhoods and  
17 communities of color, areas where many of our  
18 community gardens are located, we must be the ones  
19 sitting at the table of government and nonprofits,  
20 not only identifying the problem, but being part  
21 of the solution. We need to start looking at the  
22 next step for community gardens. In the  
23 beginning, community gardens were valued for  
24 beautification, but now community gardeners are  
25 being recognized as part of sustainable

1  
2 agriculture. Farm Aid 2007 helped to spotlight  
3 community gardens as urban farms, which  
4 highlighted the need for sustainable agriculture  
5 and for New York City to look at ways of growing  
6 food. But it was our First Lady, Michelle Obama's  
7 action of starting a community garden at the White  
8 House that made New York City's community gardens  
9 the source for urban agriculture at the grassroots  
10 level. Each week we are being highlighted in  
11 magazines, newspapers, and other media sources  
12 throughout the United States and internationally.  
13 We as New York City Community Gardens are doing  
14 the following: number one, we are demonstrating  
15 strong leadership at the New York City Community  
16 Garden Coalition, that has helped resurrect the  
17 State Office of Community Gardens, along with our  
18 yearly forums, we are bringing forth both  
19 transparency and accountability to those in  
20 charge; two, we have community gardens now running  
21 farmers markets and farm stands, so that money  
22 made are reinvested into our community, but more  
23 importantly, low income neighborhoods have access  
24 to local, fresh, and affordable produce; three, in  
25 the South Bronx, a new co-op has opened, making

1  
2 partnerships with local farmers and community  
3 gardens to supply locally grown produce; community  
4 gardens are now chefs, educators, trainers,  
5 massive composters, farmers and advocates--we are  
6 partnering with local bodegas, schools,  
7 restaurants, churches, food pantries and soup  
8 kitchens, supplying them with locally grown  
9 produce; six, this year, the Department of  
10 Agriculture and Market funded a community  
11 gardening grant program; and seven, the Governor's  
12 office, the Governor's chef, plans to outsource  
13 community garden produce for next year's State of  
14 the State dinner event; eight, we are now seeing  
15 urban farms in Brooklyn and The Bronx; and nine,  
16 this year we are hosting New York City's first  
17 urban farming Olympics. [applause, cheers] Our  
18 expectation and hope is that community gardens  
19 will have a larger representation when it comes to  
20 food and health issues in New York City. We hear  
21 so much about ways of growing food on rooftops and  
22 vertical buildings. How about promoting and  
23 supporting the 500 community gardens and urban  
24 farms that are already growing food? [applause]  
25 We want to hear that the Mayor's 2030 plan

1  
2 includes the increase of community gardens, land  
3 for urban farms, and a community garden at Gracie  
4 Mansion. [applause] I have given enough reasons  
5 on the importance of community gardens, and why  
6 resolution 1890, mapping community garden as  
7 parkland, is needed. Let the next generation of  
8 gardeners look back on this day in history and  
9 proudly state that it was the people who stood  
10 united with government that preserved community  
11 gardens in New York City. Thank you so much.  
12 [applause]

13 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: I'm sorry  
14 about that, that was my daughter's school.

15 URSULA CHANSE: Good morning, I'm  
16 Ursula Chanse, Director of Bronx Green Up and  
17 Community Horticulture at the New York Botanical  
18 Garden. And first I would like to thank Chair  
19 Foster for holding this hearing, and for her  
20 continued support and commitment to community  
21 gardens, and the Botanical Garden. I am in  
22 support of Resolution Number 1890, which would map  
23 all GreenThumb community gardens in New York  
24 City's parkland, providing them with more  
25 protection for the future. I will just be reading

1  
2 a short portion of my testimony. Community  
3 gardens are at the heart of Bronx Green Up, the  
4 community outreach program of the New York  
5 Botanical Garden. Formed in 1988 with much of the  
6 Bronx reeling after two decades of decline, Bronx  
7 Green Up was established to join the momentum and  
8 passion of Bronx residents in creating beautiful  
9 green oases out of garbage strewn vacant lots. As  
10 every gardener knows, nurturing and caring for  
11 gardens is hard work. Bronx Green Up continues to  
12 support community members in their volunteer  
13 efforts to provide long term maintenance for these  
14 community green spaces. Bronx Green Up provides  
15 horticulture advice, technical assistance and  
16 training, and seeds, bulbs and plants. Community  
17 gardens tucked away in many neighborhoods are  
18 invaluable, unique resources. These gardens,  
19 sustained by volunteer efforts, often need  
20 additional support and resources to strengthen the  
21 infrastructure and programming opportunities that  
22 they provide. Increasing and protecting community  
23 gardens when the opportunities arise, particularly  
24 in areas with less open space, will aid the City's  
25 efforts in creating a healthier, greener, and more

1  
2 sustainable City. Thank you. [applause]

3 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: He'll come get  
4 it, hold on.

5 SHEELAH FEINBERG: Good morning,  
6 still. My name is Sheelah Feinberg, and I'm the  
7 Director of Government and External Relations at  
8 New Yorkers for Parks. Thank you for holding this  
9 hearing and thank you for giving us the  
10 opportunity to testify today. New Yorkers for  
11 Parks is the only independent watchdog for all the  
12 City's parks, beaches and playgrounds, and for 100  
13 years we have worked to ensure greener, safer,  
14 cleaner parks for all New Yorkers. We are here  
15 today in support of Resolution 1890, which would  
16 commence the process to change the official New  
17 York City map to designate Parks Department  
18 GreenThumb communities gardens as city parks.  
19 Approximately 86 existing GreenThumb community  
20 gardens and 225 lots are under the jurisdiction of  
21 New York City Parks and Recreation Department. A  
22 September 17, 2002 agreement between the City of  
23 New York and the State of New York, established a  
24 protocol for preserving and developing City Owned  
25 GreenThumb community gardens. But these gardens

1  
2 were not designated as City Parks. We recommend  
3 that more community gardens are developed,  
4 especially in neighborhoods with less than 2.5  
5 acres. Based on current trends, by 2030 59  
6 neighborhoods will have less than 1.5 acres of  
7 open space per 1,000 residents. That's according  
8 to PlanNYC. We encourage all new developments to  
9 incorporate open spaces and maybe community  
10 gardens that meets the needs of the community.  
11 Last month, New Yorkers for Parks released updated  
12 council district profiles, detailing parks and  
13 recreational spaces in each council district. The  
14 following data comes from the Council, City  
15 Council district profiles, which indicate the  
16 following about community gardens and open spaces  
17 in New York City. For example, in Council  
18 District 23 in Queens, there are no community  
19 gardens. In Council Districts Four and Five in  
20 Manhattan, 19, 22 and 30 in Queens, and 43 in  
21 Brooklyn, 50 and 51 in Staten Island, have only  
22 one community garden. Then Council District  
23 rankings in terms of open space provision, Council  
24 District Four in midtown Manhattan ranks 51<sup>st</sup> in  
25 parkland per 1,000 residents, that's actually the



1  
2 lowest. Council District Five, the Upper East  
3 Side of Manhattan ranks 45<sup>th</sup> in parkland per 1,000  
4 residents. Council District 22 in Astoria,  
5 Queens, ranks 34<sup>th</sup> in parkland per 1,000 residents.  
6 And finally, Council District 43, Bay Ridge,  
7 Decker Heights, Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, ranks 43<sup>rd</sup>  
8 in parkland per 1,000 residents. And we can get  
9 you that information for all the districts if  
10 you're interested in that, and they're all  
11 available on our website as well. We support this  
12 resolution because it will solidify community  
13 gardens as park space that enhances neighborhoods,  
14 improves air quality, creates gathering spaces,  
15 provides local fruits and vegetables, and promotes  
16 an overall enhanced quality of life. We applaud  
17 the gardeners and community volunteers for their  
18 continued engagement to strengthen community  
19 gardens. New Yorkers for parks continues to  
20 support the City of New York and State of New York  
21 legislation that increases City parks and  
22 community gardens and neighborhoods as well.  
23 Thank you. [applause]

24 Thanks. First of all, I'm going to  
25 thank all the folks who are here--

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Tell us who  
3 you are for the record.

