

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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March 8, 2019
Start: 2:00 p.m.
Recess: 4:00 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Barry S. Grodenchik - Committee on
Parks and Recreation
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joseph C. Borelli
Justin L. Brannan
Andrew Cohen
Costa G. Constantinides
Mark Gjonaj
Andy L. King
Peter A. Koo
Francisco P Moya
Eric A. Ulrich
James G. Van Bramer

A P P E A R A N C E S

Lynn Kelly
New Yorkers for Parks

Julie Tighe
New York League of Conservations Voters

Carter Strickland
Trust of Public Land

Heather Lubov
City Parks Foundation

Dan Clay
President of Local 1507

Joe Puleo
President of Local 983

Marlene Giga
Treasurer of Local 983

Dilcy Benn
President of Local 1505

Raymond Figueroa, Jr.
New York City Community Garden Coalition

Cory Provost
Prospect Park Alliance

Hunter Armstrong
Natural Areas Conservancy

Charles Krezell
LUNGS

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Lynden Miller
New Yorkers for Parks

Kristina Taylor
Friends of Van Cortlandt Park

Martha Lopez-Gilpin
Astoria Park Alliance

Brad Taylor
Friends of Morningside Park

Meryl Brodsky
Friends of Dag Hammarskjold Plaza

Sherrill Kazain
Friends of Dag Hammarskjold Plaza

Anne Hersh
Friends of Dag Hammarskjold Plaza

Tara Gitter
New York Restoration Project

Molly Adams
New York City Audubon

Eli Dvorkin
CUFF

Johanna Clearfield
Urban Wildlife Coalition

Fay Hill
Resident of Springfield Gardens

Kay Webster
Sara Roosevelt Park

Lucia Makin

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Parks Gardener

Roxanne Delgado
Friends of Pelham Parkway

Pamela Pettyjohn
Coney Island Beautification Project

Scott Daly
NYJTL New York Junior Tennis and Learning

Toba Potosky
Cadman Park Conservancy

Katherine Conkling Thompson
Friends of Bushwick Inlet Park

Jerilyn Sackler
Volunteer in Prospect Park

Tessa Huxley
Forsyth Street

Lo Vander Valk
Carnegie Hill Neighbors

Joanna Oltman Smith
829 President Street

Joel Kupferman
New York Environmental Law and Justice

Mitchel Cohen
No Spray Coalition Against Pesticides

Juan Gonzales
NYRR

Celinda Casanova
NYRR

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Marlene Pantin
Red Hook Conservancy

Karen Argenti
Bronx Council for Environmental Quality

Laura Spalter
Chair of Broadway Community Alliance

Robert Fanuzzi
Council for Environmental Quality

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2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: [Gavel] Good afternoon
3 everybody and welcome to the hearing on the Parks and
4 Recreations Committee Fiscal 2020 Preliminary Budget
5 and Fiscal 2019, I should say Fiscal 2020 Preliminary
6 Mayor's Management Report for the Department of Parks
7 and Recreation. I am Barry Grodenchik, I have the
8 honor of Chairing the Committee on Parks and
9 Recreation for the Council term. We have been joined
10 so far today by Councilman Peter Koo, who represents
11 part of the borough of Queens. We also have two
12 other Queens Ites here today, Councilman Jimmy Van
13 Bramer and Councilman Costa Constantinides.

14 In line with the budget process is mandated by
15 the City Charter that ultimately will lead to the
16 adoption of the Fiscal 2020 Budget.

17 Today, we will hear testimony from the Department
18 of Parks and Recreation on its expense and capital
19 budgets for Fiscal 2020. I want to welcome
20 Commissioner Silver and his team once again to City
21 Hall, it's always good to see you. It would help me
22 see you better if I was putting on my glasses, but I
23 have to take them off to read. So, the Departments
24 proposed Fiscal 2020 Expense Budget totals \$542.9
25 million, which is \$8.8 million more than the Fiscal

1
2 2019 adopted budget representing a little more than
3 half of one percent of the entire city budget of
4 \$92.2 billion. The Departments proposed Capital
5 Budget for Fiscal 2020-2023, totals \$2.3 billion
6 which represents approximately 4.3 percent of the
7 city's total capital budget for those years.

8 The New York City's Park system has dramatically
9 improved in almost every way in recent years with
10 better upkeep, greater safety and dazzling new
11 renovations which I have enjoyed seeing over the past
12 year that I have been Council Chair.

13 Most recent Mayor's manage report shows that the
14 upward trend has continued over the past year. The
15 Parks Department has accomplished this feat despite a
16 tight operating budget thanks to creativity and the
17 hard work of its staff. The efforts of thousands and
18 thousands of New Yorkers who volunteer their time and
19 the increasing generosity of private donors.

20 However, it is clear that there are still areas in
21 the Department's budget that desperately need
22 additional enhancements both on funding and staffing
23 levels particularly I'm referring to the Department's
24 capital program area, its office is funding and its
25 maintenance program area.

Also, the Department's Preliminary Budget does not include baselining of any of the enhance funding measures which the City Council put in place last year. These include \$9.6 million for park maintenance workers, \$1 million for tree stump removal, \$1.7 million for pool and beach season extension and \$4.5 million for the parks equity initiative, which is council funded to help build a more equitable park system.

I am hopeful that in the Executive Budget, the Administration will restore these funds. However, merely seeking restoration of the items that were once funded by the Department is not enough. It is time that we as a city start treating our parks as the critical infrastructure that they are and fund them appropriately. That is why I am proud to have partnered with New Yorkers for Parks, the League of Conservation voters, District Council 37 AFSCME, and numerous park organizations and other organizations who understand the importance of a vital parks system to this city.

Currently, almost 100 groups have joined our efforts from all across the city of New York. These organization represent by themselves, hundreds and

1 hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. We call it
2 play fair and if you'd like a sticker, I'm sure you
3 can find one in this room.
4

5 This grassroots movement is mobilizing to fund our
6 parks at the level they deserve by dramatically
7 increasing the Department's Annual Budget and to take
8 our parks out of the Annual Budget dance which has
9 long played a role in keeping our parks underfunded.

10 At this hearing, I will be asking all witnesses,
11 including you Commissioner Silver, to tell us what
12 their wish list for parks would be if they had more
13 public funding to work with. Use this opportunity to
14 let the Council and the Administration know what the
15 city needs to do so that your park and all of our
16 parks have the resources and amenities they need now
17 in the long term. As such, we hope to hear from the
18 Department on how these areas I just mentioned, can
19 be improved.

20 Lastly, keeping in mind the importance of parks
21 and open spaces, I look forward to us working
22 together by taking the necessary steps to increase
23 access to parks for all New Yorkers and ensuring that
24 the cities public parks, which is almost every single
25

1
2 one of them and parks programs are adequately funded
3 in this budget and in all future budgets.

4 Before I welcome Commissioner Silver, I want to
5 mention something that started last spring and I
6 wanted to thank him publicly and the Mayor.

7 We had a hearing last spring on Rockaway Beach
8 and the proposed closing of a long stretch of the
9 beach in the middle of the Rockaway Peninsula. At
10 that time, Commissioner Silver and First Deputy
11 Commissioner Liam Kavanagh were able to reopen a
12 smaller stretch of the beach and we were grateful to
13 them at this time. This week, however, we have
14 received news that the Army Corps of Engineer will be
15 replenishing this section of beach and we hope before
16 the beach season opens. I'm getting a yes over there
17 and I want to acknowledge the efforts of Mayor de
18 Blasio, Commissioner Silver and First Deputy
19 Commissioner Liam Kavanagh in making this happen.
20 It's greatly appreciated by the millions of people
21 who use that beach every year.

22 With that, I'm going to ask our Council Chris
23 [Inaudible 9:10] to swear in the Commissioner and the
24 people on the panel and Commissioner before we start,
25 if you could just let us know who's up there. I know

1
2 you, well, I know them all, but the audience probably
3 would like to know.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, joining me here at
5 this table, we have First Deputy Commissioner Liam
6 Kavanagh. We also have Matt Drury, our director of
7 Government Relations and nearly to my left, and into
8 my right we have Deputy Commissioner Therese
9 Braddick. We're also joined by a number of my senior
10 members of my staff and both the capital team, the
11 boroughs, and our newest Commissioner for the Borough
12 of Queens, Mike Dockett. If you would just raise
13 your hand, so people acknowledge you.

14 As we all know everyone loves their borough
15 Commissioners and I aspire to be a borough
16 Commissioner one day, but I just want to be thankful,
17 not only that for all the other supporters, I see
18 them here in the room sporting a very attractive
19 sticker on their shirt, as you as well, Chair
20 Grodenchik.

21 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you, Commissioner.
22 Mr. Council.

23 COUNCIL: Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
24 whole truth and nothing but the truth in your
25 testimony before this Committee today?

1
2 PANEL: I do.

3 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, good afternoon, Chair
4 Grodenchik and members of the Parks Committee. I am
5 Michell Silver, Commissioner of the New York City
6 Department of Parks and Recreation and I am proud to
7 be joined here today by a number of my senior staff,
8 who I've just introduced.

9 As you are aware, New York City Parks primary
10 responsibility is the stewardship of over 30,000
11 acres of green and open space, 14 percent of New York
12 City's land mass, including 10,000 acres of natural
13 areas. We oversee nearly 4,500 individual
14 properties, ranging from parks and playgrounds and
15 community gardens and green streets and thank you for
16 allowing me the opportunity to discuss the agency's
17 Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2020, and to
18 provide an overview of our agency's recent efforts
19 and initiatives in building and maintaining our
20 city's green and open spaces for All New Yorkers.
21 We're proud of our achievements over the past year
22 and welcome this chance to update the Council on our
23 continuing work. With the tremendous support from
24 Mayor de Blasio in partnership with City Council, New
25 York City Parks will continue to find innovative ways

2 to improve our maintenance and operations, expand
3 programs and services to improve the experience in
4 parks and public spaces. We are working smarter and
5 more efficiently, streamlining the capital process,
6 and continuing to improve the quality of life for New
7 Yorkers all over our great city.

8 As the Mayor noted when he presented this year's
9 Preliminary Budget, it is relatively cautious and
10 conservative, in light of the potential economic
11 impacts faced by the City in relation to dynamics, at
12 the state and federal level, but it still gives our
13 Agency the resources we need to get the job done.
14 The Preliminary Budget reflects our agency's ongoing
15 priorities, providing for operating expenses of
16 \$542.8 million. That number includes pay raises to
17 \$15 per hour for our Parks Opportunity Program
18 employees, and over \$1 million in new funding, for
19 rat mitigation efforts to increase late day cleaning
20 and collection services in parks in the Rat
21 Mitigation zones in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and
22 Manhattan, as well as new exterminator positions to
23 help address additional concerns. The Preliminary
24 10-year Capital Budget including the current Fiscal
25 Year, provides total Parks Capital Budget of \$5

1 billion, with \$71 million in Mayoral funding for
2 approved new capital needs.
3

4 2018 was an exciting year for New York City
5 Parks. I hope you'll agree that our achievements
6 over the last five years have been considerable, and
7 that we're continuing to build momentum in more ways
8 than one. Specifically, our agency's ability to
9 deliver capital projects and improve our parks
10 continues to be my top priority. In Fiscal Year
11 2018, we completed construction on 123 park
12 improvement projects, with 88 percent in on time and
13 on budget and 27 of those projects, over 20 percent
14 were completed with construction early 30 days or
15 more ahead of schedule. And more improvements are on
16 the way. We complete design on 167 park capital
17 projects in Fiscal Year 2018, a 78 percent increase
18 over the 98 projects that were completed and designed
19 in Fiscal Year 2014. The internal reforms we have
20 instituted for our design process since then, the
21 administration took office, we streamlined reviews,
22 reduced internal process, are having a transformative
23 impact. On average, the single site landscape
24 projects in Fiscal Year 2014 took over two years to
25 complete design, but projects that are now completed

1
2 in this Fiscal Year, we had cut that average timeline
3 in half. When projects encounter complications or
4 delays, we're tracking those challenges head on,
5 working with internal and external partners to clear
6 logjams and get projects back on track.

7 Upon arrival at this agency, our backlog was over
8 150 previously existing projects that had run into
9 serious delays. I can report that we are close to
10 two thirds of those delayed projects, which have
11 predated this administration, have now been
12 completed. That's two thirds of those that were
13 delayed. The remaining projects are nearly all in
14 construction, with a few projects expected to begin
15 construction shortly.

16 Though the City's capital process can be
17 complicated and lengthy, we're proud to do our part
18 in keeping these projects moving forward as quickly
19 as possible, and we are committed to working with the
20 Council and our agency partners to continue finding
21 practical solutions and making improvements.

22 With this spirit in mind, I'd like to update the
23 Council and outline some agency highlights for 2018
24 in all five boroughs. Starting with Queens, we're
25 continuing to make progress with a key agency

1 initiative, our Anchor Parks program, which is
2 investing \$150 million of capital funds to make our
3 old parks new again with five projects, one in each
4 borough, for parks that serve as vital open spaces
5 for thousands of New Yorkers. Phase 1 of the project
6 at Astoria Park, which will include a synthetic
7 soccer turf field and improved site amenities, is in
8 construction and is expected to be completed later
9 this year and we anticipate that Phase 2, which will
10 completely reconstruct the comfort station at
11 Charybdis Playground, will begin construction this
12 summer. The Anchor Park projects in all other four
13 boroughs are progressing as well, and we look forward
14 to unveiling these revived community spaces soon. We
15 are also pleased to make Fisher Pool in East
16 Elmhurst, one of the pilot sites for our Cool Pools
17 Initiative. We gave a new look and feel to five
18 outdoor pools in under served neighborhoods
19 throughout the City, none of which had seen
20 significant renovations since they were built in the
21 1970's. We utilize a creative approach to
22 reactivating these spaces by providing fun polar
23 themed wall art, lounge chairs for sunbathing, and
24 relaxing poolside, cabana style shade structures to
25

1 keep swimmers cool, and free poolside activities,
2 including games, sports, art and crafts, and fitness
3 classes. Cool Pools was a tremendous success,
4 improving the outdoor pool experience so much that we
5 increased attendance by 27 percent of these five
6 pools, which people in these neighborhoods began
7 calling the resort pools. We currently are examining
8 ways to expand this approach to other pools
9 throughout the City, and we look forward to providing
10 the Council with an update soon.

12 In Brooklyn, we were delighted to cut the ribbon
13 on a complete reconstruction of Lieutenant Joseph
14 Petrosino Park in January, three months ahead of
15 schedule, as part of the Administration's commitment
16 toward parks equity, the Community Parks Initiative
17 or CPI. As you're well aware, CPI is the signature
18 program of NYC Parks effort to invest \$318 million of
19 Mayoral capital funds for improving parks throughout
20 the City, many of which have been overlooked for
21 decades. 67 parks and playgrounds were included in
22 this incredible initiative to completely reimagine
23 and reconstruct these vital community amenities and
24 I'm pleased to announce that we have already
25 completed 35 of the 67, with an additional 17 sited

1
2 in construction. The remainder are slated for
3 completion by 2021.

4 Earlier this year, we delivered another capital
5 renovation in McCarren Park, two months ahead of
6 schedule. The park now has a beautifully
7 reconstructed synthetic multiuse field and a running
8 track. Visitors to McCarren Park are also benefiting
9 from our implementation of our new strategies to
10 clean and maintain our heavily used parks. In
11 Brooklyn, we have instituted our Zone Management Plan
12 to better manage trash and other maintenance concerns
13 at McCarren Park, as well as Fort Greene Park. We
14 piloted this approach at Crotona Park in the Bronx in
15 2017 and having expanded our approach to these two
16 new sites in Brooklyn, we have seen tremendous
17 results in improved cleanliness ratings at these
18 three locations.

19 In the Bronx, we're investing \$60 million to
20 restore the majestic Orchard Beach Pavilion, with an
21 additional \$35 million allocated for the second phase
22 of improvements for visitors at this beautiful beach.
23 Our agency partners at EDC now have designers on
24 board for this exciting project, and we have held two
25 public input sessions, so that local residents

1 throughout the Bronx can help shape the design for
2 this sorely needed restoration. We're also
3 reactivating and reenergizing Aqueduct Walk, a park
4 constructed on top of Old Croton Aqueduct, in a
5 community that has faced significant challenges.
6 Earlier this year, we announced that we're adding the
7 Aqueduct Walk to our Catalyst program, our highly
8 regarded intensive community engagement program, led
9 by our dedicated staff at Partnership for Parks, a
10 joint program with our friends at the City Parks
11 Foundation. The Catalyst program targets
12 historically underserved neighborhoods and utilizes a
13 focused organized approach to work with local
14 advocates and volunteers to improve our parks and
15 build community. We're excited to see the Catalyst
16 program help establish a steady network of park
17 stewards to sustain long term improved conditions
18 along with Aqueduct Walk, as the program has helped
19 build supportive communities surrounding parks in
20 neighborhoods all over New York City.

22 In Staten Island, the Ocean Breeze Athletic
23 Complex recently hosted the USA Track and Field
24 Indoor Championship, highlighting its national status
25 as a premier athletic facility. This amazing three-

1 day event allowed New Yorkers the opportunity to
2 witness history, as a World and U.S. records were
3 broken in the Men's 600-meter and Women's 600-meter
4 races. This was the first time in nearly two decades
5 that the USATF brought the indoor championship back
6 to New York City and we look forward to hosting even
7 more elite track events at this incredible facility.
8 2018 was also an exciting year for new Staten Island
9 park spaces, as we are proud to formally incorporate
10 Brookfield Park into our agency portfolio after year
11 of coordination between the state and local partners.
12 This acquisition pushed of this open space holdings,
13 now pushed our acre count over 30,000 acres for the
14 first time and more importantly, this new park, on
15 the site of a former landfill, delivers much needed
16 green space in a community where open space is well
17 needed and deserved.

18
19 And in Manhattan, at Jackie Robinson Park and
20 Seward Park, two exciting capital projects are
21 underway with funding provided by our Parks Without
22 Borders Initiative, utilizing \$40 million in Mayoral
23 investment in all five boroughs to enhance
24 neighborhood access and extend the beauty of parks
25 our into the surrounding communities. At Seward

1
2 Park, we're creating a more inviting community space
3 adjacent to the nearby library by reactivating a
4 former street bed and improving park edges,
5 sidewalks, the existing garden space. In Jackie
6 Robinson, we're reconstructing a damaged staircase,
7 reopening entrances, and central pathways to increase
8 access and beauty of the park edges. All eight of
9 our signature Parks Without Borders projects
10 throughout the City are progressing nicely and the
11 design approach we're incorporating in other projects
12 and changing the way in which New Yorkers think of
13 their parks and open space. While keeping our parks
14 in the best condition possible is our top priority,
15 we continue to find new and creative ways to keep New
16 Yorkers engaged with their local park, which is why
17 we are delighted to unveil the beautiful new Stop NYC
18 Parks, or I should say, the Next Stop NYC Parks
19 transit map, that was available at our stand at the
20 past seasons Union Square Holiday Market. The map,
21 which mimics a New York City transit map, highlights
22 local parks, many of which are just steps away from a
23 subway stop, and the overwhelming demand we saw for
24 New Yorkers was a testament to just how much this
25 City loves and cares for its parks and open spaces.

1
2 Natural Resource division continues to care for our
3 urban tree canopy, incredibly important part of our
4 City's natural infrastructure and in 2018, we worked
5 with the Natural Areas Conservancy to launch the
6 Forest Management Framework, a new vision for urban
7 forest management in New York City, which outlines
8 recommendations and best practices for restoration
9 and comprehensive management of all 7,000 acres of
10 our City forested areas.

11 I'll close by noting our efforts to improve and
12 protect New Yorker's connections to another important
13 natural resource, the waterways that surround our
14 City. In the midst of high rise buildings and busy
15 avenues, it is easy to forget that our location along
16 the water is what helped make this City the global
17 capital that it is today and this administration is
18 working to preserve and improve this important
19 legacy, by implementing thoughtful projects that
20 serve to reconnect us to the waterfront, but also
21 provide vital protection and resiliency measure in
22 changing the global environment. With our partners
23 at the federal level, the City was proud to announce
24 that they've successfully executed the Project
25 Partnership Agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of

1
2 Engineers and the New York State to lock in funding
3 for the construction of the Staten Island Levee
4 Project, a \$615 million project, of which two thirds
5 will be federally funded. The U.S. Army Corps of
6 Engineers plans to break ground on this project in
7 2020 and expects full completion by 2024.

8 The Mayor also announced his vision for a
9 complete Manhattan Waterfront Greenway, to close key
10 gaps in the waterfront access in Midtown East,
11 Inwood, and in East Harlem, where we are making a
12 \$100 million investment in new waterfront parks at
13 East 125th Street and East 132nd Street. We continue
14 to make significant investments for the East River
15 Esplanade, identifying opportunities to repair and
16 reconstruct this vital waterfront infrastructure
17 which suffered from decades of neglect. Moving
18 further south, the Mayor's Preliminary Budget, also
19 includes \$56 million in additional funding for the
20 East Side Coastal Resiliency project protecting
21 Manhattan neighborhoods along the East River, and to
22 add a fly over bridge to serve as an important access
23 point near the Con Edison building at East 14th
24 Street and replace the existing narrow sidewalk at
25 that location and on another side of East River in

1
2 Brooklyn, we continue to make progress on our
3 commitment to build Bushwick Inlet Park, as we begin
4 design for two additional parcels that will receive
5 \$17.5 million in capital investment, creating new
6 open space for residents of Williamsburg and
7 Greenpoint. And in Queens, we're seeing exciting
8 upgrades at Flushing Bay, with \$45 million secured to
9 reconstruct the World's Fair Marina, and of course, I
10 have to offer an update for our beloved waterfront
11 destination, the Rockaway, which you've mentioned.
12 The Boardwalk was badly damaged after Superstorm
13 Sandy, but thanks to complete reconstruction, it has
14 reemerged as a major attraction for New Yorkers and
15 out of towners alike. Portions of the shoreline have
16 been threatened by increased erosion, and as you may
17 be well aware, we had to implement some targeted
18 closures along the beach last summer. We worked
19 closely with the community and local vendors to make
20 sure that the Rockaways could enjoy another
21 successful and safe beach season.

22 Earlier this week, we were delighted to announce
23 the agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,
24 to use dredged sand to re-nourish and restore the
25 Rockaway Beach from Beach and 92nd Street to Beach

1
2 103rd Street. Though there are several variables at
3 play, including weather patterns and the pace of
4 dredging work which the sand will be sourced, the
5 project should allow for the reopening of the stretch
6 of beach this coming summer season, which we know
7 will be good news for the Rockaway residents and all
8 New Yorkers, as these opportunities and spaces are
9 for rest, relaxation, enjoyment and vital for
10 protecting our health and wellbeing.

11 So, thank you for allowing us to testify before
12 you and for your dedication to providing great parks
13 and open spaces for all New Yorkers. We look forward
14 to continuing to work with the Mayor and the City to
15 create a bright, green future for more equitable and
16 innovative park system. We value your partnership
17 and thank you for your support of our agency and we
18 would now be happy to answer any questions that you
19 may have.

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you, Commissioner.
21 We have been joined by some of my colleagues, Justin
22 Brannan of the great borough Brooklyn, Francisco Moya
23 from Queens of course, Andrew Cohen from the Bronx
24 and we have a junior Council Member apparently, from
25 the borough of Queens representing the Rockaway

1 Boardwalk and joined by her father, Councilman Eric
2 Ulrich. It's good to see everybody. Oh, and Mr.
3 Gjonaj, how did you sneak in? He represents the
4 biggest park in the city Pelham Bay Park.
5

6 Commissioner, thank you for your testimony.
7 We're beginning the budget process, it'll end
8 hopefully by June 30th, hopefully a lot earlier than
9 June 30th. As we can see there are a lot of people
10 in the City that are interested in the parks. I was
11 happy to be with you in the Bronx a few weeks ago
12 with Commissioner Rosa at the great Bronx Speak Up.
13 It really is a great event and I know we're making
14 progress on an event like that in the borough
15 Brooklyn and I'm meeting with our new Commissioner
16 Dockett next week and maybe we'll talk about doing
17 that in Queens, I know it's been tried in the past.

18 You know, one of the things that has concerned me
19 historically is the low point that the parks budget
20 has reached. It's come up a few percentages of the
21 few hundreds of a percentage point and I'm not going
22 to say that the Mayor has not been attentive to
23 parks, because he has and has been innovative. The
24 Community Parks Initiative has done a great job and
25 other things but I am still concerned and that's why

1
2 you see so many people in this room because I'm
3 concerned and they're concerned that the budget is
4 not where it needs to be and so, with those words in
5 mind, you'll hear from my colleagues shortly. My
6 first question, can you help us in this process by
7 explaining to this committee the changes in spending
8 in the Department's Budget, especially for
9 maintenance and operations which are critical to
10 protecting the investments, the billions of dollars
11 of investment we're making and for the Capital
12 Projects division?

13 MITCHELL SILVER: Maintenance and Operation
14 covers about 75 percent of our budget. If you would
15 look at the Mayor's targets for both cleanliness and
16 in terms of condition, we will always meet and exceed
17 those targets. I understand there's always a concern
18 about the resources we have. Our job is to get the
19 work done with the budget that we have. Clearly, we
20 would always welcome more resources, but we know this
21 is the beginning of the budget conversation that we
22 go through every year. We want to make sure as it
23 goes on and the City Council reaches out to both OMB
24 and the Mayor's office, we'll continue to see what we
25 can do throughout this process, but my goal is with

2 the funds that we have to ensure that we have well
3 maintained and cared for park system and 75 percent
4 of our budget, as I stated, within maintenance, but
5 our goal year over year is to make sure we continue
6 to have a park system the public can be proud in and
7 we watched those numbers very careful about
8 cleanliness as well as condition and make adjustments
9 to ensure we meet those targets.

10 So, beyond that, I don't know if I can answer
11 your question further.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Let me modify then a
13 little. As I said, in my statement in the beginning,
14 a lot of people here are going to testify today after
15 you're done testifying. I know that you have been
16 experimenting with more fix posts and parks and if
17 you can go into that a little and what it might cost
18 us to do that because we are concerned about that.
19 You know, I visited close to 100 parks now about two
20 thirds just over two thirds of the Council Districts,
21 always with your staff, although sometimes I kind of
22 go in different neighborhoods just because I enjoy
23 seeing parks, but as good of job as we're doing we
24 could certainly be doing better if we had more
25 resources and I'd like you to talk to that. If you

1 had, we'll call it the Mitch Silver wish list. I
2 hope I didn't get you in trouble.

3
4 MITCHELL SILVER: You know, I wish not to answer
5 the question. So, the public would understand,
6 there's two ways you manage parks. You have the fix
7 posts, where their staff that stays within the park
8 and then you have mobile crews and our parks, it's a
9 combination, we have fixed post in parks and then
10 mobile crews who go from site to site.

11 We try to pilot in Crotona. I cannot give you
12 the cost off hand, we certainly can follow up but you
13 divide up the park in zones where one of the park
14 workers are responsible for an entire zone, but you
15 also have to supplement that with parks enforced
16 patrol, so, it is costly. We self-funded that when
17 we also wanted to try the pilot in both McCarren and
18 in Fort Greene and so, it's working successfully but
19 I don't believe we have the budget resources to
20 expand that to other parks, but we want to see if it
21 works. Pilots have to report back to see how it's
22 working, to see how we can replicate in other places,
23 but at this time, I wouldn't want to shift some of
24 the resources from mobile crews to put them into
25 other fixed posts.

1 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: No, I understand that.
2
3 I mean, you have a responsibility to every New
4 Yorker, to the Mayor and to make sure that you do the
5 best with what you can, which I know you are doing.

6 MITCHELL SILVER: But we'll follow up with a
7 number, whether it's a per acre cost or by park or
8 something.

9 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, we can put that
10 into our wish list to play fair and you're going to
11 hear about that a little later but I'm glad to hear
12 that that's something that I know that you've been
13 thinking about.