4 ARESH JAVADI: Oh, Aresh Javadi,  
5 More Gardens and New York City Garden Coalition  
6 board member. Wanted to thank all the people who  
7 came, especially the kids, who I loved seeing  
8 here. Wanted to wish everybody a happy solstice,  
9 and also a new moon, which is actually a very  
10 auspicious thing at this particular time right  
11 now, and to having this legislation come in at  
12 this moment is not an accident for me. I'm also,  
13 just wanted for the record, just to point out, I  
14 have dirt under my fingernails. I was putting  
15 moon flower in the dirt this morning, so there  
16 they are. Wanted to really, basically, I don't  
17 need to say about the positive things of the  
18 community gardens, 'cause so well been put  
19 already. From, from the Administration, from Jack  
20 Linn, to Helen, to everybody here, I think it's,  
21 it's been pretty much clear, and the kids were so  
22 perfect in doing it. I did want to get to  
23 specifics of how that, the gardens can be made  
24 permanent, and how best we can support that, both  
25 from legislation point, but also as policies as

1 well. So, we discussed the whole area in regards  
2 to the State Attorney General's agreement. We're  
3 looking forwards to adding that, and I think all  
4 the parties right now are saying yes to it. It is  
5 important that one, some of those particular  
6 strengths in the State Attorney General's  
7 agreement, which has always had said that, because  
8 of community gardens having been in a de facto  
9 parkland, they need to be continued so, and they  
10 are really, have been acting in the communities  
11 have been a source of park, and it's really,  
12 that's what it is, we just need to make it a  
13 reality in law, and it became an agreement. So I  
14 think that's a key thing that we continue working  
15 on that. As well as making sure that all the  
16 gardens that are under HPD become immediately  
17 permanent gardens and mapped with the rest of the  
18 gardens. So that's really important, I think we  
19 shouldn't lose any more. And this, some people  
20 say, "Well, housing versus garden," there were  
21 40,000 vacant lots at the same time during  
22 Giuliani's time, when they were saying, "Yes, we  
23 need to make those into housing, as well." So I  
24 think as environmental justice, and for the  
25

1 benefit of every one of those 40,000 lots that are  
2 now housing in some sort, we need not only to make  
3 sure all the gardens are made permanent, but we  
4 find ways to increase community green spaces to  
5 benefit all of those 40,000, and millions of  
6 others that are also housing and people. So that  
7 would be point number two. Point number three,  
8 the GreenThumb city owned land, such as Parks  
9 Department and various other ones, need to become  
10 mapped, but really key is it's under community  
11 control. We've seen before that what, and this  
12 has been in certain parks are in The Bronx, when  
13 the Parks saw large area and lots of money that  
14 was given by a Council Member for the community  
15 garden, and went ahead and said, "We're going to  
16 make it into a park, and not give it to the  
17 community gardeners," so that became a very  
18 contentious issue, and we've had to pretty much,  
19 Edie had to say, "No, no, they are community  
20 gardens, they are not parks to be done as Parks  
21 wants to do." And so, that needs to be really  
22 underlined, that the community and the gardeners  
23 are the ones who make all of the plans, or work  
24 along city, as the leads to make sure that  
25

1 happens. That's really important, 'cause we can  
2 easily map all of them, and the next thing you  
3 know, Parks, or whoever the next Parks  
4 Administration is, starts turning 'em into pretty  
5 little parks with, you know, a little Park person  
6 running it. So that's really important for me,  
7 that that is put in there, because it could be a  
8 very dangerous thing to actually put them in  
9 Parks, and then next thing you know, they're  
10 kicking out the community gardens, a little bit  
11 like New York Restoration Project, which--that's a  
12 whole other story. Four, community gardeners  
13 would continue to be lead participants, that's  
14 what number four is, and have final decision on  
15 new plans for their site control across all City  
16 agencies, and land trusts. Five, any vacant  
17 properties, and this was actually, Helen Sears was  
18 saying, "I have no community gardens in my  
19 district." So if there are, in those particular  
20 districts, which there is less than two-and-a-half  
21 acres of open space per thousand person, that new  
22 land that becomes available, since it's so  
23 saturated with housing, they would be actually  
24 offered first for community gardening, for the  
25

1  
2 community. So that would be returning, you know,  
3 green spaces and less asthma, etc., to those  
4 community spaces. So that would be a legislation  
5 that would allow that to happen. Funding, that's  
6 also key. We've seen in certain areas that the  
7 block grants is running down, or it's not  
8 administerable for areas which are getting a  
9 little bit more money. So we need to have funds  
10 made available to, a) purchase new lots, 'cause  
11 there are still vacant lots, it's just privately  
12 owned, and turn them into community gardens. And  
13 this could be a City budget set aside, like one  
14 percent of any new building development, and  
15 taxes, goes into purchasing community gardens and  
16 parks. And that's happened in Martha's Vineyard,  
17 and they have lots of beautiful green spaces. Any  
18 community garden that becomes abandoned or  
19 receives multiple violations, and this has  
20 happened and there's been certain cases where  
21 they're like, "Oh, well then we have to just give  
22 it back to HPD." Well, no, we were saying "Give  
23 it to New York City Community Garden Coalition and  
24 other agencies so that we can make sure that other  
25 groups that may be in the community, schools,

1 etc., churches, or just local folks, have an  
2 opportunity to go ahead and make sure that they  
3 can use it as a community green space. And then,  
4 even if that runs out, we should even find out,  
5 they could, maybe they could become a New York  
6 Restoration Park, if that doesn't work. And then,  
7 more parks and City department land, and this was  
8 something that I think Elizabeth Crowley was  
9 asking. We have a very positive State Department,  
10 Ag Department, and we're really proud of them.  
11 Chris Grace has actually, and the Ag Department  
12 Market has put a statewide issue to all State's  
13 land, that to be made available, to be made into  
14 community gardens. We want to see a similar thing  
15 to go out to all City land, that is open and not  
16 being used, to also be open and available, and  
17 really pushing for making more New York City  
18 community garden land. And then nine, any new  
19 development site, like we were talking about,  
20 Letitia James was saying, how this huge  
21 development. Well, definitely a portion, one  
22 percent to five percent of any new development,  
23 needs to also be put aside for community gardens,  
24 as part of policy. HPD has been doing it, but  
25

1  
2 it's, you know, with a really good developer. We  
3 want that across all development. So even the  
4 mean ones get to have something returned to the  
5 community, as well, even if it's all luxury  
6 condos. Those are the points I think are really  
7 key, and I would really encourage council members  
8 and of course the grassroots folks to put out  
9 there and make sure that they have it. Thank you  
10 so very much. [applause]

11 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very  
12 much. Just a, just a quick question, Karen, what  
13 is the Urban Farming Olympics?

14 KAREN WASHINGTON: Yes. Great, and  
15 I have a invitation. It's happening September  
16 12<sup>th</sup>, the Garden of Happiness, it's located on  
17 Prospect Avenue between 181<sup>st</sup> and 182<sup>nd</sup> Street. We  
18 would like you to be there to be one of our  
19 judges, and you can make sure that all the council  
20 people there, as well. We're trying to do a  
21 partnership between food and fitness, that's  
22 number one. Each community gardener has to have  
23 six members, two have to be adults and two have to  
24 be children. So we want it to be  
25 intergenerational. And hopefully this will be the



1  
2 beginning. We've seen the future of it being from  
3 New York, to statewide, to international, now who  
4 knows?

5 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And what are  
6 the, like what's their--

7 KAREN WASHINGTON: Oh, we're going  
8 to do wheelbarrow races, potato sack races, how  
9 about running a hose to the hydrant and back,  
10 maybe chasing chickens. [laughter] It's going to  
11 be a lot of fun. So--

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Well, I look  
13 forward to it.

14 KAREN WASHINGTON: [laughs]

15 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very  
16 much.

17 KAREN WASHINGTON: You're quite  
18 welcome.

19 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.  
20 Our next panel is Rhoma Mostel, Devanie Jackson,  
21 Ajja Worley [phonetic], and Alan Ginsburg. You  
22 can just have a seat and get started in whatever  
23 order you'd like.