14 Since the Preliminary Budget was announced last
15 month, has the Department made any additional budget
16 requests to OMB and if so, what was the dollar value
17 of those requests and the outcome that you could
18 share with us? Maybe there isn't any, I don't know.

19 MICHELL SILVER: Since the Preliminary Budget was
20 released?

21 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Yeah, yeah.

22 MITCHELL SILVER: No, there were no additional
23 new needs submitted.

24 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, the Preliminary
25 2020 Plan for Parks and Recreation recognizes \$11.8

1 million in Federal funding for Fiscal 2019. Given
2 the current atmosphere in Washington, can you give
3 the Committee a sense of which Federal Grants the
4 Department is seeking for the upcoming Fiscal Year
5 and how much you hope to receive?
6

7 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, in 2019, a lot of those
8 were based on CBDG Grants, that was about \$2.56 and
9 those went for some specific parks. We had a lot of
10 one shot for several parks. For FY 2020, we have
11 \$2.6 in baseline for CD funding and \$3.9 in one shot
12 funding for the restoration of Lewis Playground and
13 Calvert Vaux Path in Prospect Park. So, those are
14 ones that represent, I'd have to follow up on the
15 \$11.6 but that's what I have down in terms of federal
16 funding for FY 2020.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay. The Mayor at his
18 Preliminary Budget announcement with the Council and
19 later with the Press, announced the program to
20 eliminate the gap which targets all city agencies in
21 order to achieve \$750 million in savings from this
22 Fiscal Year to next and OMB, according to the
23 documents that the Committee Staff has received,
24 targets Parks and Receptions savings target as \$12.6
25 million which is approximately 3 percent of the city

1 funded budget in both this Fiscal Year and Plan 2020.

2 Can you give us some sense of where you think you're

3 going to get those savings? It greatly concerns me.

4 We're looking to bring Parks funding back to historic

5 levels and the Mayor's Administration seems to want

6 to take it backwards from the strides that they've

7 made forward?

8 MITCHELL SILVER: We're working with OMB to

9 identify opportunities for savings within our

10 baseline expense budget. That review is still

11 underway, so we have not finalized any decisions but

12 expect that we'll be able to identify savings that

13 will not impact delivery of services to the public.

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: It's a lot of money.

15 MITCHELL SILVER: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: It's a lot of money and

17 it concerns me. I just want to be clear on that on

18 the record. It concerns me, it concerns our Speaker,

19 and it concerns every member of the Council. If

20 there's one thing that everybody loves, its our Parks

21 and you know, 130 million New Yorker's and visitors

22 can't be wrong. That's the number of visitors that

23 we get every year in our New York City Parks, so we

24 will be fighting, at least I will. I know the rest

1
2 of my colleagues will be fighting that Peg. I've got
3 more questions, but I'm going to turn it over now to
4 my colleagues for some questions. I'm going to put
5 them on a three-minute clock. I fully expect that
6 they will adhere to that clock and the first one up
7 is Councilman Peter Koo. Councilman Koo?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Thank you, Commissioner
9 Silver. So, I have been a big supporter of the parks
10 and often put money towards the parks in my district.
11 One of the most utilized parks in my district is
12 **[Inaudible 51:19]**. In 2015, I was told it would cost
13 a certain amount of money to renovate the park, so I
14 put in the money. In March 2017, the park asked me
15 for more money, so I secured that money. Then, two
16 months later, parks told me that the estimate was
17 off, and it would cost even more money, in total I
18 have put in with the help of the Speaker and
19 Financial Daniel Dromm over \$3.5 million and the
20 Queens Borough President has put in even more. So,
21 my question is, how does Parks determine how much a
22 park renovation will cost?

23 MATTHEW SILVER: We use industry practice. We
24 actually bought some new estimating software as
25 adding to estimators and determining the cost of an

1 estimate and then when you put out to bid, what you
2 get back from the contractors, there's always going
3 to be a variation. It is something that updates how
4 we do our estimates going forward.
5

6 The good news in your case is that project will
7 go into construction this June but we're always going
8 back to find out what is happening in the market. I
9 know that we're always looking at what is happening
10 with the cost of steel in terms of what is happening
11 with some of the trade wars, to determine exactly
12 what these commodities cost and how these estimates
13 will ultimately fall, but there is something we are
14 always tweaking and we're trying to minimize the time
15 between we give you the first estimate and if one or
16 two years past, we do expect those prices to go up,
17 but it's something that we're also trying to work
18 with and we're trying to do more funding of it
19 internally, so we do not have to go back to Council
20 Members on a regular basis for you to cover that
21 shortfall. So, that's something more and more we're
22 trying to do, so the burden is not going to be on the
23 Council Member. So, we're focusing on estimates,
24 watching it carefully, seeing whats happening in
25 terms of the cost of steel, which is now slightly

1
2 going up and minimizing the time of when we give you
3 the first estimate and then when it actually goes out
4 to bid as well as, in some cases, us covering some of
5 the shortfall.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: So, does parks plan on doing
7 another one of Community Parks Initiative?

8 MITCHELL SILVER: No, not at this time. We're
9 focused on completing the 67. As I stated, we've
10 already finished 35. About another 17 are in
11 construction but at this time, there is no funding to
12 continue on the Community Parks Initiative.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: So, if you do the next one,
14 and I will recommend you the Bland Playground on 40
15 Road in my district. I sent you a letter in July
16 2018 and I better give you a copy of these. I hope
17 you will consider Bland Playground in my district
18 because this is in one of the most densely areas.
19 So, we need the **[Inaudible 55:49]**, the money to
20 renovate the park. So, thank you.

21 MITCHELL SILVER: Alright, thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Perfect timing. Next,
23 we're going to hear from my colleague from Western
24 Queens, Costa Constantinides.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Commissioner,
3 good to see you again. So, I'm going to talk a
4 little bit about the procurement and design. Design
5 is supposed to be what, nine to twelve months?

6 MITCHELL SILVER: Up to about a year, correct.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Up to about a
8 year, but we shouldn't be at a year for every
9 project, right? Like, that's the worst-case
10 scenario?

11 MITCHELL SILVER: That's correct.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: So, here's my
13 dilemma. House and I have spoken to your staff
14 already, so I'm not saying anything in public that I
15 haven't said in private. I met with them last week,
16 we have a project, Halletts Cove multipurpose area.
17 Fully funded, we scoped it for design last August, we
18 have a design. I've been told its going to take
19 another six months to put together documents to go
20 into procurement. I can't see what would take six
21 months to put together documents. If you want, I'm
22 an attorney, I can do it for you guys today, but we
23 shouldn't be spending six months putting documents
24 together to go into procurement. I'm livid about
25 this Commissioner.

1
2 MATCHELL SILVER: These are construction
3 documents; these are the specifications. When you
4 construct something and go out to bid, these aren't
5 just documents, in terms of legal documents, these
6 are construction drawings with specifications to
7 ensure it is constructed properly, all the
8 fabrications involved, the material involved. So,
9 this is within that one-year time frame. It's not
10 one year for design plus construction documents,
11 that's all included in the one-year design. When the
12 construction documents are completed, then it can
13 move onto the procurement process.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: But here's my
15 complaint, right? We have a design, it's March,
16 you're telling me it takes six months to put together
17 the designs. Then we're going to get to twelve
18 months, which is supposed to be the worst-case
19 scenario to do that.

20 MITCHELL SILVER: If you want to check with the
21 industry about how long it takes to put construction
22 documents together, six months is about average, yes.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: That's terrible.
24 But then so, where do we get to nine months? Where

25

1
2 does the nine months come from? If it's going to
3 take six months just to put together documents.

4 MITCHELL SILVER: It varies on the complexity of
5 the design. We'll certainly invite you to come to
6 our office out in Queens to show you exactly what a
7 contract booked looks like, and when you see it this
8 thick, I think it gives you an appreciation because
9 we want to make sure it's done in a safe manner.

10 That the contractor knows exactly what their bidding
11 on and they know what their constructing, but these
12 are construction drawings when I say documents, I
13 don't think it's doing exactly what this contract
14 book and specifications look like because it is a
15 thick book.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: But here's the
17 problem I have right, we funded this project in the
18 Budget of 2017, which is FY 2018, right? This now is
19 going to go until August, probably not going to go
20 into procurement until late this year, which means
21 procurements going to take another thousand years.
22 So, from a park that was funded in 2017, we're not
23 going to see it constructed until 2022, 2023. Is
24 that fair or accurate here?

1
2 MITCHELL SILVER: I think the numbers are not
3 accurate.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: No, we funded the
5 project in Speaker **[Inaudible 1:00:52]** last term.
6 So, we scoped it a year late, so we're talking about
7 five to six years from the time the project was
8 funded to the time we're actually going to see it on
9 the ground. That bothers me, especially when it's
10 next to public housing. The residents there deserve
11 better, we all deserve better to see this project
12 stalled in that way.

13 MITCHELL SILVER: In all due respect Council
14 Member, the project is not stalled. We have a start
15 date of August 18. All of our projects now are being
16 done three to four years. We'll certainly sit down
17 to go over specifically our numbers. My goal is to
18 move projects along regardless of where there
19 located.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: But it was funded
21 in 2017, it took a year to design.

22 MITCHELL SILVER: No, it took a year to assign it
23 to someone to start the work. On average, we get well
24 over a hundred projects per year. We wait for staff
25 to become available, so they can start the design.

1
2 That could take anywhere from six months to a year to
3 assign it to staff. Once it's assigned to staff, it
4 can take three to four years to actually design,
5 procure, and build a project. This one right now is
6 on schedule. I think your concern is that time gap
7 between when it was funded and when it actually
8 started and that's something, we can certainly have a
9 conversation about.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: I'm deeply
11 frustrated about this. I mean, it's going to be five
12 years and I know Mr. Chair I'm sorry, I'm taking more
13 than my three minutes but I just need to get this
14 out. To say its going to five years, that's just not
15 something that is great for the residents there who
16 want to see government work.

17 MITCHELL SILVER: I agree with you. I do believe
18 government was working and this is process of
19 streamline which the process had been longer prior to
20 2014. So, we can sit down and go over specifically
21 what the process is. I am governed by the rules that
22 I need to follow and we're following those rules to
23 move this along as quickly as possible.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: I'm happy to help
25 you change those rules.

1
2 MITCHELL SILVER: I'm willing to sit down and
3 have that conversation with you.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: But please, lets
5 do that.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you Councilman
7 Constantinides. Commissioner, in the last week, I
8 just want to follow up on a question asked before.
9 Has there been any requests from OMB for you to move
10 Capital Projects back into the out years?

11 MITCHELL SILVER: Yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Can you talk about that?

13 MITCHELL SILVER: We're just getting the details.
14 I'm sitting with staff; I'll be able to share that
15 with you soon after this meeting, but we just got
16 word within the last day or two.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, I would appreciate
18 that follow up whether its from you or Deputy
19 Commissioner Braddick or whoever it is, they could
20 follow up with me and some of the staff people who
21 are concerned about that. At this time, from the
22 great borough of Brooklyn, Justin Brannan, Council
23 member Brannan.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Thank you, Chair.
25 Commissioner, always good to see you. I must say,

1
2 your local team continues to be dynamite. Borough
3 Commissioner Mar, super responsive. I'm pretty sure I
4 talk to him more than I talk to my wife. She
5 probably thinks I'm having an affair. I'm okay with
6 that but no, he's great and it's helpful to think
7 outside the box and try to push things forward. I've
8 always respected you as a Commissioner because I
9 think we share similar DNA in that we both sort of
10 have a inherent allergy to bureaucracy and we're
11 trying to fix that and just because its been done a
12 certain way for a hundred years doesn't mean that
13 that's the best way to do it and I certainly share
14 the frustration in the ire of my colleague from
15 Queens. I guess my question is, how can we help?
16 Are there ways whether its through design build or
17 working with DDC or getting creative in some ways?
18 You know, I know in my district, my predecessor was
19 able to get creative on somethings with SCA where it
20 helped. I understand that sometimes your hands are
21 tied to the nature of whats out there but for me to
22 go to my constituents and tell them and my campaign,
23 I ran on trying to demystify government and make
24 people see what it costs and how the sausage gets
25 made and all of that stuff.

1 So, if someone says, I'd love to redo this
2 playground, I automatically tell them, sounds great.
3 It's going to cost \$4 million dollars and your kid
4 might be in college by the time it's done, but I'd
5 like to fix that, and I know that other agencies are
6 getting things done quicker, I don't know about
7 cheaper, but quicker. I just want to offer the
8 Council as a partner to you and if there's ideas we
9 have to fix that and if there's any ideas that we
10 have, again whether its through design build or
11 something to get creative to try to fix that?

12 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, thank you for your
13 questions. I suggested to the Chair we would welcome
14 Committee Meeting, hearing, whatever it is to sit
15 down to go through various parts. We've done this
16 before under the former Chair Mark Levine is here.
17 There was some discussion about two years ago. We'd
18 welcome that conversation because we manage over 620
19 projects. As I stated, when I came on board, I
20 inherited about 150 that were stalled. That
21 virtually all either were completed and about a third
22 in construction. So, we do have some thoughts and
23 ideas. This is the Administration as well. DDC is
24 pursuing some ideas, some that we're working together
25

1 to put in place. Procurement continues to be an
2 opportunity but design, I hear the concern from Costa
3 Constantinides, we cut design before it got here in
4 half. It was two years its now down to a year and
5 we'll see how we could explore to make it shorter.
6 Construction, as I stated, now over 20 percent of our
7 projects are done 30 days or ahead of schedule. So,
8 I'm open to sitting down and having a conversation
9 with Council about what other opportunities are
10 there. I would suggest we would include some of the
11 other agencies that may also have some good ideas and
12 thoughts, then we can talk about SEA which really
13 does not have to abide by our procurement rules which
14 how their able to move a lot quicker than some of the
15 city agencies. We welcome that opportunity.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Thank you, Commissioner.
18 Thank you, Chair.