24 FEMALE VOICE: Yes, and there's  
25 some supporting petitions, as well. Some

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supporting petitions, as well.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay.

FEMALE FIRST: --do first.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Devanie  
Jackson? Rhoma we have.

RHOMA MOSTEL: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Harvey, Hava,  
I'm sorry. [off mic]

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Say that  
again, that's a G.

AJJA WORLEY: Ajja, Ajja.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: That's a J?

AJJA WORLEY: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh, I'm sorry.  
Looked like a V, Ajja. So, Alan? He left? Okay.  
Sarita, Sarita--How do I say? Say the last name  
for me. [off mic] Oh, that's a F. Okay. Yes,  
please. Okay, you can get started and we'll go  
across that way. Alright? Thank you.

DEVANIE JACKSON: Hello, I'm  
Reverend Devanie Jackson, I'm from the Brooklyn  
Rescue Mission and the Bed-Stuy Farm. I am,  
submitted testimony because our urban farm falls  
within a unique category, and we are here to

1  
2 support our farm being saved from developers. We  
3 started our urban farm on a piece of land that  
4 belonged to the mission, but there was a piece of  
5 land that was being, under HPD control, it was  
6 actually a house, it was in, renovated poorly and  
7 abandoned. We cleaned up that space, and now that  
8 is a thriving urban farm. We are producing over  
9 7,000 pounds of food and we serve over 4,000 fam--  
10 4,000 people a month through our emergency food  
11 pantry, that's connected with the mission. We  
12 have seniors and we have teenagers that actually  
13 grow the food, and work at our farmers market.  
14 And it is a thriving, vibrant, productive green  
15 space for our community. And the land is in  
16 danger of being sold by a developer to, to make up  
17 for fines that they incurred during their botched  
18 renovation job. So, we are working hard because  
19 our farm is an award winner. This year, we were  
20 voted number six favorite urban farm in the  
21 country, which is a big honor for us as a small  
22 group.

23 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER:

24 Congratulations.

25 DEVANIE JACKSON: We also got the

1  
2 Harry Chapin 2008 Self-Reliance Award. And we  
3 would really hate to see this farm cut in half or  
4 infringed upon by some building shading our sun,  
5 which would greatly reduce our production efforts.  
6 In an economic downturn, I don't think anybody  
7 really wants to hear that food is being taken away  
8 from a community that has been known to be a food  
9 desert. And where most of our people who attend  
10 our emergency food program cannot afford to get  
11 locally grown organic produce, you know, that was  
12 picked moments before they ate it. And I think  
13 that in terms of land use, that it's good to give  
14 the community some say that we can have some  
15 control over what happens in our communities,  
16 because we really don't need another little  
17 building stuck in this little corner of a lot,  
18 when we could produce so much food and inspire so  
19 much goodwill from the community, and inspiration  
20 of greening up community blocks around this, and  
21 educating our young people in agricultural  
22 techniques. So, I just wanted to highlight a few  
23 of the things that we do at our garden, and  
24 reasons why it would be good to have that saved,  
25 and reasons why we need to get more control of

1  
2 land use and community greening into the hands of  
3 the community, because you really feel that you to  
4 a place where you really don't have a voice to  
5 fight the system. And you know, that's why we  
6 made sure we were able to come out here today to  
7 share our testimony.

8 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Who's your  
9 council member?

10 DEVANIE JACKSON: Darlene Mealy.

11 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And have you  
12 been in contact with Council Member Mealy on this  
13 issue?

14 DEVANIE JACKSON: We have contacted  
15 her repeatedly, but we haven't received answer.

16 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: You haven't--?

17 DEVANIE JACKSON: Received an  
18 answer.

19 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay. Martin?  
20 Is Martin from--Before you leave, I'll make sure  
21 Martin from my staff gives you a card.

22 DEVANIE JACKSON: Thank you.

23 [applause]

24 SARITA DAFTARY: Good morning.

25 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Good morning.

1  
2 SARITA DAFTARY: My name is Sarita  
3 Daftary. I'm with the East New York Farms  
4 Project, which is a part of the United Community  
5 Centers in East New York. I want to thank  
6 Chairman Foster and the Council for creating this  
7 opportunity for discussion on community gardens.  
8 And I want to commend the Parks Committee for  
9 introducing Resolution 1890 in an effort to give  
10 gardens the permanency that they deserve. I am  
11 here today on behalf of a lot of the members of  
12 East New York Farms Project that could not be  
13 here. Although we have some of our members who  
14 could make the trip here today, and I really  
15 appreciate them for being here. [applause] Since  
16 our inception in 199--

17 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: All of the,  
18 wave you hand, all of the United Communities.

19 SARITA DAFTARY: East New York  
20 Farms.

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Oh, okay.  
22 [applause, laughter]

23 SARITA DAFTARY: Since our  
24 inception in 1998, we've grown to be one of the  
25 largest and most successful urban agriculture and

1  
2 market creation projects in the country. We work  
3 with over 40 adult and 25 youth gardeners, and  
4 grow healthy food in over a dozen community  
5 gardens, and run one of the most vibrant markets  
6 in New York City. We would like to make some  
7 additional recommendations on community gardens,  
8 and a lot of it echoes what's been said already  
9 today. We ask that the Council consider adding to  
10 1890, a provision of Resolution 1033, which was  
11 introduced in 2007, that any garden that's  
12 abandoned or receives multiple violations from any  
13 City or State agency be offered to other gardeners  
14 before its use is changed. We field inquiries  
15 weekly, if not daily, from neighbors who want to  
16 get involved in gardening. At the same time, some  
17 of the gardens in our community were started  
18 decades ago by people who are no longer able to  
19 take care of them. With a set process and a  
20 timeline established, GreenThumb could work with  
21 community groups like ours, to identify people who  
22 are interested in taking over struggling gardens.  
23 We also urge the Council to further support  
24 community gardens by allowing them to benefit, and  
25 provide the Parks Department more resources that

1 would allow gardens to benefit from some of the  
2 services that other Parks Department properties  
3 benefit from. Like more timely external repairs,  
4 like fences and sidewalks. If gardens, like  
5 parks, received a perimeter rating, we believe  
6 that this would help gardens to get these repairs  
7 in a more timely fashion. Since although fencing  
8 and sidewalk repairs are provided to gardens, that  
9 can take years. And to give one example, we, in  
10 2007, were approached by HPD, who actually had a  
11 half an acre of land that was designated as open  
12 space under various urban renewal programs. It  
13 had been sitting vacant for years while the Parks  
14 Department struggled to find a budget to develop a  
15 park there. Eventually they came to us and  
16 offered us the land to develop an urban farm. We  
17 did so, and we've developed a thriving urban farm  
18 there, with over 25 members that represent the age  
19 and ethnic diversity of our community, and it's a  
20 great place to be. It was also a real struggle to  
21 develop it, because we had to wait--Because we're  
22 a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, we were able to raise money  
23 to fix up the lot ourselves. However, we had to  
24 raise \$12,000 to repair the fencing, because the  
25



1 lot was given to us with a broken fence. And we  
2 were told that we could wait an infinite number of  
3 years for that fence to be repaired, or we could  
4 take action on our own if we were interested in  
5 getting it done immediately. We also had to  
6 invest several thousands of dollars in bringing in  
7 topsoil and compost, to be able to actually grow  
8 on that land. One barrier was that the land was  
9 covered in bricks from buildings that had been  
10 demolished there. There was also possible lead  
11 contamination because the buildings that had been  
12 there previously had led paint in them. So, we  
13 are so grateful that we were able to do that, and  
14 that is a challenge too great for a lot of really  
15 active but smaller community groups, to be able to  
16 take on a lot that size. So we ask that the  
17 Council consider providing Parks Department with  
18 more resources to direct towards gardens,  
19 particularly developing new gardens in some of  
20 these spaces that can be really challenging. I  
21 would like to also commend the Council for its  
22 focus on health and healthy eating in the past few  
23 years, from taking on trans-fats to passing green  
24 cart legislation. It's clear that New York City  
25