19 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: My colleagues not even
20 pushing for this, I'm hopeful that the Council will
21 be having a hearing on procurement and I hope with a
22 number of committees because as I've said before at
23 some of these hearings and have met extensively with
24 Commissioner Silver and Deputy Commissioner Braddick
25 and Commissioner Kavanagh and just about everybody I

1
2 could find and many, many groups in the private
3 sector, my colleagues and all of that. The
4 procurement process which we put in place to protect
5 us from chicanery is now costing more than us more
6 than it's protecting us. So, that's something that
7 this Council will address I hope in short order. I
8 have spoken to the Mayor about this, the First Deputy
9 Mayor's, I said, anybody who is willing to listen but
10 we know that this is an expensive town to do business
11 in but it does not have to be as expensive or as time
12 consuming as it has been.

13 I'm going to pop back in for a second with the
14 Parks Opportunity Program or POP, which is almost \$61
15 million budgeted in Fiscal 2020. Can you tell me
16 Commissioner, or somebody in your staff, what is the
17 number of participants that we have enrolled in this
18 program and how often are new participants enrolled?

19 MITCHELL SILVER: On an annual basis we serve
20 about 4,800 POP workers per year. The head count
21 varies between 1,200 and 2,500, so I would say if we
22 had to say what that average yearly count would be is
23 about 1,700 but we service about 4,800 throughout the
24 year. They're on lines for about six months, their
25 onboarded on a regular basis and so, we tend to line

1
2 them up with some of our peak seasons, but those are
3 some of the numbers in terms of our POP workers.

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Is the Department
5 tracking how many participants find employment
6 outside of the Parks Department after they complete
7 the program?

8 MITCHELL SILVER: Yes, we do and so, you know our
9 goal is about 600 private placements per year for FY
10 2019 and we've been quite successful. In 2018, the
11 last number we tracked, we placed 745 park workers in
12 employment, 525 in a private sector and 180 came to
13 work for parks.

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, is anybody
15 tracking retention after a year or so? Is there any
16 mechanism in place to do that?

17 MITCHELL SILVER: Our attempt is, it is difficult
18 to get feedback from all of those employers.

19 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: No formal mechanism
20 though apparently? It's okay, its alright.

21 MITCHELL SILVER: For now, it sounds like there's
22 no formal mechanism.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: We've talked about this
24 a little more formerly, is there a placement and
25 retention goals for the participants?

1 MITCHELL SILVER: We do, 600 per year.

2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Are the POP participants
3 represented by union?
4

5 MITCHELL SILVER: Yes, DC37.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, and you mentioned
7 that you've hired some of them. So, is it fair to
8 say that there is a career path for these folks, they
9 make minimum wage, which is now \$15.00 an hour,
10 that's my understanding but from there, I guess they
11 get whatever the union contract would call for once
12 you hire them?

13 MITCHELL SILVER: Correct.

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

15 MITCHELL SILVER: And there is a career path.
16 You'd be surprised some of the people who came
17 through as POP workers, the positions they hold
18 today. In fact, it's quite emotional to see how
19 they've moved up. In fact, my advanced person who
20 travels with me, started in the program and there are
21 just great stories and so, if we see some of the
22 workers and they have an opportunity to advance in
23 parks, we certainly encourage it and we want to see
24 their growth pattern in parks or the private sector.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: That's very heartening
3 to hear. You know, getting a City job is a way to a
4 better way of life, so I'm happy to hear that. At
5 this time, from the borough of the Bronx, the far
6 reaches of the Bronx, Councilman Mark Gjonaj.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Thank you, Chairman.
8 It's so good to see you again Commissioner and three
9 minutes isn't enough time.

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Well, that's all your
11 getting, so make it work.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: So, keep your answer
13 short please Commissioner, I have lots of questions,
14 but I just want to go on the record and share that I
15 think the world of my Bronx Commissioner, Iris
16 Rodriguez, she's awesome. The Mayor signaled that he
17 plans to initiate a PEG program for FY 2020 Budget
18 asking agencies to find up to \$750 million in savings
19 by the release of FY 2020 Executive Financial Budget.
20 What impact do you believe this will have on the
21 Parks Department? Have you begun to think about
22 where you anticipate you would make these cuts in
23 your budget? If so, please elaborate on the programs
24 set for these cuts and I hope that the borough of the
25 Bronx is not going to be subject to these cuts as

1
2 your own report shows, we fall at the very bottom,
3 only second to Staten Island with CPW workers,
4 gardeners, maintenance operations and borough
5 recreational educational initiatives. The borough of
6 the Bronx in particular, my District has the largest
7 park in New York City and yet, I still don't have a
8 pool and the park lands are not being maintained,
9 especially some of the overgrowth when we have heavy
10 rain during the summer months where grass grow
11 quicker. It's constantly a battle to keep up with
12 the needed maintenance of our park land. From PEP
13 officers to tree pruning, sidewalk restorations, our
14 home owners are always concerned of a trip and fall
15 hazard. We never have enough crews out there
16 preparing our sidewalks, pruning and trimming our
17 trees and removing stumps. I know that we increased
18 the budget, but we need your attention on this issue.
19 Our homeowners and the liability to the single most
20 valuable asset that they own, it's always in
21 jeopardy. I can't help but mention the cost of
22 improvements, I mean \$3 million for a new rest
23 station is absurd, insane, unimaginable, and we need
24 to do more to curb those out of control spending. I
25 would continue to urge you to open up more park's

1 concession, working with a private sector for this
2 partnership that's needed that will give the
3 additional revenue to Parks Department and also
4 require them to maintain the section of the park land
5 or city owned property that they will be renting or
6 leasing from you.

7
8 Pelham Bay Park, tens of millions of dollars are
9 needed in improvements. We're great that we are
10 fortunate now to have a great lawn but that's taken
11 away from recreational sports areas. We have a
12 football team that needs additional space for its
13 various age groups.

14 We have the largest park in the City but yet we
15 never have enough park land that can be used by our
16 residents. You've got three minutes.

17 MITCHELL SILVER: I heard five questions. In
18 terms of the cut Council Member, I did answer this
19 one earlier, but I'll just repeat that we're working
20 with OMB to identify opportunities for savings within
21 our baseline expense budget and that review is still
22 underway. We do not have final decisions at this
23 point but expect that we'll be able to identify
24 savings that will minimize the delivery of services
25 to the public. So, its something we're looking at

1
2 right now. I don't have a definitive answer for you
3 today.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Commissioner, with the
5 stats that we have, please make sure that the borough
6 of the Bronx does not receive another cut in any
7 program or staffing. We are at the lowest levels of
8 the city, cannot afford to lose a single person or a
9 program or a service. We need more, not less and I
10 hope that you'll work with me on achieving that. My
11 Commissioner needs more.

12 MITCHELL SILVER: Yes. In terms of MNO, I think
13 its along the same line. We work very closely about
14 how we distribute all of our MNO resources, but I
15 hear you loud and clear. This is something we'll go
16 back as we look at some of the concerns about the
17 anticipated cuts that we have to take a look at,
18 we'll work very carefully to make sure again, we will
19 minimize, minimize, minimize any impacts but I hear
20 you loud and clear.

21 In terms of costs, this is something that we
22 grapple with as well. We do not tell the contractors
23 what number to give us. They determine what the
24 market bears. We're surprised and you'll be
25 surprised to learn between 2011 to 2018, the cost of

1 a comfort station increased by 175 percent. We put
2 the project out to bid, these are numbers that we're
3 getting, it's concerning us as well. We went to
4 standardized design; we're trying every way to make
5 sure the new construction cost as little as possible.
6 We are equally shocked that numbers in that short
7 period of time 175 percent between 2011 and 2018, so
8 we share your concern. For concessions, we're always
9 looking for new opportunities. If you have ideas,
10 you can sit down with our revenue staff, we'll
11 explore out, sometimes we will do a request for ideas
12 to see if anyone's willing to respond before we put
13 out a formal one, but we're always looking for
14 opportunities. There are some considerations we look
15 for but we're willing to sit down and hear your
16 ideas.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Pelham Bay, train
19 station, comfort station has been closed for decades.
20 It's an eye sore, it's a maintenance problem, a
21 concession there would go a long way to improve that
22 area and bring in additional resources.

23 MITCHELL SILVER: Finally, on Pelham Bay, we'll
24 see where there are opportunities to have more
25 recreation. I know it's a wooded park, a lot of

1
2 acres there but that's something we'll follow up with
3 Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa to see exactly what
4 can be done in either the short term or the long term
5 for Pelham Bay Park.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Tree pruning. You left
7 out trees.

8 MITCHELL SILVER: I'm sorry. I missed the
9 question on trees, could you repeat the question
10 because I know Commissioner Kavanagh will here to
11 address?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Tree maintenance
13 throughout our city. It's great that we just went
14 through a million tree plantings, that's going to
15 require much maintenance in the future. Our current
16 trees that occupy local streets do not receive the
17 attention, the pruning, the stump removals, the
18 damage that the tree roots are doing to our sidewalks
19 placing a tremendous liability on our home ownership
20 with years and years of waiting for a response as to
21 when they're able to be addressed is alarming and
22 concerning. It hasn't been adequately met, the need
23 for sidewalk replacement as well as root cutting and
24 tree trimming.

1
2 LIAM KAVANAGH: Council Member, in terms of tree
3 pruning, stump removal and dead tree removal, we're
4 actually in pretty good shape thanks to a partnership
5 between the Council and the Mayor's office, we have
6 the seven-year pruning cycle. There are
7 approximately 7,500 trees going to be pruned in the
8 Bronx this year under that program. We are removing
9 more stumps than we have ever been. Council Member
10 Grodenchik referenced the million dollars that the
11 Council added to our budget for that program and
12 we're doing very well there. We have a new risk
13 management approach to tree maintenance which has
14 been in effect for about a year now and it's showing
15 terrific results. We are addressing the most
16 potentially hazard trees possible first before
17 anything else and we're able to stay on top of those
18 with a pretty rigorous standard. The one area that
19 we are struggling, and I absolutely agree with you
20 100 percent is on the sidewalk repairs. We have
21 money in the budget, we're having difficulty finding
22 qualified contractors to do the work. If anyone
23 knows anyone who's interested in that business,
24 please send them our way. We'd be happy to show them

1
2 what the opportunities are, but we have struggled
3 with that particular part of the program.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Thank you for that and
5 I'm pleased to hear that you're going to aggressively
6 address 7,500 trees in the borough of the Bronx but
7 this is after years of unfunded tree pruning that's
8 led to this alarming concern and outrage, so thank
9 you and we'll be working on finding on contractors
10 for you that may be able to help you with your
11 problem. Thank you. Our problem, I should say.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you, Councilman
13 Gjonaj. Thank you and Deputy Commissioner Kavanagh,
14 just to highlight what you said. There seems to me
15 there's been a change in the policy at parks. It
16 used to be years ago that if there was one leaf on
17 the tree it didn't come down, but much to my
18 surprise, the other day I came outside, I heard a
19 buzz saw. I was like what's going on, it's seven in
20 the morning and there were three trucks in parks
21 taking out a fairly sizable red maple at the end of
22 my block and it needed to go. I don't think I ever
23 put in a complaint about it to be quite honest about
24 it, but it was still somewhat alive, but so, to me
25 that seems like there's a change. In the years I

1
2 have lived there, every year we've lost a major limb
3 off that tree. Thankfully it's never hurt anybody,
4 we've taken the limbs away, but that tree is now a
5 stump. I put a little note on it to see when that
6 stump gets removed but, in the meantime, it seems to
7 me there has been a change in policy.

8 LIAM KAVANAGH: Yes, the entire field of a bar
9 culture is evolving fairly rapidly, and the tree risk
10 assessment approach has been developed over the last
11 I think, six or eight years. It's an industry
12 standard developed by the International Society of a
13 Bar Culture. It uses very exacting methods to assess
14 whether a tree poses a risk. It involves both the
15 condition of the tree and the potential either injury
16 or damage it could cause should it fall and there is
17 very specific training that you have to undergo to be
18 a tree risk assessor. We have, I don't remember the
19 exact number off the top of my head, but we've
20 invested heavily in that. I think we have over 40
21 qualified tree risk assessors working for us now.
22 They apply that standard to every tree that they look
23 at and yes, there are trees that may not be
24 completely dead but do pose a risk and do need to be

1
2 addressed more quickly than we may have considered in
3 the past.

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Well, I'm glad to see
5 that. I love trees you know, I love trees but this
6 one was a hazard and I've heard from other
7 constituents, so on behalf of my 50 colleagues, we're
8 delighted that there has been a change in that policy
9 to protect New Yorkers from dangerous trees. At this
10 time, it would be my pleasure to call on Councilman
11 Andrew Cohen, of the great borough of the Bronx and
12 Van Cortlandt Park.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you, Chair. Good
14 afternoon Commissioner Silver. I was thinking as I
15 was sitting here, I guess this is the sixth time
16 we've done this and five out of six times, I really
17 railed about the Capital process. I'm going to mix
18 it up and talk about expense, but I do want to give
19 credit where credit is due, and I think that you know
20 that I think the Parks Department does phenomenal
21 work in my district. I love my borough Commissioner.
22 We work really hand and glove in trying to make sure
23 that the parks are as beautiful and as well
24 maintained and get the capital money that they need,
25 but I really had very, very tough season last year

1 and I don't think that the maintenance budget and I
2 know that we got additional workers last year but
3 it's just not enough. We are just not able to meet
4 the minimum standards. I had terrible problems
5 getting the parks mowed, the grass mowed last year,
6 and I know there were problems with the mowers, but
7 it boggles my mind. Like I call up the Parks
8 Department and I'm like, yeah, we don't have a mower.
9 Like, how can that be the answer? How can someone
10 tell that to me? So, I really feel like that it is
11 sort of crisis that and when we're talking about
12 PEGs, I'm beside myself. I think Councilman Gjonaj
13 really summed it up. We should not be talking about
14 cuts; we should be talking about significant
15 increases. Your agency is just chronically, severely
16 underfunded and I don't believe that we're meeting
17 sort of the minimum standards corps to the mission.
18 I know you said in your statement that we do our job
19 with what we're given but you're not giving enough,
20 and I don't think it's tenable anymore. I don't
21 really have a question in there, but I just wanted to
22 really go on the record as I think that we need to do
23 more. Thank you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you, Councilman
3 Cohen and I share your sentiments. We need more
4 money and I just want to announce after this hearing
5 is over, Commissioner Rosa will be signing autographs
6 in the back of the room. Right now, we'll hear from
7 the man who represents a big chunk of the Rockaway
8 Beach, Council Member Eric Ulrich with his assistant.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Thank you very much.
10 Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm here with my boss today,
11 she's not my assistant. She is my boss and my
12 beautiful daughter Lily.