1 is making the health of its residents a priority.  
2 It would be a huge oversight to ignore gardens as  
3 a crucial part of this effort in healthy eating.  
4 Gardens are feeding the City, and they have been  
5 for decades. In many working class communities  
6 throughout New York, where fast food restaurants  
7 and corner stores far outnumber grocery stores and  
8 parks. Gardens have become some of the only  
9 sources of fresh food, with the added benefit of  
10 creating public green spaces and gathering places.  
11 The gardeners that we work with in East New York  
12 alone, grew over 14,000 pounds of fresh organic  
13 produce last year for sale at our market. And  
14 that's only the numbers that we can capture  
15 through sales at our market. That doesn't include  
16 the produce that gardeners brought home to their  
17 families or gave to their neighbors. Even though  
18 the recent growth in farmers markets across the  
19 City has benefited some low income neighborhoods,  
20 the competition for farmers to supply those  
21 markets has also grown, meaning that markets in  
22 outer borough neighborhoods like ours often have  
23 difficulty attracting farmers, and really need to  
24 rely on the urban produce that we can grow.  
25

1  
2 Gardens are also building community in East New  
3 York. They function as a place for people to  
4 preserve their cultures and work across barriers  
5 of age and ethnicity that often divide us. I'm  
6 actually going to depart from my written testimony  
7 in a minute here just to tell you, to actually  
8 comment on the discussion before about having the  
9 Department of Youth and Community Development more  
10 involved in funding programs, to have youth  
11 involved in gardens. Unfortunately, we, for the  
12 past four years, we had been funded by the--part  
13 of our youth program had been funded by the  
14 Department of Youth and Community Development.  
15 And in two thousand--they issued in 2008 a concept  
16 paper for 2009, outlining what they were  
17 considering funding for middle and high school  
18 youth, that's the ages that we work with. And it  
19 had changed from the time when we had gotten our  
20 funding, we were funded under community service  
21 and leadership programs; they had changed the  
22 focus to focus only on afterschool tutoring, more  
23 traditional afterschool tutoring programs.  
24 Although we submitted comment on that concept  
25 paper, it went through as it was originally

1  
2 written. And our program is no longer eligible  
3 for funding under that program, because we're not  
4 primarily an afterschool tutoring program, and  
5 though those have value, we are an urban  
6 agriculture program, we teach youth about science,  
7 environment, math, community engagement and  
8 leadership, all through farming. And it is,  
9 unfortunately, I think a, one of the things that  
10 slipped through the bureaucratic cracks that the  
11 City would be trying to encourage greening, and  
12 trying to encourage healthy food, at the same time  
13 that programs like ours are no longer eligible for  
14 City youth funding. Lastly, I want to mention  
15 that community gardens are a victory for our  
16 community. A horrible history of racial  
17 discrimination and mortgage lending practices  
18 spurred a vicious cycle of urban decline that left  
19 East New York riddled with vacant lots. The fact  
20 that community residents have joined together to  
21 convert these lots into community assets through  
22 gardening, is a symbol of resilience for us. I  
23 want to reinforce the point that so many of my  
24 fellow gardeners have made, this City needs  
25 gardens. I think this is a point that people can

1  
2 easily agree with. But gardens also need more  
3 support from the City. Resolution 1890 is an  
4 important start. It will ensure gardeners that  
5 the land they have cleaned up, nurtured and cared  
6 for as volunteers, will not be sold to the highest  
7 bidder. Gardens also need the support of a formal  
8 process to keep lands as gardens even if their  
9 original organizers are no longer able to keep the  
10 gardens going. Lastly, they need the recognition  
11 that they are expected to, and would ideally  
12 function, much like parks, and just like parks,  
13 they need investments from the city to keep them  
14 from falling into disrepair. Thank you again for  
15 your time and attention to this issue. [applause]

16 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Next.

17 RHOMA MOSTEL: I'm Rhoma Mostel,  
18 and I'm a member of LaGuardia Corner Gardens,  
19 which is a garden in Manhattan under CB2, in Lower  
20 Manhattan. We are one of the few, if not the only  
21 garden in Lower Manhattan. Of course, I'm writing  
22 and talking to, about recommending that for the  
23 sake of our communities, that all the community  
24 gardens should be protected, not only just ours.  
25 But I'll talk a little bit about ours, to give you

1  
2 an idea of what our garden does. LaGuardia Corner  
3 Gardens are a community garden, is a GreenThumb  
4 garden, self-financed and self-maintained. It has  
5 served as a necessary oasis and beloved cultural  
6 institution in our community for almost 30 years.  
7 An attractive and vibrant community garden that  
8 has become an integral part of neighborhood life,  
9 it offers very necessary green space in an already  
10 congested and polluted area. And I cannot  
11 emphasize enough how important green space is in  
12 our particular area. There simply is not enough  
13 of it. LaGuardia Corner Gardens maintains an  
14 active children's program, introducing urban  
15 children to nature and educating them to have  
16 respect for and commitment to the natural world.  
17 Classes of school children have released  
18 butterflies into the garden, followed the life  
19 cycles of various plants, and even learned how to  
20 grow and take care of plants, thereby learning  
21 respect for living things. I think that we've all  
22 agreed that that's a very important part of what  
23 happens in a community garden. As part of its  
24 outreach, LaGuardia Corner Gardens offers cultural  
25 events, including participation in music programs,

1  
2 such as Make Music New York, which just took place  
3 on the solstice, we were one of the gardens  
4 hosting the bands. A community garden is not just  
5 a green space, it is a special world where local  
6 residents, through their hard work, funds and  
7 commitments of time and energy, continue to create  
8 a place of beauty, color and harmony, that could  
9 serve as a role model for the larger world. And I  
10 think that's a very important point. The quality  
11 of its green space is quite different from a park.  
12 Unlike a park, a community garden invites active  
13 participation from the community at large in its  
14 maintenance and ongoing stewardship, while  
15 fostering greater sense of community cohesion and  
16 pride in our general neighborhood surroundings.  
17 We have a website, we've progressed to the point  
18 where we have a website. We invite you to look at  
19 it, it's called [laguardiacornergardens.org](http://laguardiacornergardens.org), and it  
20 attracts visitors from all over the world, people  
21 who've never visited our garden have seen the  
22 progress of what we can do in a small space in  
23 downtown Manhattan. Our garden is unique in that  
24 it represents a diversity of age groups and  
25 socioeconomic backgrounds from schoolchildren to

1  
2 artists, writers, university professors, health  
3 and social service professionals, and people from  
4 other walks of life, all of 'em devote their  
5 energies to making this garden a special place,  
6 and a necessary institution in our local life.

7 LaGuardia Corner Gardens also provides a real  
8 place where local seniors, who often cannot travel  
9 to the Botanic Gardens, can and do appreciate the  
10 great variety of our mature plantings. To seniors  
11 and other frequent visitors, our irises and roses  
12 are old friends, and they frequently comment on  
13 particular favorite plants. We have a lo--we're  
14 surrounded by a fair number of senior people  
15 living in regular housing, but who are an elderly  
16 population, they really cannot even use the subway  
17 or a bus, but the community garden, to walk around  
18 the garden every day, is a real treat for them.

19 And they're as familiar with our plants as we are.

20 And we're there all the time. So, LaGuardia  
21 Corner Gardens deserves permanent production and  
22 must remain a vital force for good in our  
23 community. May it and other community gardens  
24 continue to flourish and have the complete and  
25 enthusiastic backing of all our public officials.



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Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

[applause]

AJJA WORLEY: Sorry. Good

afternoon, my name is Ajja Worley, I am here representing the New York City Community Garden Coalition and Project Harmony Incorporated, of whom I'm co-director of the Joseph Daniel Wilson Garden, Memorial Garden, on West 122<sup>nd</sup> Street, of which I am a gardener and also a certified street tree pruner. Having long been in this struggle to preserve community gardens, I support every effort to ensure that community gardens remain a vibrant part of the fabric of our wonderfully diverse City. These verdant oases help to build and stabilize communities, and at once nurture and nourish them in invaluable ways. Community gardens speak to the resilience and self-reliance of our citizenry. They speak uniquely to the camaraderie of our citizens that our citizens have for one another. They are a remarkable reflection of the many cultures which coexist here harmoniously. They are amazing evidence of just how willingly and productive our City's populace

1  
2 can work together for the good of all. Mayor  
3 Bloomberg initiated PlanYC and I believe that  
4 community gardens need to be closely linked to the  
5 governor's 2030 plan. I trust the Council will  
6 agree on the important of putting forth Resolution  
7 1890 and that the Department of City Planning will  
8 designate GreenThumb gardens as parklands. And I  
9 just want to add some things that I had not  
10 included in the written testimony. First of all,  
11 I neglected to thank you, Councilman Foster,  
12 Councilperson, oh boy, Foster, for your due  
13 diligence and supporting community gardens. Also,  
14 want to thank those councilpersons who are  
15 involved with community gardens. Our community  
16 garden has been around since 1985, and as most of  
17 us who are involved in community gardens, we have,  
18 the beginning was blood, sweat and tears, and we  
19 drug off tons and tons of debris. So, I consider  
20 us to be not only community gardeners, but  
21 grassroots developers, as well. And so, we have  
22 had visitors come to visit our garden from Spain,  
23 from France. We're even listed in a German  
24 tourist guide. We've had people, you know, just,  
25 the garden has been just a drawing, a magnet for

1  
2 people from all walks of life. And that we have  
3 seen our community improve, and I believe that in  
4 part what we have done is, as grassroots  
5 developers in our community, had a lot to do with  
6 the state that our community is in. So, I  
7 definitely support Resolution 1890. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very  
9 much. [applause] Sarita, are you in contact with  
10 your local councilperson? [off mic] Okay.

11 Because there are certain discretionary funding  
12 that can be helped, used to help with your fence  
13 and soil and stuff like that. Thank you very  
14 much. Our next panel will consist of Catherine  
15 Cord, Sir Rodney Sir, Peter Kramer, and Joanna E.  
16 Williams. [pause] Okay, you, who, you are?  
17 Johanna and you?

18 PETER KRAMER: Peter Kramer.

19 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay.  
20 Catherine? Sir Rodney Sir. Okay, they're gone.  
21 Dominique Bouillon? Zack Schulman? Kendall  
22 Morrison? Kendall? Great. Sara Jones? Okay.  
23 You may get started.

24 JOHANNA WILLENS: [off mic] My name  
25 is Johanna--

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Push the, push the light on and speak into the mic.

JOHANNA WILLENS: Sorry. My name is Johanna E. Willens, I am the cofounder of Herbal Garden of East New York. I'm a master composter, a Just Food trainer, also I'm the cofounder of Olympus Garden Club, and a Daffodil award winner for 2008. My talk today is about what has not been touched on: developers and our hydrant. Many of our developers come to our communities, they take our good soil, they take our trees, and they never replace them. Most of the homes are put in with nothing more than concrete. They use our hydrants, and they bust the hydrants. The hydrants are then not replaced by the City. When our community gardeners need water, we must now work with hydrants that are busted. The water comes from under the ground because they have used trucks to get water to mix their cement, and the hydrants are still broken. The City of New York has asked us gardeners to take care of trees. How can we take care of trees when we have no water to supply new trees with water? I now have six tulip trees on the property

1  
2 of Herbal Garden, and they will need water over  
3 the summer, and they will get less water because I  
4 need water in Herbal Garden to produce produce.  
5 My produce goes to the East New York Farmers  
6 Market, which I am a cofounder of, and this market  
7 has been in existence for over eleven years. We  
8 are the first community garden to cosign all of  
9 our produce to the farmers market, which help our  
10 senior citizens, who get WIC coupons, which also  
11 help our women with children get coupons. Without  
12 the farmers market being there, our seniors and  
13 women with children would not be able to get  
14 coupons. That means they would not--

15 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Is the  
16 hydrant--is the hydrant still broken?

17 JOHANNA WILLENS: Yes, ma'am.

18 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And who's  
19 councilman, council district are you in?

20 JOHANNA WILLENS: Charles Barron.

21 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And have you  
22 reached out to Councilman--?

23 JOHANNA WILLENS: I have written  
24 DEP, I have numerous letters that I have written  
25 and Environmental Protection--

2 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: To Council  
3 Member Barron?

4 JOHANNA WILLENS: I've sent them  
5 everywhere, and they always said, "We're coming,"  
6 and they have not gotten there yet.

7 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Alright.

8 JOHANNA WILLENS: Alright? The  
9 next there is our youth with the farmers market.  
10 We are the first, East New York Farmers Market is  
11 the first one who had youth work with us. All the  
12 other programs that came after the East New York  
13 Farmers Market have based their program on what  
14 East New York Farmers Market has done. Thank you  
15 very much.

16 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

17 [applause]

18 PETER KRAMER: Hi, good afternoon,  
19 thank you again, Chair Foster, for your dedication  
20 to this issue. The gardeners artist community and  
21 neighbors of Le Petit Versailles Garden petitioned  
22 for the guaranteed existence of gardens and green  
23 public space in New York City. The gardens of New  
24 York are an important part of the urban policy,  
25 attracting worldwide interest in how gardens

1  
2 function as essential public spaces fostering  
3 community and environmental benefits to all New  
4 Yorkers. Allied Productions, Inc., a nonprofit  
5 arts organization, is the steward of the garden  
6 Petit Versailles, and leaseholder in agreement  
7 with GreenThumb since 1996. We are the producer  
8 of free public events, from May to October,  
9 initiated since 2001, with support from the New  
10 York State Council on the Arts, the Department of  
11 Cultural Affairs, Materials for the Arts, City  
12 Parks Foundation, Citizens for NYC, Trust for  
13 Public Land, Poets and Writers, and Meet the  
14 Composer. Le Petit Versailles has developed a  
15 garden center that bridges shifting demographics  
16 of the Lower East Side. It has served as a refuge  
17 for many, and continues its commitment to that  
18 community profile of civil urban policy that is  
19 now an essential part of the mayor's PlanNYC,  
20 which I like to refer to as Play Nice. We urge  
21 you to support Resolution 1890, which calls upon  
22 the City to map all GreenThumb community gardens  
23 in New York as parkland, thereby giving them  
24 stronger protection for the future. We thank you  
25 for your time, your commitment and your civic

1  
2 duty. Thank you. [applause]

3 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

4 KENDALL MORRISON: My name is  
5 Kendall Morrison, and I represent the Woodbine  
6 Street Block Association Garden and the Linden  
7 Bushwick Block Association Garden. And I'm also a  
8 Director of Earth Matter New York; we're a  
9 organization that provides composting in the City.  
10 And also--basically, the first nine items here, we  
11 can just kind of skip over, because they're  
12 adopted from the NYCCGC, and they're basically  
13 items that Aresh already went over. And I'd just  
14 like to skip to the tenth item, which is something  
15 that's new. I ask that the, for the reinstatement  
16 of the leaf collection program, as well as the  
17 compost give back program [applause] and I ask  
18 that the City Council work to enact legislation  
19 that allows community gardens to compost up to 24  
20 cubic yards of food waste collected from its  
21 members per year, without DEC Part 360.5  
22 registration. Right now, community gardens, if  
23 they collect food waste from their home, and bring  
24 it into their garden, they're actually subject to  
25 Part 360.5 registration, and they could be in



1  
2 violation. And a lot of composters are actually  
3 in violation, and it's really kind of silly when  
4 they're just using the vegetable scraps from their  
5 homes and they're composting, and they're  
6 returning it to their garden. So I think it would  
7 be great if the City Council could work to provide  
8 automatic exemption for a small amount of  
9 composting that's already really being done in  
10 community gardens.

11 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: We would have  
12 to, that, DEC is actually a state agency, so that  
13 would need to go through the Senate and the  
14 Assembly. But that is something that, in part of  
15 the package, in preserving and having parkland, I  
16 mean, green, community gardens mapped to parkland,  
17 that is something that the coalition can work  
18 towards when you address the Assembly and the  
19 Senate.