13 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I understand that.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: I have a few questions
15 and I appreciate the amount of time and the testimony
16 Commissioner. First, I want to say thank you to you
17 and the Administration for really making sand
18 replenishment a priority in the Rockaways. The
19 announcement this week I think, was a tremendous
20 relief for not only the residents of my district but
21 also the small businesses that really survive on the
22 beach season, so thank you very much. I want to
23 begin by saying that. I want to ask a few follow up
24 about particular projects, capital projects that I
25 funded in my district last year we were able to fund

1 with the Speakers help. The renovation of Harold
2 Schneiderman Playground in Lindenwood and I know
3 we're supposed to do a walk-through of the Al Stabile
4 Playground which they were kind enough to help us
5 with the renaming. That's something that the family
6 and the community are looking forward to. I'd just
7 like to get an idea of what the timeline is there, if
8 you can have someone look into that?

10 MITCHELL SILVER: Well first, Harold Schneiderman
11 was partially funded, so one is fully funded and when
12 we have a designer on board that one can start.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Well, we funded it fully
14 the Speaker and I put in I think a combined \$2.5 or
15 \$2.7 million there with Speaker funding and my own
16 discretionary funding.

17 MITCHELL SILVER: We can certainly follow up with
18 you. It seems that there is a shortfall, but we can
19 talk internally about how to address that shortfall.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Yeah, I mean, so that
21 gets to the point earlier that I think Council Member
22 Gjonaj raised about, you know, we get the estimates
23 from you and then you know, you do them in good
24 faith, not you personally but Parks Department but
25 then sometimes it comes up eight or nine months later

1
2 that there's a shortfall. This is the first that I'm
3 hearing that there's a shortfall. No one has
4 notified my office that there was a shortfall. Now,
5 I know that Commissioner Lewandowski retired, and we
6 miss her dearly and we love her, and we wish her the
7 best, but you know, there's a new Commissioner in
8 Queens that you announced a couple of weeks ago,
9 right? Where is he, I didn't have a chance to, oh,
10 hi there, and I'm hoping that he'll have a chance to
11 come and meet with each Council Member in the borough
12 individually not only to introduce himself, but to go
13 over some of the particular projects in the district
14 that are waiting. You know, my constituents said,
15 hey, you made a big announcement about Harold
16 Schneiderman. You made an announcement about Al
17 Stabile, when is that happening? I need information,
18 I don't have the information that I need to relay.

19 MITCHELL SILVER: We'll certainly follow up with
20 you. It is our practice that all the Council Members
21 to give an update of the Capital Projects and then
22 we'll find out exactly. In this particular case,
23 what happened as I stated earlier, we're trying to
24 work things where we do not come to Council Members
25 with shortfalls to see how we can fund it.

1 Internally, that's not always the case but certainly
2 we'll follow up to find out what happened on that
3 particular park.
4

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: And lastly, because I
6 have eight seconds, seven seconds on the clock now.
7 With respect to the Rockaway Reformulation Plan and
8 the Army Corps, are there any delays that we're
9 expecting, any bad news on the horizon or is
10 everything just going according to schedule for the
11 long terms investments that are being made by the
12 Army Corp?

13 LIAM KAVANAGH: The government shut down did
14 impact the process for which the reformulation plan
15 is going to be reviewed and approved by the Army
16 Corps headquarters in Washington. There was an
17 environmental opinion that the Fish and Wildlife
18 Agency is required to provide for any project of this
19 size, and they were out of business for six weeks and
20 their backed up, so the corps is still awaiting their
21 opinion. The good news however, as a result of the
22 Mayor's meeting with General Semonite, following the
23 townhall meeting in Rockaway back in December of
24 2017, the General gave the Corps the authorization to
25 begin design work. That never happens in my

1
2 experience. The Corps is actively designing even
3 though they don't have an approved project and that's
4 really going to push that work forward once the plan
5 is finally approved.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Thank you very much. Mr.
7 Chair, thank you again.

8 MITCHELL SILVER: I just want to update, so the
9 Al Stabile will start design basically any day now.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Oh, great. I think we
11 have walk-through next week scheduled. I'm almost
12 certain it's going to happen, but I was more
13 concerned about Schneiderman only because we fully
14 funded it. We thought we fully funded it and if we
15 didn't, you know, I'll follow up with JoAnn or
16 someone in the borough office and we'll be happy to
17 move that along hopefully, but these projects do take
18 a really long time. I think you know that
19 Commissioner and that's the general sentiment. I've
20 been in office for ten years and there are still some
21 projects that I funded two or three years ago that
22 haven't even started yet. I'm not going to get into
23 particulars, but we have to find a better way. I
24 think you agree with that right?

1
2 MITCHELL SILVER: I absolutely agree. I look
3 forward to that hearing because I certainly, I hear
4 to long, it will be an interesting exercise to find
5 out from Council Members how long it should take and
6 then we can lay out for you the rules and
7 requirements and show how do you fit processes within
8 a two year time frame, which sounds to me would be
9 probably the expectation. So, I look forward to that
10 conversation, as well and exercise, I to agree, I
11 would like these to move a lot quicker and we're
12 doing the best that we can, but we certainly are open
13 to more ideas.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Thank you Commissioner
15 and Mr. Chair, thank you again.

16 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I think we all look
17 forward to that day. May it come speedily in our
18 time. My colleague from the far reaches in
19 Manhattan, far reaches, former Chair of this
20 Committee, great Chair of Health, great Chair of
21 Parks, Mark Levine.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.
23 Thank you for a great hearing and for your great
24 leadership for Parks. Good morning to you
25 Commissioner and to everybody from the Department.

1
2 Since we're giving shout outs to borough
3 Commissioner's, shout out to Commissioner Castro. He
4 has been a great partner for me in my office and we
5 really appreciate his leadership here in the far
6 reaches of Manhattan.

7 There's a decades long problem with the way the
8 leadership of the City has viewed parks, which is to
9 treat it as a luxury amenity, as opposed to really
10 corps infrastructure for the City that is critical to
11 health and public safety to environmental resiliency
12 to economic development. I would imagine you share
13 this perspective. That's definitely my perspective
14 and I think that of most people here. This tension
15 becomes a huge problem when we face tight budgets
16 because there's a rush to cut the Parks Budget
17 because it's not seen as being essential. It's seen
18 as being an amenity and so, we're facing PEGs this
19 year. I know this has been covered so far in the
20 hearing, which would necessitate a 3 percent cut in
21 your operating budget. That's \$13, I think \$13.6
22 million and I'm not going to play the game of
23 comparing agencies here, because I care about every
24 function in the city, but that is a larger cut on a
25 percentage basis than most of the other agencies in

1 the city are facing and so, I can only conclude it's
2 because of this mistaken view of parks as being a
3 superfluous amenity and I know that you and your team
4 have done ever more creative things to do more with
5 less, but at a certain point, you get to a limit and
6 you're only going to be able to do less with less.
7 At a certain point, there's no way around it and
8 \$13.6 million in the context of your budget, that's
9 real money. In past budget belt tightening, and this
10 happened under the previous Administration, we went
11 to cut Parks expense and the huge investment we had
12 made in Capital then was eroded. We have a pattern
13 of making big capital investments but if you don't
14 maintain, then those investments quickly deteriorate.
15 So, I am very, very worried that we're repeating that
16 mistake and I wonder if you could and forgive me if
17 you've already covered this, just detail what the
18 impact on your operations will be of this 3 percent
19 cut that you're now forced to make?

21 MITCHELL SILVER: Council Member Levine, I
22 appreciate your sentiments and you and I have had
23 many conversations about this. We don't fully know
24 at this point since we were given this PEG very
25 recently and we're working with OMB to really

1
2 identify opportunities for savings within our
3 baseline budget. That review is underway and so, we
4 don't have an answer for you right now, but our goal
5 as this moves forward is to minimize any impact to
6 service delivery as possible. We just don't know at
7 this point. I'm sure those conversations will
8 continue as this budget process proceeds and I can
9 work with my budget team to figure out exactly what
10 those impacts will be but I'm just not able to
11 articulate it at this time.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: And I know you share our
13 values and I'm going to wrap up but it's really, it's
14 not good that you would come to a hearing without
15 knowing what those cuts will entail. It maybe
16 because this was passed onto you at the last minute,
17 but we're mobilizing to increase the Parks Budget
18 because we already have unmet needs under your
19 current plan and now we're forced to play defense to
20 shield your Department and our Parks from cuts and we
21 need to know exactly what impact this will have.
22 Whether you're going to have a **[inaudible 1:49:30]**
23 and when you have **[inaudible 1:49:33]**, that means
24 there's one less person to do a job and again,
25 there's no more slack in the system, so as soon as

1 possible we really do need to understand where that
2 \$13 plus million will come from because we're worried
3 about impact on Parks that are already in my opinion,
4 in need of more resources.
5

6 Thank you, Commissioner and thank you, Mr. Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you Councilman
8 Levine and as always, it's great to talk Parks with
9 you. We're going to hear from a lot of people today.
10 I just want to remind you, we currently have over 30
11 people signed up to speak. I have to leave by
12 midnight, but I will be here as long as it takes and
13 I know that Commissioner Silver's team, part of team
14 will be here as well to listen to you. In the
15 meantime, I've got some questions that I'm going to
16 go through and then I'm going to get to the public as
17 soon as possible.

18 MITCHELL SILVER: Council Member Chair, I do want
19 to take an opportunity because I know there are a
20 number of people in the room. I am very aware of the
21 Campaign. I do want to thank all the supporters out
22 there that spoke loud and clear. A lot of them are
23 our friends and partners in particular Lynn Kelly, so
24 I know there will be a lot of people speaking. I
25 will be staying around to hear some of the testimony

1
2 but just want to say thank you. I think we're all
3 committed to providing the very best Park system in
4 New York as possible. So, I'm sure you have more
5 questions.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I have more questions. I
7 don't want to disappoint you; I was up all night.

8 MITCHELL SILVER: Okay.

9 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: With this current
10 budget, the Council negotiated with the
11 Administration to provide \$9.6 million to support an
12 additional 150 maintenance workers. They have been
13 in place for a while. It was my number one priority
14 as Parks Chair to make sure that those workers were
15 maintained, they were maintained, and I would like to
16 hear from you the importance of those workers, some
17 of whom are with us right now as we're holding this
18 hearing. I'd like to know the importance to these
19 workers and what it would mean to Parks if they
20 weren't in place and why this funding is not
21 baselined in the current, well, the proposed 2020
22 Budget?

23 MITCHELL SILVER: Council Member, as you know,
24 this is always an ongoing budget conversation. We do
25 have this conversation every year. So, I know those

1
2 people or God forbid the police, but those things are
3 important. I hate to ask this question, and I am
4 determined once and for all this year that this year
5 will be the year that we baseline these workers.
6 It's part of our Play Fair Campaign. You're not
7 supposed to clap, but since I'm the only Council
8 Member here, I don't really care.

9 I'm not going to ask this question, because I am
10 determined to make sure that we get this done this
11 year and I am looking forward to working with you and
12 the Mayor's office to do that. Maybe you can talk a
13 little bit more about expanding the Zone Management
14 Program. I know you went into a little before and
15 you know, we really want to bring our Parks to the
16 next level. They are and I've said this, and I'm
17 going to continue to say it publicly, they're in
18 pretty good shape but I've seen and you've talked
19 about this in your testimony and that's why you
20 ordered those eight trucks to remove the debris from
21 sewers, so that Parks doesn't have rely upon anybody
22 else. But how do we get to that next level? Would
23 it be that Zone Management Plan?

24 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, I can't say this is all
25 Management Plan, I'm going to be very careful how I

1
2 proceed. By self-funding it means that we had to
3 work with each borough Commissioner to make sure we
4 modified both mobile and a fixed post to make sure we
5 can use this pilot to see how it works. To move
6 toward Zone Management is very expensive. Each park
7 is different, some have wooded areas, some have open
8 spaces. It also comes with equipment, it comes with
9 pep, and so, it's something we can certainly have a
10 conversation and I stated earlier, that we will
11 follow up with what the cost of that is. So, we
12 always want to rely also on our analytics. We have a
13 new division, a performance management that's looking
14 how to optimize how we do our work. They were key in
15 coming up the Zone Management approach and so, it's a
16 combination of resources. It's a combination of
17 analytics, of looking in cooperation of all of our
18 borough teams to ensure we maintain our Park system.
19 So, we're always open to find out how it could be
20 more efficient. The Zone Management is one approach,
21 but we also want to look at how to optimize our
22 mobile crews as well. That was part of our OPPS 21
23 Initiative, which is also working quite well. So, I
24 think it's a combination, you can't do everything
25 Zone Management, you also have to rely on mobile

1 crews and we're always looking at how to optimize
2 that.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, thank you. It's
5 my understanding that not all of the eligible
6 playgrounds are staffed with a program associate. Is
7 that just a lack of funding?

8 MITCHELL SILVER: Back in the day, we all grew
9 up. We new there was a parkee associated with every
10 playground. Things have changed, so it is not every
11 comfort station and playground have a park worker.
12 It is something we can explore over time, but I don't
13 know the number of how many within our system, but
14 everyone knows that not every park has a comfort
15 station has a parkee. I think the number would be
16 about 700 in total that exists within our system and
17 I don't know what percentage of that actually has a
18 park worker within that park and I want to take this
19 time since we don't have a member from Staten Island,
20 I lived in Staten Island. I want to talk about the
21 amazing borough Commissioner, Linda Ricciardone. She
22 is amazing.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: She is amazing. She's
24 got great parks and they swore to me that there were
25 a lot of deer on Staten Island on my last trip out to

1 Council Member Borelli's District and I confronted
2 them, and I said, I think this whole thing's a myth.
3 Low and behold, I think they had some deer squirreled
4 away and there he was on the west mound.
5

6 MITCHELL SILVER: No, go to Conference House
7 Park, a few of them asked me to leave, that I was
8 invading their space, so they're there in Staten
9 Island definitely.