20 KENDALL MORRISON: Thank you.

21 SARA JONES: Hello. I'm so happy to  
22 be here today, and I'm so happy, Madam Chair, that  
23 you are such a huge supporter of our gardens. And  
24 it made this a pleasurable meeting, as I've been  
25 to so many contentious ones, that this has been so

1  
2 wonderful, that you are listening to us. I've  
3 brought a few visual aids. One of them you have  
4 is a little pamphlet on the actual beginning of  
5 our garden, how it was an empty lot. And then the  
6 postcard about how it appears today. So, you, I  
7 will not go over it, but you can go over it at  
8 your leisure, from basically a barren DOT lot, to  
9 the beautiful oasis that it appears today. My  
10 name is Sara Jones, and I am the Chair of  
11 LaGuardia Corner Gardens. I urge the City Council  
12 to renew Resolution 1890 to protect our GreenThumb  
13 gardens. All GreenThumb gardens should be mapped  
14 as parks and protected as such. We are a 30 year  
15 old GreenThumb garden made on the roadbed of a  
16 failed urban project. That was one of Robert  
17 Moses' bright ideas about the big causeway. So,  
18 LaGuardia Corner Gardens is the oldest and the  
19 last remaining community garden in the West  
20 Village. The benchmark we've heard before, for  
21 the green space, is two-and-a-half acres per  
22 thousand people. Our community board, in the  
23 heart of Greenwich Village, actually has the  
24 second lowest in Manhattan, at .4 acres per  
25 thousand people. Now, I'm going to quote an NYU

1  
2 environmental impact study, that found that green  
3 space actually improves a neighborhood. And I  
4 quote, "We find that the opening of a community  
5 garden has statistically significant positive  
6 impact on residential properties within a thousand  
7 feet of the garden. And that impact increases  
8 over time. We find that gardens have the greatest  
9 impact in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods.  
10 Higher quality gardens have the greatest positive  
11 impact. Finally, we find that the opening of a  
12 garden is associated with other changes in the  
13 neighborhood, such as increasing rates of  
14 homeownership, and thus may be serving as  
15 catalysts for economic redevelopment of the entire  
16 community. That's a quote from the NYU study.  
17 So, community gardens I have to reiterate are  
18 self-sustaining. So parkland parks will not be  
19 taxed in any way of their resources, because we do  
20 all the work. We put all our money and our heart  
21 and soul into these gardens. They are beloved in  
22 their communities, and to allow them to be  
23 bulldozed for development would tear the heart and  
24 soul from the very neighborhoods. So thank you  
25 again so very much for having this hearing.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very much. Thank you for your enthusiasm. Our next panel is Lynn Sir, Carla Orso Perez, Susan Howard, and Rachel Brody. She left? Ellen Belcher? Good. That's - - . [pause, background noise] You may get started.

LYNNE SERPE: Hello, my name is Lynne Serpe, and I'm with Two Coves Community Garden in Astoria. I think I might be the first Queens gardener who's spoken this evening. Or actually, I guess it's still afternoon, just feels like this evening since I've been here a couple of hours. [laughs] Two Coves Community Garden in Astoria has over 200 active members. We are just under a half acre, and our membership is diverse as you would expect in the borough of Queens. Our members range from newborn infants, all the way up to people in their 80s, who are gardening. We also have a component that I'm sure other gardens have, but just hasn't been mentioned today, which is that we have wheelchair accessible plots. We have several raised beds, and we even have a structure where people in wheelchairs can bring their wheelchair under them and garden themselves.

1  
2 And that was something that was very important to  
3 us, because of the area where our garden is, in  
4 Northwest Queens and Astoria, we're right across  
5 the street from Astoria Houses, the only NYCHA  
6 property within District 22, and down the hill  
7 from Goodwill, which has a large population of  
8 people in wheelchairs. So, we do have public  
9 programs, just like many of the gardeners have  
10 mentioned. We work with local schools, we  
11 provided composting for the five borough bike  
12 tour. When we heard that 30,000 cyclists were  
13 coming to Astoria Park, and were going to be fed  
14 bananas and oranges, we started thinking about all  
15 those banana peels and orange peels, and so  
16 several of the gardeners went to provide  
17 composting for those cyclists who came from all  
18 over the City and in fact all over the east coast.  
19 We do partner with local artists, with local  
20 musicians. We were also one of the sites for Make  
21 Music New York. We host workshops, we host food  
22 events, and we're one of the gardens that was  
23 recently populated with two new town Pippin apple  
24 trees. There is a move that some of you might  
25 know for the new town Pippin apple tree to be

1  
2 named as the official New York City apple, and  
3 it's something that, because we're in Western  
4 Queens, New Town, it's an indigenous plant for us.  
5 In addition to all those issues, we're actually  
6 one of the community gardens which is parks land.  
7 And that gives us an enormous amount of advantages  
8 over several of the other gardens that are always  
9 worried about their future, but also provides some  
10 challenges to us. We are a licensed GreenThumb  
11 community garden, on park land. Parks has  
12 separate requirements, and separate rules, than  
13 GreenThumb. And it can sometimes be very  
14 confusing to figure out how to navigate through  
15 bureaucracy and which bureaucracy. For example,  
16 to have an event on a park through Department of  
17 Parks and Recreation, requires a \$25 permit, and  
18 that's usually required for an assembly of at  
19 least 25 people. Well, we have over 200  
20 gardeners, we have an assembly of over 25 people  
21 pretty every day of the week. Now, GreenThumb and  
22 the Parks Department works with us, to make sure  
23 that we don't have to constantly apply for \$25  
24 permits. But it's something just to think about  
25 because in the implementation of Resolution 1890,

1  
2 which I fully and completely support, as Aresh  
3 mentioned, it's important that these gardens  
4 aren't just mapped as parkland, but they are  
5 mapped as community gardens--and it is very, very  
6 clear what that means for the gardeners. Because  
7 I probably spend at least half my time as a  
8 volunteer with the garden trying to figure out  
9 what rules we're following, trying to figure out  
10 the bureaucracy, trying to figure out the  
11 paperwork, when what I really want to be doing is  
12 gardening. So I really wanted to bring home that  
13 point, because I was thrilled that Aresh mentioned  
14 it, and it's something that's very, very  
15 important. They need to be mapped as community  
16 gardens. [applause] The final thing I just want  
17 to say in closing is we talked about how it's  
18 about building community, and it's also about  
19 gardening. And the expression that we use often  
20 in Two Coves is that it's about food, fun, flowers  
21 and friendship. Thank you very much. [applause]

22 SUSAN HOWARD: Hi, my name is Susan  
23 Howard. I don't have a written testimony, but if  
24 it, if I could submit it later, I would be happy  
25 to. I found out about this at last minute. Just

1  
2 as a brief history of how long we've fought, and  
3 how hard we've fought just to get here, we, I  
4 began working with garden activists in 1998. And  
5 it took us three years on the street, and sit-ins  
6 here at City Council, tree sits, numerous arrests  
7 and street actions, lots of lobbying, lots of  
8 organizing. We did a public referendum and got  
9 tens of thousands of signatures to get the word  
10 out, to let people know that the administration  
11 was planning to bulldoze all community gardens,  
12 for so-called "affordable housing," when there  
13 were tens of thousands of vacant lots available  
14 for housing at that time, City owned lots. We  
15 fought very, very hard, and we cold-called the  
16 Attorney General's office until we found one  
17 friendly voice who said, "I will look at it, but I  
18 can't make you any promises." And the day that  
19 they came for Esperanza Garden on the Lower East  
20 Side, I was sitting in the Attorney General's  
21 office, begging them that this garden was going to  
22 go. And that was the beginning of that temporary  
23 restraining order that held for three years, I  
24 believe, until this settlement was drawn up with  
25 much, much consternation on the Parks' and the



1 Administration's side. One thing that I think is  
2 really important, because affordable housing has  
3 been used against the preservation of gardens this  
4 entire time, is during that time the Giuliani  
5 Administration, instead of allowing property to go  
6 in rem, and revert to the City, to make decisions  
7 about the future of those properties, they decided  
8 to start selling them en masse to private  
9 developers, to holding firms, to investment  
10 groups, to do whatever they wanted with. So you  
11 don't know if your building goes tomorrow, Nextel  
12 might take it up, and you're in danger of being  
13 evicted. So, they come for the gardens, they  
14 constantly come from the gardens now. I am a  
15 member of the Children's Magical Garden, which is  
16 not protected, it is not a GreenThumb garden, it's  
17 been there for 25 years. It is a complicated  
18 story because there is a parcel that a developer  
19 says is his, and there are two parcels that are  
20 under the HPD. And HPD would like to sell those  
21 parcels to the developer. We have been fighting  
22 that for ten years now. And it, we are still in  
23 limbo. This resolution would save that garden, at  
24 least the two HPD parcels, which would make it a  
25

1  
2 lot easier for us to negotiate with the so-called  
3 owner. That's one of the only gardens left in  
4 Community Board One. Community Board Three has  
5 numerous community gardens, but many of them were  
6 bulldozed before we managed to save the ones that  
7 exist there now.