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: According to the
11 Preliminary Plan, DPRs Contract Budget contains a
12 total almost \$67 million for 285 contracts. Can you
13 talk about some of the larger contracts and what that
14 entails for the Department?

15 MITCHELL SILVER: Sure, I'll just give you top
16 ten very quickly. Trees and sidewalks \$11.7 million,
17 we have pruning emergency contracts \$19.1 million,
18 zoos \$6.6 million, CPC \$9.1 million, CD park
19 construction renovation \$3.9 million, vehicle
20 maintenance \$3.7 million, The Emerald Ash Borer
21 \$3.25, Environmental Modeling \$2.8 and bridge flag
22 repairs \$2.5 and I'll end with stump removal at \$2
23 million. So, there's others, but those are just the
24 top two.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Those are the biggies,
3 okay. I want to go back to Capital because I was
4 sitting here the other day at the first Budget
5 hearing, OMB Director Hartzog, who is a big fan by
6 the way of the Queens farm. Just putting a shameless
7 plug in for my District. I asked her, we have you
8 know, I've thought about this, I know others have
9 thought about it. What she thought of the creation
10 of a fund for Parks. I met with Deputy Commissioner
11 Braddick, who is a constituent, I'll be very careful.
12 I guess it was last week or two weeks ago on a Friday
13 and we were outside the bid room and it's amazing
14 really, if you want to see something go see the bid
15 room, it's really amazing and that will be online
16 soon I know, so you won't have to go to the Homestead
17 Center but it is amazing the difference in prices
18 even on a contract of \$1 million, you'll see from \$1
19 million all the way up to \$2 million or more. I
20 guess people are taking a shot and we have to higher
21 the lowest responsible bidder, but some people have
22 mentioned to me in the past and I asked this, she
23 thought she would talk to me about it. I wanted to
24 get your feeling and that of your top staff about a
25 fund that would be at your discretion and perhaps

1 OMBs discretion working with local Council Members.

2 You know, sometimes we're just short. You know, we

3 got a project that's \$3 million and it comes in at

4 \$3.2 million and then we have to sit and wait because

5 I can't reach into my pocket. I can promise you the

6 money for next year, but that doesn't always work out

7 so well for the agency. So, I just wanted to get

8 your thoughts on maybe a fund for wayward contracts,

9 I don't know what to call it.

10 MITCHELL SILVER: And this is a question you

11 asked the OMB Director?

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Yes, I did.

13 MITCHELL SILVER: And her response was?

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: She liked the idea. She

15 said she would think about it.

16 MITCHELL SILVER: So, you know, this idea has

17 floated around. I know there was a Council Member,

18 well, Borelli had mentioned this in the past is

19 something that we're certainly open to exploring. As

20 you know, we have a fund for repair, it has limits

21 between \$40,000 and \$700,000 but this is a concept

22 that has floated around before, so we're certainly

23 open since the OMB Director is open, we'll probably

1
2 sit down very shortly and see whether that is
3 something -

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, I'd like to be
5 part of that process. I just wanted to ask you while
6 it was on my mind. Overtime, over the past Fiscal
7 Years, the Department of Parks actual overtime costs
8 have been higher than the year end overtime Budget
9 that DPR has proposed. If the Department fails to
10 adjust its overtime Budget to reflect its actual
11 overtime costs, it prevents the Council from
12 accurately accessing the budget during the course of
13 the Fiscal year and it leaves the City with a
14 monetary gap to cover once the Fiscal Year ends. Is
15 there a reason why your overtime budget has not been
16 reflective of the actual overtime spending?

17 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, I can first respond and
18 then if Commissioners Stark or Wang want to respond.
19 We watch our overtime Budget very carefully and we
20 stay within our budget except for emergencies, heat
21 waves and extended beach and pool hours coverage for
22 vacant mandated positions and major change in
23 managerial status. So, unlike Sanitation, Parks does
24 not have storm led overtime funding included in our
25 baseline budget. So, in those situations we could

1
2 all agree, it think there were several times last
3 summer where we had extended pool hours because of
4 the heat and so, these are situations I would say in
5 an emergency is that we will use overtime. Beyond
6 that, I don't know if I want to share, it seems like
7 I'm getting a nod, I answered the question
8 appropriately.

9 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay. It's always nice
10 when your staff agrees with your right.

11 MITCHELL SILVER: Yes, it is.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, you mentioned some
13 of the factors. Would it help if we hired more staff
14 to cut down on overtime, or most of this is
15 emergencies?

16 MITCHELL SILVER: Most of these are emergencies.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay. Preliminary
18 Budget anticipate \$1.9 million in savings beginning
19 July 1st of this year, when Fiscal 2020 begins. Due
20 to Departments permanent vacancy reduction of 34
21 positions. I'm going to read you a series of
22 questions. What program areas will be impacted by
23 these reductions? What will be the Departments total
24 head count for Parks in Fiscal 2020? Is the
25 Department not currently understaffed? Is the agency

1
2 able to carry out operations effectively given the
3 current level of employment? I'll let you start with
4 those.

5 MITCHELL SILVER: I'll kind of combine them into
6 one. Response, we do not expect huge impacts, we
7 look at the entire system to ensure that as we have
8 these vacancies, we could absorb it in within each of
9 the boroughs. So, we do not see major impacts and
10 because we have a close and tight operations where we
11 meet with our Chiefs and Operations on a monthly
12 basis, that we belief we'll be able to withstand some
13 of these vacancies. So, I can't say it's a one
14 program area. We make sure it's distributed
15 throughout the system so that we're able to absorb
16 and minimize any impacts of these vacancies.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, we talked before
18 about the 150 maintenance workers, but I want to
19 hammer this because it concerns me greatly. Do you
20 consider the level of head count to be adequate to
21 meet the Departments maintenance needs citywide and
22 you know, some of the things that really bother me
23 are the muddy sidewalks because of improper drainage?
24 Some of that may be capital work that needs to be
25 done but we are investing billions and billions of

1
2 dollars and I've been to the arsenal and I've seen
3 that chart of the number of people that used to work
4 there and it concerns me greatly that we're not
5 spending enough and this is going to be something I'm
6 going to hammer home through this Budget process.
7 That we're not spending enough to maintain what we're
8 buying. I'm a home owner, I own three houses in New
9 York City, I put a roof on every one of them because
10 that's the most important thing. So, it's concerning
11 to me Commissioner that we may not have what we need.
12 I don't think we do to be quite honest. As I said in
13 my opening statement, I think you do a great job at
14 what you have and that's a reflection upon you and
15 every body that works at Parks but we really do need
16 to, I'm going to continue to hammer this point home
17 to be fair.

18 MITCHELL SILVER: As a Commissioner, I would
19 never say no more resource.

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I'm glad to hear that.

21 MITCHELL SILVER: But having said that, this is a
22 very cautious and conservative budget.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I understand that.

24 MITCHELL SILVER: And as you stated, my goal is
25 to ensure that the public experiences the same level

1 of service they've enjoyed in years past and so, we
2 work very hard with our Budget to ensure that our
3 Parks are maintained at that level of service that
4 the public expects. So, I will just respond that way
5 and as you know, this is the beginning of the Budget
6 process and I am sure your point of view you
7 communicated here will be communicated throughout the
8 remainder of this process.

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I'm sure they're
11 listening already, something tells me. Just if you
12 could forward to us the full breakdown borough by
13 borough of maintenance head counts, I would
14 appreciate that being sent to us.

15 Park cleanliness, which of course is extremely
16 important. It sends a big message to every person
17 who uses the parks. I know as Commissioner, that's
18 the first thing you see when you walk in and
19 everybody sees. Does the Park Department consider a
20 Parks cleanliness rating when making funding
21 allocations?

22 MITCHELL SILVER: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, so that's part of
24 the deal. Okay, I think you've heard this, but fixed
25 posts would increase, I believe they would increase

1
2 cleanliness because I remember the parkee in my park
3 as a kid. He was undeterred no matter what was going
4 on, he was always cleaning.

5 MITCHELL SILVER: Yeah, I have to really commend
6 staff. We did a number of things. They do
7 outstanding work and as you know, I run, I travel to
8 many parks and I do not see many parks that are what
9 I consider to be littered. They do an outstanding
10 job. Our level of service ensures our parks are
11 clean, so that's something I have to say first and
12 foremost. Having Zone Management is not just about
13 cleaning but it's also doing other work within the
14 park. Zone Management, you're doing potentially
15 gardening, there are other things you do, it's not
16 just for cleaning, it's for other things as well and
17 so, that's the benefit but I have to say if you look
18 at our targets across the board, year over year over
19 year, we meet or exceed the Mayor's targets for both
20 condition and for cleanliness and for that, I am very
21 proud of that. If not just for our park workers but
22 we have a lot of friend's groups that also assist in
23 cleanups of our parks.

24

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Well, friend's groups
3 are wonderful, and I certainly enjoy working with all
4 of mine.

5 Changing lanes, according to the Preliminary
6 Mayor's Management Report, major felonies in the 30
7 largest parks excluding Central Park decreased by one
8 percent when compared to the same four-month period
9 last year. However, crimes against personal property
10 have increased unfortunately by 14 percent. Can you
11 tell this Committee why you believe crimes are going
12 up in parks at a time when crime rates continue to be
13 down citywide?

14 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, I will still say that
15 less than one percent of all crimes occur in our New
16 York City Parks. We're working closely with NYPD, we
17 have a list of the parks where the most crimes take
18 place, and so, our parks enforce patrol as well as
19 our borough Commissioners try to determine exactly
20 what we can do. In some cases, we're still seeing
21 cell phones that in some cases are left behind. I'm
22 not saying that it was considered a crime, but for
23 the most part, I cannot pinpoint exactly what are
24 some of those categories we can do a deeper dive. I
25 know we did this last year particularly in Flushing

1 Meadow Corona Park to find out what we can do, so
2 we'll circle back again. I'll meet with the
3 Commissioners and circle back with NYPD to find out
4 how we can focus and target on those "hot spots".

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Do you think that
6 additional PEP officers would help reduce crime in
7 our parks and if you had your druthers, what would
8 the appropriate number be?

9 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, our Parks and Force
10 Patrol are Peace Officers, they enforce Park Rules.
11 Certainly, they add added eyes and ears to parks and
12 so, we want to emphasize that we want to work with
13 our partners at the Police Department to ensure our
14 Parks remain safe and so, like I stated earlier, we
15 would always welcome more resources, be working with
16 our Parks and Force Patrol. We make sure through
17 some of their fixed locations as well as mobile
18 crews, we do provide the presence that make our park
19 patrons feel safe.

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: And the Urban Park
21 Ranger Program. Can you tell me how many we have
22 right now?

23 MITCHELL SILVER: You wanted PEP or Urban Park
24 Rangers?
25

1 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Urban Park Rangers.

2 MITCHELL SILVER: The Rangers. We'll get that
3 number to you momentarily because I didn't see it in
4 my notes, but I will get that for you.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: That's okay, that's
6 alright.

7 MITCHELL SILVER: We have 35.

8 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: We enjoy them in our
9 parks.

10 MITCHELL SILVER: We have 40. Correct its 40.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Look a 14 percent
12 increase just like that.

13 MITCHELL SILVER: Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, I'd like to see
15 more of those. I've been privileged to take a few
16 tours with them especially in Alley Pond Park. The
17 have a huge urban forest there and it is really
18 stunning.

19 MITCHELL SILVER: So, you know, we have increased
20 that number within the last two years, so we now have
21 more urban park rangers than we did a couple years
22 ago.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, thank you. I
24 think we've talked about Capital a good today and I
25

1
2 would appreciate if the Capital Division could
3 provide me with a breakout of how much in terms of
4 percentage and how much in terms of raw numbers, not
5 right now, we are spending in each borough because I
6 have seen some incredible investments in the borough
7 of Manhattan and I don't begrudge them. I know that
8 the waterfront, we had a hearing here and I know a
9 lot of additional funding was added to the resiliency
10 plan but it if five boroughs and I want to take a
11 look at that to make sure everybody's being treated
12 fairly.

13 Can you talk to me a little bit about how much we
14 spend on programming in parks and events and I know
15 that we, being the Council Members enjoy funding
16 events? We have movies and we have Shakespeare and
17 we have puppet shows and all that kind of stuff.

18 MITCHELL SILVER: We'll see if we can get that
19 number for you Council Member.

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

21 MITCHELL SILVER: We know we capture the number
22 of programs, the sources of funds may come from
23 Council Members, come from sponsors. It may be a
24 difficult number, but we'll certainly try to get that

25

1
2 to you. We do look at the number of events, how many
3 people attend.

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: It's a staggering
5 number, it's just unbelievable.

6 MITCHELL SILVER: The numbers are staggering.

7 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: We want more but it's
8 still staggering.

9 MITCHELL SILVER: Okay, we will see if we can get
10 you the resources spent because they may come from
11 multiple sources.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, you know, we're
13 obviously very concerned about the 2020 Census and
14 I'm just wondering what efforts have been made to
15 incorporate Census information outreach in
16 communication at events that you may be holding and
17 it's never too early to start, I just wonder if
18 there's anything being done?

19 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, we currently don't have a
20 formal one, but we anticipate that we will be working
21 closely with the Mayor's office soon as their Census
22 outreach efforts continue. As you may know, we were
23 very active on the Voter Registration Drive and so,
24 Parks Department is ready, willing and able once
25 those Census efforts kick off to support the

1 Administration and Mayor's office in any way that is
2 needed.
3

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, thank you for
5 that. How are the funding for the forest management
6 framework make a difference for our natural forest?
7 I have seen some of the great work that's been in
8 Alley Pond Park and also some work was being done, at
9 least what I saw up in Pelham Bay Park. I was with
10 the Assistant Commissioner and I greatly appreciate
11 that. I've got lots and lots of forest acreage in my
12 district, but I know we have over 7,000 acres of
13 forest in the City. So, can you talk a little bit
14 about the challenges the agency is facing in
15 maintaining our natural forests or anticipates facing
16 in this area of climate change?