8 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: What borough?

9 SUSAN HOWARD: Manhattan. So, I,  
10 you know, I beg that, that the Council, when it  
11 gets through this Council, to support Reso 1890,  
12 and you know, really commend Aresh and all the  
13 activists who have managed to persevere through  
14 this incredible struggle. But I would, I would  
15 really advise trying to work with Housing to  
16 change and allow properties to go back in rem to  
17 the City, and to create truly affordable housing,  
18 and use that opportunity to create the housing  
19 that is needed for the City, instead of going  
20 after the gardens, and what's left of them.

21 [applause]

22 ELLEN BELCHER: Hi, my name is  
23 Ellen Belcher, and I'm a community gardener and  
24 community garden activist. I live in Washington  
25 Heights, where I garden at the Morris Jumel

1  
2 Community Garden on West 162<sup>nd</sup> Street, one of the  
3 very few community gardens in Washington Heights.  
4 I'm also a member of the Children's Magical Garden  
5 de Carmen Rubio, along with Susan, which is on the  
6 corner of Norfolk and Stanton Street, on the Lower  
7 East Side. I'm also a board member of the New  
8 York City Gardens Coalition. I'd like to speak in  
9 favor of Resolution 1890, because it's an  
10 important first step towards saving all of our  
11 gardens. Although it would save all of the  
12 endangered and beloved Children's Magical Garden,  
13 because it's not presently under the temporary  
14 protection of GreenThumb. The Children's Magical  
15 Garden has a story similar to many gardens  
16 throughout the City. 26 years ago, almost 26  
17 years ago, a couple of community activists cleaned  
18 up an abandoned lot and planted trees and flowers  
19 to make a beautiful oasis in the City safe from  
20 the crime, drugs and decay of their neighborhood.  
21 There are unique aspects to this story, however.  
22 Two of the community activists and gardeners fell  
23 in love and got married, while cleaning the  
24 garden. And for all of that time, the garden has  
25 existed, it's been dedicated to the children,

1 offering them a safe to play and grow. Now, the  
2 children who grew up in the garden bring their own  
3 children to play in the garden. On any afternoon,  
4 there can be three or four languages spoken in the  
5 garden by the diverse community it serves. The  
6 past few years, we have gotten new members,  
7 because it is one of the only green open spaces in  
8 this densely built up neighborhood. We just  
9 finished planting our third annual pizza garden,  
10 in which the kids plant their own pizza toppings,  
11 to be harvested in October for our annual  
12 Halloween garden pizza making party. This year we  
13 received a grant to fund a medicinal garden to  
14 teach neighborhood kids about herbs and medicinal  
15 plants. It will include plants like fuzzy lambs  
16 ears, which were used as bandages in the medieval  
17 times, and lemon catnip, which I brought for you  
18 today. Actually, I'll bring it up to you  
19 afterwards. Aresh at some of it, but there's  
20 still more left. He's calmed down. We have a  
21 full summer of educational workshops planned,  
22 covering topics like the origins of agriculture,  
23 worm composting, bee watching and identification,  
24 as part of the Great Pollinators Project. It's  
25

1  
2 great, it's pollinators week, here, all over the  
3 country, by the way, and I brought testimony from  
4 one of the directors of the Great Pollinators  
5 Project, who couldn't come here today. We're  
6 going to build a traditional oven for the pizzas,  
7 and in the meantime, the developer that owns one-  
8 third of the garden might at any time move to take  
9 over our garden, which was already offered to him  
10 by HPD a few years ago. I hope we will not have  
11 to see children standing in front of bulldozers to  
12 save their garden, but I'm ready to stand with  
13 them if need be. I hope that GreenThumb gardens  
14 are made permanent through this legislation, so we  
15 can work with further efforts to make all the city  
16 gardens permanent, including adjacent overland  
17 owned by speculators, such as the one that owns a  
18 third of the Children's Magical Garden, awaiting  
19 another Giuliani style selloff of the gardens,  
20 which could legally happen in 2010. This is the  
21 situation with the Morris Jumel Community Garden,  
22 which is a GreenThumb garden adjacent to abandoned  
23 lot, on which we are not allowed to garden,  
24 although our waiting list for garden plots is  
25 growing longer and longer. These open spaces are

1  
2 becoming increasingly rare in New York; this  
3 particular open lot is full of red clover,  
4 possibly ancestors of the clover planted in the  
5 18<sup>th</sup> Century to feed a flock of Merino sheep owned  
6 by the Jumel family, who lived in the mansion  
7 nearby, that still stands nearby. While we know  
8 that Proposition 1890 will do nothing to protect  
9 those of us outside of the group of GreenThumb  
10 gardens, I support this legislation because I know  
11 it is a first step for making all gardens  
12 permanent, be they on land managed under Parks,  
13 HPD, DOT, MTA, DOE and I'm sure there's a lot of  
14 other acronyms, or any other State or City agency,  
15 or even private owners, because we can certainly  
16 do plenty of land swaps, as well. I suggest that  
17 the City Council passage of this legislation will  
18 make a strong statement to all New Yorkers that it  
19 cares for community controlled open spaces, into  
20 which families are able to be together, meet their  
21 neighbors, and even grow their own food and  
22 flowers, even their own pizza and bandages.  
23 [applause]

24 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very  
25 much. [background noise] Okay, and what do you

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do with it?

ELLEN BELCHER: [off mic] You can give it to your cat.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: And what's-- Okay, I don't have a cat, so I--

ELLEN BELCHER: Yeah, we've actually used it to keep the rats out of the garden, actually, by planting it, and the cat--the bodega cats come, and we have no more rats. But there, it's also very good for tea, to help you calm down, and--kind of like mint tea. Anyway, it smells good.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Yeah, it does, thank you. What? [off mic] Oh, okay.

ELLEN BELCHER: Good for stomach, too. I don't even know all the--we're going to have to learn all the good things.

CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Okay. Thank you very much. It's pretty cool. Our last panel is Philip Rossman. Philip? Patrick McCardy. And Yetta Kurland. [pause] Feel free, whatever order.

PHILIP ROSSMAN: My name is Philip Rossman ,and I am a resident of Washington

1  
2 Heights, where I am a member of the Morris Jumel  
3 Community Garden. I also am a member of the  
4 Children's Magical Garden in the Lower East Side,  
5 and have helped out at a number of other gardens  
6 across the City, such as Brook Park in The Bronx.  
7 Today, I am here to urge the honorable members of  
8 the City Council to recognize our community garden  
9 as public parkland. I agree that supporting  
10 Resolution Number 1890 is a valuable and important  
11 step in that direction, but I also stress that it  
12 is only one step out of many that need to be  
13 pursued in order to transform and preserve all  
14 community gardens and all land available for  
15 community garden use. Community gardens across  
16 all five boroughs in New York City provide a  
17 wonderful urban oases of green trees, colorful  
18 flowers, clean air and recuperative tranquility in  
19 one of the largest cities in the world. They also  
20 provide valuable educational opportunities for  
21 children all over the City, to learn about the  
22 natural world in which is live and how things grow  
23 and depend on each other to thrive. The  
24 Children's Magical Garden and Brook Park represent  
25 two of many great examples of such gardens. All