17 MITCHELL SILVER: You sort of hit the nail on the
18 head there Council Member, climate change is the big
19 concern for us in much of the work we do particularly
20 in our natural areas management and the forest
21 management framework is specifically intended to help
22 ensure the integrity of these resources going
23 forward, so that they can continue to play the key
24 role of buffering against rising sea levels,
25 mitigating excessive heat, absorbing storm water

1
2 predicted to be more and more frequent and more
3 damaging storms in future. So, we think that
4 investing in the forest management framework is a
5 really sound investment and a more sustainable and
6 resilient New York.

7 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I have just a quick
8 question, I know from time to time the agency has
9 changed the kinds of trees it plants. It plants
10 different species which we deem to be more durable
11 and safer for the public. Have you changed species
12 due to climate change?

13 MITCHELL SILVER: We are looking at that right
14 now. We see sort of almost a progression of species
15 that are now doing well in this area where 30-40
16 years ago, you would not consider planting in New
17 York City and we anticipate that's going to continue
18 happening but it is an area which is only now are
19 people studying it in great deal and trying to
20 anticipate what will be successful here in the future
21 and what may no longer be successful and that's a
22 scary thought.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Tricky question.

24 MITCHELL SILVER: It is and it's a scary thought
25 because there are lots of species that are right on

1
2 the edge that we depended on for many years, you know
3 both for their strength and durability, the size the
4 environmental benefits that they provide and they may
5 no longer be hospitable in these areas. We may no
6 longer be hospitable for them.

7 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Alright, Departments 10-
8 year Capital strategy totals \$4.1 billion which
9 certainly will augmented by Council Members as we go
10 forward and borough presidents, but the majority of
11 that funding, just over half \$2.3 billion is front
12 loaded in the first two years of Fiscal 2020 and 2021
13 and I was here the other day, I was kind of blown
14 away. I spoke to Director Hartzog about this and my
15 question is why is all this capital funding, it's
16 impossible that in the future we won't have needs and
17 Parks take on a more important part of being the
18 front lines of defense, we've already talked about
19 the Rockaways today. We've talked a little bit about
20 the big U Plan for lower Manhattan which Parks will
21 be a very important part of. As we go forward, it's
22 inconceivable to any of us in this room that we will
23 not have needs in the out years. In fact, they may
24 actually be higher, but I don't understand why most
25 of the budget is frontloaded this way and can you

1
2 tell this Committee how the Department plans to
3 complete such and ambitious capital plan and what
4 your plans are for that, Commissioner?

5 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, we believe in
6 rationalizing the budget to ensure that the years for
7 design and construction is well placed. So, each
8 year at the budget adoption, elected officials
9 allocate all of their new funding for Parks Projects
10 in the upcoming Fiscal year. Parks then forecast the
11 funding in the appropriate years, and we think we'll
12 spend it in design and in construction. So, that's
13 the rationalization that we expect for all the
14 projects because you're not going to spend all the
15 money in one year. So, we like to rationalize it
16 over several Fiscal Years.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: If you had looked at
18 that chart the other day at the hearing, it looked
19 like Parks flatlined after like four years. It just
20 went, it went like this and then it went hmm... you
21 know, if it was patient, it would be dead. So, I am
22 concerned about that. I have had discussions with
23 the Arch Finance people and I'm sure, I know that
24 they are talking to the other side of City Hall about
25

1
2 that and I guess we'll have to see as we go forward
3 what happens.

4 Any plans right now, I know we've talked a little
5 bit about getting more people in the Capital
6 Division, can you talk a little bit about that?

7 MITCHELL SILVER: I think in terms of Capital
8 division, other than some vacancies through a
9 **[Inaudible 2:33:02]** we're just about fully staffed. I
10 can go over some specific numbers. Right now, we're
11 at 479 and we have roughly about 44 vacancies that we
12 need to backfill. So, we're very thankful about the
13 Council and the Mayor over the past years of giving
14 us more staff at Capital, which we're able now to
15 deliver capital projects sooner but these are
16 vacancies that we're trying to fill on a regular
17 basis. So, we're very comfortable with our staffing
18 numbers.

19 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, do you think the
20 vacancies are hindering us? We've talked a lot today
21 about that.

22 MITCHELL SILVER: We always have a number of
23 vacancies and so, I don't think it's hindering us.
24 We're able to still deliver some of those projects.
25 I don't exactly if they're senior or junior, what

1 level of these position, but we're still able to
2 maintain our same level and if you heard me say at
3 the front end, we're now completing projects ahead of
4 schedule. Design is now cut in half and so, we're
5 able to get the work done with the staff that we
6 have.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Alright, in Fiscal 2018,
9 Parks committed only 47 percent of its capital plan,
10 realistically how much of the \$964 million at
11 schedule in Fiscal 2019 adopted capital commitment
12 plan will actually be committed by June 30th of this
13 year?

14 MITCHELL SILVER: I'm going to let Commissioner
15 Braddick have a turn at the mic and answer this one.

16 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: It's always good to see
17 a constituent here.

18 THERESE BRADDICK: Thank you. On average, we
19 register or commit anywhere between \$400 and \$600
20 million a year. It really depends on the number of
21 projects and the dollar value of the projects. So,
22 it's not a flat amount of money. It does vary from
23 year to year, again depending on those variables.

24 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, so it's certainly
25 not going to be a 100 percent. Would this push the

1
2 number back into, it would push it into obviously at
3 least into Fiscal Year 2020?

4 THERESE BRADDICK: The funds that are not used in
5 the current year then are rolled over to the next
6 year and yes, you're correct, it's not possible to
7 spend all of the money in the current year. You set
8 aside contingency that is used for change or is as
9 needed and you keep that in the current year in case
10 it's needed, but hopefully you never use 100 percent
11 of your contingencies, so it stays there.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, thank you for
13 that. Recreation centers, we had a hearing in
14 December on them but according to the Preliminary
15 Mayor's Management Report, in the first four months
16 of this Fiscal year, membership at Rec Centers has
17 decreased slightly by 3 percent. Overall, recreation
18 center attendants increased by 21,000 visits when
19 compared to the same four-month period last year. In
20 addition, attendants at non-rec center venues has
21 decreased by over 225,000 visits when compared to the
22 same reporting period in 2018. Do you have a sense
23 of why these things are happening, why there down?
24 Just there are some Rec Centers that are closed.

1
2 MITCHELL SILVER: Yes, some Rec Centers right now
3 are either going through full or partial renovations
4 and so, when that occurs the public does not have
5 access to those facilities.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, they are great.
7 I've toured a few of them. I seen one in the middle
8 of Staten Island, TJ Park, as we talked about the
9 other day, Jefferson Park has just a great rec
10 center. Bumper pool, I hadn't seen that in quite
11 some time. Great stuff. Do you advertise the
12 Centers or is it word of mouth?

13 MITCHELL SILVER: We know there is advertising
14 outside of the Centers and when we have a lot of our
15 public events, whether its senior games, it may be to
16 late for some of you to sign up but there's senior
17 games, street games, all of our activities, we're
18 always promoting. Our Rec Centers, whether its Shape
19 Up, swimming, so the answer is yes, we do at the
20 extent possible promote our Rec Centers through media
21 campaigns, through social media, and then though a
22 lot of our public events.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Can you tell me now if
24 you can, if not, how much funding is included in the
25

1
2 Preliminary Capital Plan for Rec Centers from Fiscal
3 Years 2020 through 2023?

4 MITCHELL SILVER: Yeah, we'll have to get you
5 that number, I don't know it off hand.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, I know there's
7 one, I guess in Brownsville, I spoke to Councilwoman
8 Alicka Ampry-Samuel the other day about hers and
9 there are others that are undergoing renovation at
10 this time.

11 We talked about the Community Parks Initiative.
12 I'm hopeful that we can get more money for that
13 because its been a success and it's taken us to
14 places that haven't been touched in a very, very long
15 time.

16 Regional Parks, can you just give us a general
17 update on the plan, the agencies plan NYC projects
18 and how much funding is included in the Preliminary
19 Capital Budget for regional parks in 2020 to 2023?

20 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, the current regional park
21 strategy is captured through our Anchor Parks
22 Initiative launched in 2016 and as you all know about
23 Anchor Parks builds on the success of the plan NYC
24 2030 Initiative to transform regional park
25 destinations. Plan NYC was a precursor of the

1
2 current one NYC Plan. Currently, we're investing
3 \$150 million in five Anchor Parks. Those parks
4 include St. Mary's in the Bronx, Highbridge in
5 Manhattan Historia, Park in Queens, Betsy Head in
6 Brooklyn, and Freshkills in Staten Island. All the
7 others I believe, are under construction or some
8 phases and Freshkills the one that is still in
9 design.

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Alright, can you tell me
11 how many Green Street Projects have been undertaken
12 since the commencement of Plan NYC? I love that by
13 the way, it's one of my favorite things.

14 MITCHELL SILVER: So, you say constructed or
15 design?

16 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Are we building any new
17 ones?

18 MITCHELL SILVER: We are building new ones. I'm
19 looking at numbers here. We now have rolled these
20 into our Green Infrastructure Programs. I'll go back
21 to FY 2014, it was 131. FY 2015 57, FY 2016 were 6,
22 FY 2017 was 84 and there were none in FY 2018 and we
23 did 2 in FY 2019.

24 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Alright, we talked about
25 the 285 contracts at almost \$67 million and can you

1 talk a little bit about the current status of MWBE
2 prime and subcontract utilization at the Department
3 and is the Department going to meet, exceed or miss
4 its goals for the current Fiscal Year?
5

6 THERESE BRADDICK: Chair, we're currently at 24
7 percent. Our utilization rate is currently 24
8 percent and our goal, which we expect to meet or
9 exceed is 30 percent. We do very well with MWBEs,
10 and we are typically ranked very high within the
11 city. Last year we were ranked number two in the
12 city. The rankings haven't come out yet for this
13 Fiscal Year, but we hope to be in that top tier
14 again.

15 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, and do you have a
16 current value of those contracts?

17 MITCHELL SILVER: It was \$120 million in prime
18 contracts in FY 2018.

19 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, I appreciate that.
20 With that Commissioner, I think I am going to let you
21 go, if that's okay.

22 MITCHELL SILVER: What if I tell you, I'm not
23 ready yet?

24 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Well, that's why I have
25 a sergeant at arms here, but we do appreciate your

1 testimony and I certainly appreciate the work that
2 you're doing. One native New Yorker to another, we
3 both grew up in the City and we know the great value
4 of parks to past, present, and future generation of
5 New Yorkers. We are going to be very aggressive this
6 Committee and this Council is going to be very
7 aggressive in seeking additional funding for you to
8 spend working with all these wonderful people out
9 there and millions of other New Yorkers who depend
10 upon our Parks each and every day. I asked people
11 what their favorite park is and what their most
12 important park is, and I have come to realize that
13 the most important park in the City of New York is
14 every single park and I know that you share that
15 philosophy with me.

17 MITCHELL SILVER: You asked me earlier if I had a
18 wish, as you all know I have an opportunity of doing
19 presentations both here and across the country and I
20 wish people can witness the incredible support we
21 have from our park friends and supporters. When I go
22 to certain places and tell them the number of
23 volunteers, we have their jaws drop. The people
24 literally are astounded that there are people that
25 take time on their weekends and so, I personally want

1
2 to thank those here in the audience again, who are
3 really are strong park supporters as well as staff
4 who not just maintain our parks but care for our
5 parks. So, thank you so much for this opportunity.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: You know, we just do
7 incredible work. I was out in Alley Pond Park in
8 Paul Vallone's Park, I want to make that clear. It
9 had snowed, this was in November after that freak
10 storm we had and then it rained, and the planting
11 field was a sea of mud and it didn't deter people
12 from coming out. It took us a few extra days to do
13 what we did, we planted over 3,000 shrubs, bushes and
14 trees and transformed what had been pretty much a
15 waste land. I walked through it recently, obviously
16 nothings growing because of the winter, but I'm
17 looking forward to going back there this spring just
18 to see whats going on. I'm very excited about that
19 and that's what parks can do for people. So, it's my
20 pleasure to dismiss you right now and I hope as you
21 said, we'll have some parks people will stick around
22 to listen to all these people that want to take about
23 how much they love parks. So, thank you
24 Commissioner. Enjoy the weekend. Not every
25 Commissioner leaves to applause I got to tell you.

1
2 I'm going to call the first panel. As some of the
3 DPR folks are leaving Lynn Kelly New Yorkers for
4 Parks, Julie Tighe New York League of Conservation
5 Voters, Carter Strickland Trust of Public Land and
6 Heather Lubov for the City Parks Foundation.

7 We have a lot of people here today. As I said
8 before, first of all, I'm delighted to see so many
9 people here, so you can give yourselves a round of
10 applause and I will clap with you. As he leaves, I
11 want to thank again, Commissioner Silver. We're
12 going to put the testifiers on a two-and-a-half-
13 minute clock, which is a compromise. When you hear
14 the bell ring, I would appreciate if you could sum
15 up. I know that some people can't sum up, so I will
16 remind them after a while but the reason that we put
17 you on a clock is that people have come from far and
18 wide to testify today and everybody's time is
19 precious but I do want to hear from everybody. So, I
20 will be here until midnight. After midnight, they'll
21 probably throw me out, but I don't think it will take
22 that long. So, Ms. Kelly if you'd like to begin.

23 LYNN KELLY: Good afternoon Council Member
24 Grodenchik and good afternoon to everyone here. I'm
25 Lynn Kelly. I am the Executive Director of New

1
2 Yorkers for Parks and I want to thank you for
3 inviting me to testify today. We are a proud
4 founding member of the Play Fair Coalition along with
5 Council Member Grodenchik, the New York League of
6 Conservation Voters and our friends at DC37, many of
7 whom are here today.