1  
2 of these gardens are the result of hard work to  
3 transform urban land in many battles to protect  
4 these beautiful havens from conflicting interests.  
5 Without a doubt, mapping these spaces is an  
6 important step to permanently recognize and  
7 protect New York City community gardens. However,  
8 far more needs to be done to facilitate such  
9 transformation and protection. First of all, not  
10 all New York City community gardens spaces are  
11 among the GreenThumb gardens that Resolution  
12 Number 1890 aims to recognize and preserve. For  
13 example, while the Morris Jumel Garden at which I  
14 have a beautiful plot of leafy vegetables and  
15 colorful flowers growing, it's a GreenThumb garden  
16 and would be protected by the new Resolution, it's  
17 protection may actually be fleeting, because it  
18 lies next to an abandoned lot that a speculator  
19 refuses to relinquish. That lot may not pose any  
20 immediate threat, per se, but if a speculator  
21 decides to build a hideous structure that I have  
22 little or no say on, the presence of open air  
23 space and light in my garden would be severely  
24 cut, and a terrible gloom would descend upon my  
25 garden. In addition, the Children's Magical

1  
2 Garden is not a GreenThumb garden; as such, it  
3 would not be given full protection under the new  
4 resolution. This is because the developer who has  
5 control over part of the land in which the garden  
6 sits, has not surrendered in his fight for the  
7 land. Sadly, there are countless other gardens  
8 across New York City that face similar threats.  
9 Furthermore, hundreds upon thousands of empty lots  
10 sit all across New York City. Many of these  
11 appear to be abandoned, but in reality they are  
12 parcels of land that also stand to be reclaimed  
13 and transformed into community gardens or  
14 parkland. Currently, many of these are in the  
15 hands of a variety of speculative interests, who  
16 have resisted all attempts to open these lots and  
17 make them available for use at the community  
18 gardens or other forms of public parkland. This  
19 is a terrible misfortune because as they lie  
20 delinquent, they could actually serve a public  
21 good, provide natural space for children to play,  
22 learn and grow; adults to communicate, educate and  
23 rejuvenate; and elderly to rest, contemplate and  
24 share experiences. For that to be possible, all  
25 these parcels of land should also be recognized as

1  
2 potential community garden space or parkland, and  
3 be turned over to the public to have the land  
4 cleared of trash, soil tilled and trees and  
5 flowers planted. To sum up, I must ask the City  
6 Council who's interests have you been elected to  
7 serve, the general public or that of a group of  
8 self-interested speculators? I think the answer  
9 is obvious. Stand up and represent the nearly  
10 eight-and-a-quarter million people that live and  
11 breathe in this City, not the few developers that  
12 are using the lots as poker chips in the game of  
13 speculation. To do that, I say protect all  
14 community gardens, both the GreenThumb and non-  
15 GreenThumb gardens. To the City Council of New  
16 York, I demand that you support Resolution Number  
17 1890. In addition, I also urge you to consider  
18 recognizing the non-GreenThumb community gardens,  
19 as well, and the potential for thousands of  
20 abandoned lots be transformed into community  
21 gardens and preserved. Think locally, act  
22 locally, reclaim the earth by reclaiming urban  
23 space for natural public use. Thank you.

24 [applause]

25 Thank you, Chair Foster. Thank

1  
2 you, Mr. Linn. Thank you, Ms. Stone. Thank you,  
3 concerned citizens and gardeners. My name is Pat  
4 McCarty, I belong to the Warren Street St. Mark's  
5 Community Garden in Brooklyn. The garden is a  
6 pleasant little place to rest and enjoy a quiet  
7 moment away from the busy-ness of the City. It is  
8 a great place to have a cup of coffee and read the  
9 daily paper or a good book. It is much more to me  
10 than a City park. Warren Street St. Mark's  
11 Community Garden is a magnet that brings our  
12 neighborhood together, to grow food, to socialize.  
13 It is a personal place to join with friends and  
14 neighbors in community. And isn't that the point?  
15 Today we're hearing testimony about community  
16 gardens. Take a look at that word "community."  
17 The prefix "comm," meaning "with," and the root  
18 word "unity" meaning "oneness," with oneness and  
19 harmony, shared togetherness. Community gardens  
20 are more personally special places than the City  
21 parks. For many years, neighbors have come  
22 together to make abandoned lots green oases,  
23 literally and figuratively nourishing spirit as  
24 well as health. It is hoped that the New York  
25 State Attorney General's 2002 agreement will be

1  
2 extended in perpetuity to preserve and protect our  
3 community gardens. I do ask that Resolution 1890  
4 be reviewed and enacted. I would like to know  
5 that our representatives and our community gardens  
6 work in harmony. I would like to feel the comfort  
7 that when I'm gone, the Warren Street St. Mark's  
8 Community Garden, as well as so many other City  
9 community gardens, will continue to be special  
10 places for shared togetherness. Thank you.

11 [applause]

12 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you.

13 Good afternoon, Chair Foster, and  
14 the Parks and Recreation Committee. My name is  
15 Yetta Kurland, I am a resident of the third  
16 district here in Manhattan, and I'm here today to  
17 just echo the support of Reso 1890 and talk a  
18 little bit about the importance of gardening. In  
19 light of the Attorney General's agreement to  
20 protect community gardens, which is expiring in  
21 2010, which is just next year, I'm here today to  
22 ask that this body create protections and really  
23 envision resources on a local level for community  
24 gardens. Community gardens offer, as we've heard,  
25 a lot of testimony today, vital resources to our

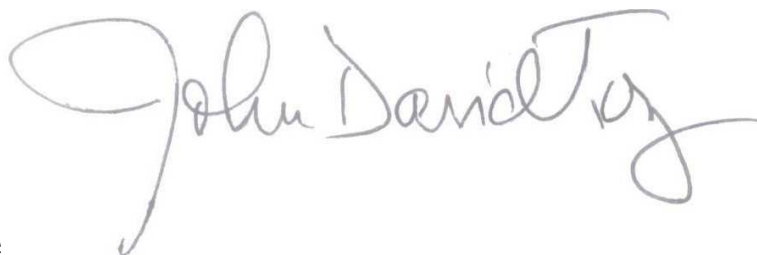
1  
2 community. As we spend much time planning and  
3 talking about greening New York City and creating  
4 more green spaces, community gardens offer an  
5 immediate working, community based, affordable  
6 blueprint for this. Gardens offer numerous  
7 benefits to local neighborhoods: they are an  
8 oasis for us to escape from the urban jungle; they  
9 teach our children about ecology, sustainability  
10 and responsibility; they connect us to our  
11 community and give us pride; they also offer  
12 opportunities, as we heard today, to create food  
13 in an affordable and healthy way, and offer  
14 inroads to think about economic and food justice.  
15 If anyone doesn't understand this, I would suggest  
16 that they take a moment to appreciate or spend  
17 time in one of the many local community gardens.  
18 And I'm here today to ask for your help beyond  
19 Resolution 1890, to envision and to help  
20 strengthen and preserve our community gardens, and  
21 to appreciate really the profound assets of these  
22 gardens, as we face even more bleak environmental  
23 forecasts. This is not a luxury, this is a  
24 necessity. We must seek to find more places for  
25 community gardens, such as vacant lots and

1  
2 property languishing in our City. We must  
3 understand the profound financial benefits in  
4 promoting community gardens in our City planning,  
5 and ensure their proper funding. And finally, we  
6 must ensure that these gardens are mapped as  
7 people have spoken about today, and as such they  
8 will be protected over time. Thank you for your  
9 time today, and I hope that you'll continue to  
10 utilize the resources and the expertise of the  
11 community members and the gardeners we've heard  
12 here today to really create opportunities in the  
13 future for our community gardens. And thank you  
14 for your work today.

15 CHAIRPERSON FOSTER: Thank you very  
16 much. [applause] I just, I'd like to thank  
17 everyone for coming out, and remember that power  
18 is in numbers in terms of your voting power. And  
19 that this is a Resolution that should come through  
20 the Council, but then needs to be pressed,  
21 supported and pushed up in Albany at the Assembly  
22 and State level. So thank you very much for  
23 coming out. There being no more testimony, this  
24 meeting is adjourned. [gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, JOHN DAVID TONG certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John David Tong". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned to the right of the printed word "Signature".

Signature

Date July 31, 2009