8 As of today, I should let you know, our Play Fair
9 Coalition hit 100 member organizations.

10 Congratulations to all of you. City owned park land
11 comprises 14 percent of all land but last year, the
12 Parks Department had .59 percent of the expense
13 budget, less than one percent. You know the last
14 time that New York City Parks had more than one
15 percent of the expense budget? You ready for this?
16 Was the 1970's, arguably one of the toughest decades
17 for economics in New York City history and yet that
18 just goes to show you how much parks are doing with
19 the little resources that they have.

20 We don't think that's fair, enough is enough.
21 Now is the time to play fair with the parks budget
22 and to fight for an increase in operations and
23 maintenance. We're asking for the city to commit an
24 additional \$100 million in the Preliminary Budget for
25 Parks and here's how we think it should be spent.

1
2 With \$10 million we can baseline, baseline positions
3 and end this budget dance that occurs year after year
4 for the hardworking 100 city parks workers and 50
5 gardener positions. It is cruel, we need to end that
6 today. An investment of \$4 million will allow the
7 city's Natural Resources Group to begin proactively
8 maintaining our natural forest and protecting us from
9 climate change. An addition of \$65 million would
10 allow parks for all sizes, in all neighborhoods to
11 receive fixed post permanent staff. Similarly, an
12 investment of \$18 million out of that \$100 would
13 allow smaller neighborhood parks to have fixed posts
14 crews. Wouldn't it be great if you could actually
15 know the first name of the gardener or the worker
16 that was in your park? That used to be the case,
17 yes.

18 \$47 million would support an innovative zone
19 management strategy for our largest parks, 48 of
20 them. This is the same model that was used
21 effectively in Central Park and Crotona Park. That's
22 not just a great model, that's creating a new green
23 workforce inside the agency. We need to make that
24 happen. \$8 million would allow the city to provide
25 funding for every single green thumb community garden

1 in New York City and \$4 million would allow the city
2 to expand its Kids in Motions Program.
3

4 I'll wrap up by saying \$9 million gets us more
5 Rangers, more PEP officers and in a city that
6 champions equity, isn't the most democratic and
7 equitable thing to fund our Parks Department? Let's
8 Play Fair with this Budget Mr. Grodenchik, Council
9 Member. Let's Play Fair for Parks.

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I am with you and the
11 Council is going to be with you. Julie Tighe from
12 the League of Conservation Voters.

13 JULIE TIGHE: Good afternoon. My name is Julie
14 Tighe. I am President of the New York League of
15 Conservation Voters and LYLCV represents over 31,000
16 members in New York City and we are proud to advance
17 a sustainability agenda that will make our people,
18 our neighborhoods, and our economy healthier and more
19 resilient. I'd like to thank Chair Grodenchik for
20 the opportunity to testify before the Committee today
21 on the Preliminary Budget Hearing. We support the
22 passage of a City Budget in Fiscal Year 2020 that
23 secures progress on many of the environmental
24 transportation and public health priorities Mayor de
25 Blasio has called for and NYC and beyond. Our City

1 is starring down a crisis of existential importance
2 and it is incumbent upon our elected leaders to
3 invest our tax dollars in climate action and
4 solutions and New York City's Department of Parks and
5 Recreation plays a critical role in that fight. The
6 Preliminary Budget for Parks totals \$542.9 million,
7 just over one half of one percent of the city's \$92.2
8 billion Preliminary Budget. As Lynn pointed out,
9 that's just .59 percent for an agency overseeing 14
10 percent of the city's land and while this represents
11 a slight increase, it includes cuts to critical
12 programs. Most notably \$5.4 million reduction to
13 Forestry and Horticulture.

15 Parks and other green spaces are one of the
16 City's most valuable environmental assets and
17 preserving these spaces is a top priority to NYLCV.
18 Parks are a major source of the city's urban canopy.
19 In fact, the Parks Department is responsible for over
20 \$2.6 million street and park trees which is a canopy
21 that mitigates climate change, provides clean air and
22 habitats for native wildlife, and contributes to the
23 wellbeing of our residents and our economy. These
24 trees remove 1,300 tons of pollutants from the
25 atmosphere and store one million tons of carbon every

1 year. Trees are vital for mitigating urban heat
2 island effect and can lower temperatures by up to 9
3 degrees, cut air conditioning use by 30 percent and
4 reduce heating energy used by a further 20-50
5 percent.
6

7 New York City's Parks also contribute to our
8 resiliency by capturing almost 2 billion gallons of
9 storm water run off every year. We should be
10 investing more, not less in protecting this green
11 asset. Further, with the soaring population growth
12 and over 100 million visitors each year, park use in
13 New York City is surging to record levels and its
14 imperative that the Parks Department Budget keeps
15 pace with these trends. That's why NYLCV was proud
16 to join with New Yorkers for Parks as a founding
17 member of the Play Fair for Parks Campaign.

18 We all agree that Parks are critical city
19 infrastructure. One does not have to look further
20 than the environmental benefits I pointed out earlier
21 as prove, but these green benefits could not be
22 realized without the park's employees particularly
23 gardeners, horticulturists, and maintenance workers
24 who work tirelessly to maintain the health of these
25 spaces.

2 For these reasons, it is time that we provide a
3 long overdue investment in the people that care for
4 our parks. As Lynn noted, the Play Fair Coalition is
5 asking the City to commit \$100 million in additional
6 funding to support much needed maintenance and
7 operation statewide as Lynn testified earlier.

8 The disparity in the City Budget for Parks has
9 existed for over a decade and now is the time to
10 invest in the Parks Department. Now is the time to
11 Play Fair for Parks.

12 So, in closing, I'd like thank Chair Grodenchik
13 for his partnership and the Committee on Parks and
14 Recreation for their attention on this issue and
15 NYLCV and myself look forward to working with you all
16 closely to ensure New York City has healthy and
17 thriving green spaces for generations to come.

18 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you Ms. Tighe. We
19 got another hearing in the next room, so as much as I
20 like to hear the clapping, I would ask you to this
21 until they, then we can have a party. So, Mr.
22 Strickland?

23 CARTER STRICKLAND: Thank you for the opportunity
24 to testify Chairperson Grodenchik and Members of the
25 Committee and I want to say I think everybody

1
2 appreciates your enthusiastic support for Parks in
3 general and also for a close oversight in the
4 Council's role, which is very critical in the Budget
5 process.

6 We like everybody in this room believe that parks
7 and open space are critical infrastructure and I
8 shouldn't say we, at the Trust for Public Land which
9 has supported parks throughout the country in New
10 York City for the last 40 years.

11 I am testifying on two issues, one is to voice
12 the Trust for Public Land support and enthusiastic
13 membership for the Play Fair campaign, we think it a
14 really critical issues and thank New York for Parks
15 and League of Conservation Voters for helping start
16 that. The simple fact is that the operational budget
17 of the parks department is too small at 0.59 percent.
18 That's not justified. I'll point this out, Central
19 Park has 42 million annual visitors at least and
20 that's greater than annual attendance that Met,
21 Lincoln Center, Yankee Stadium, Citi Field and MOMA
22 combined, and I think the City's Budget should
23 reflect the priorities and the fact that people are
24 voting with their feet.

1
2 Every year the Trust for Public Land ranks the
3 park systems of the 100 largest cities in America in
4 our annual ParkScore report, which is dropping May
5 23rd. In 2013 New York ranked second, in 2017 we
6 ranked seventh, and in 2018 New York dropped to
7 ninth. Peer cities such as San Francisco, Arlington,
8 Portland, Washington D. C., Cincinnati and Chicago
9 have moved ahead of us over the past six years. New
10 York is renowned for its innovative parks and world
11 class amenities but anything less than the top,
12 number one ranking is just not good enough.

13 The good news is that by our methodology which
14 differs slightly from the City's, over 97 percent of
15 New Yorkers have a park within a ten-minute walk from
16 home, which means that they will use it and they'll
17 get the benefits of those parks. The unique feature
18 of New York City's Parks system is that we have more
19 than 1,700 parks. I'll point out, many of these are
20 small neighborhood parks near where people live
21 that's an order of magnitude higher than other parks
22 systems. So, the other top ten, the next highest is
23 Chicago with about 600 parks, so we're about three
24 times Chicago. So, we need to focus on the quality
25 of our parks, many of which are old, on average 73

1
2 years old and have not seen capital upgrades in over
3 20 year.

4 The point is that, more parks means more
5 operational people that we need.

6 I'll just point out in the second half of my
7 written testimony which I have summarized here, I
8 address very directly your point about borough
9 equity. We think that there's parts of the city that
10 need the kind of investments that we're seeing in
11 Manhattan, the east river waterfront in Brooklyn and
12 Queens and other places and by the maps that we have
13 screen shots in our testimony of parks without
14 borders in the City Park Initiative is not evenly
15 spread as you know, we think that one way to address
16 the deficit of parks in Central and Eastern Queens is
17 to build the Queens way, which is at cost with just a
18 simple acquisition of Bushwick Inlet Park. The
19 people in Central Queens deserve it. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you and thank you
21 for bringing up those attendance figures. I often
22 say that the average cost of visitor for a New York
23 City Park is just over \$4.00. There are very few
24 things that you can buy to amuse yourself all day for
25

1 four bucks. Try going to a movie in this city.

2 Heather?

3
4 HEATHER LUBOV: Thank you Chair Grodenchik. I am
5 Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks
6 Foundation, a 30-year old non-profit that brings
7 public programs into parks to strengthen communities.
8 Each year, we reach 300,000 New Yorkers in more than
9 400 parks.

10 Partnerships for Parks is a joint program we
11 manage with the Parks Department to help improve
12 parks by encouraging communities to actively use and
13 care for them. Thanks to the Council's Parks Equity
14 Initiative, Partnerships supports nearly 600 active
15 volunteers', friends' groups, helping them plan
16 beautification projects and community events and
17 teaching them how to advocate for their parks needs.
18 We help plan more than 1,100 volunteer projects
19 contributing 72,000 volunteer hours and engaging
20 nearly 24,000 volunteers. We offer extensive
21 training for volunteers to ensure their work is
22 sustainable in the long term and our catalyst
23 program, which the Commissioner mentioned earlier,
24 sends and outreach worker into communities that have
25 difficulty building or maintaining volunteer efforts.

1
2 I ask that the Council continue funding the Parks
3 Equity Initiative in FY 2020.

4 Also, thanks to the Parks Equity Initiative and
5 the Council's Leadership support, our environmental
6 education programs reached nearly 5,000 young people
7 who will be our next generation of park stewards. We
8 teach 13,000 kids and seniors and keep them health
9 and active in their parks through gulf, tennis, track
10 and field, soccer, fitness walking and yoga
11 instruction and we're presenting more than 100 free
12 PuppetMobile performances and more than 80 free
13 SummerStage concerts across the city.

14 So, I ask that the Council continue its
15 leadership support for our work in FY 2020.

16 On June 1st, thanks to capital funding from the
17 Council, we'll open our newly refurbished SummerStage
18 in Central Park with a new stage and sound system,
19 new lighting, raised seating with improved sight
20 lines. To close out the project, we are seeking
21 \$151,000 in capital funding from the Council to
22 increase the venue's electrical power. We are at the
23 upper limit of the existing power, will be forced to
24 scale back touring productions that bring in
25

1 additional equipment, and are likely to experience
2 damage to the system in the future unless we upgrade.

3
4 But everything we do depends on the support and
5 dedication of the Parks Department. As members of
6 the Play Fair Coalition, I ask that the City baseline
7 the much-needed maintenance, gardener, and city park
8 worker positions in the budget. We believe that
9 parks are in every neighborhood and are our most
10 fundamentally democratic of public spaces, so its
11 time to Play Fair for Parks.

12 Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for
13 your long support for City Parks Foundation.

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I want to thank you all
15 for being here today. We have many great
16 organizations that love our parks and advocate for
17 parks, but you represent some of the finest and some
18 of the longest standing and it is great to work with
19 each and every one of you. We're going to need to
20 get to work and we have been at work and I want to
21 thank you publicly for everything you've done for our
22 parks and will continue to do. And with that, I'm
23 going to bring up the next panel, which we're going
24 to hear from some of the people that actually make
25 our parks run so well.

1
2 LYNN KELLY: Council Member, before we go, I just
3 wanted to indicate that we are also submitting
4 testimony for 15 organizations that couldn't be here
5 today.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, I appreciate that,
7 and I appreciate that we've 100 organizations that
8 are now in our Play Fair Coalition.

9 At this time, we're going to hear from people
10 from District Council 37, Dan Clay President of Local
11 1507, there is actually two Dan Clay's, but I think
12 he's the same person. Joe Puleo President of Local
13 983, Marlene Giga Treasurer of Local 983, and the
14 irrepressible Dilcy Benn President of Local 1505.

15 Whoever would like to start.

16 JOE PULEO: Thanks for having us. My name is Joe
17 Puleo. I represent the number of parks titles. I
18 represent the Urban Park Rangers, the PEP Officers,
19 the APSW's and the city's seasonal aids. I'm really
20 disappointed that we are actually going to be facing
21 some cuts.

22 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: We hope not.

23 JOE PULEO: Well, we hope not but we're debating
24 it which we shouldn't even be here doing that. We
25 definitely needed the restoration that we had last

1 year without a doubt, but we also need additions to
2 that. We need more park enforcement officers to
3 patrol our parks. According to your chart, only 5
4 percent of the budget goes to urban park services.
5 That includes the rangers, the PEP officers, so on.
6 8 percent goes to Administration, 65 percent,
7 according to this, goes to maintenance and operation.
8 Those numbers have to go up if you want to see our
9 parks clean and safe without a doubt.

11 I respect the Parks Department, the Commissioner
12 for all he has done but after all, their public
13 servants, they're not magicians. With these numbers
14 their going to need our help and unfortunately for
15 them, it's not like you can go to your boss and say,
16 yes, we need more money.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: That is unfortunate,
18 that's why I'm here.

19 JOE PULEO: Yeah, that's why we're here and we
20 appreciate the job that you're doing, and we
21 definitely need the money otherwise we will be here
22 again next year talking about crime figures going up,
23 parks being dilapidated. We don't want to see this.
24 We need the money. One percent like the fans for
25

1
2 Parks say, you know, is a small fraction to resolve
3 this problem.

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: There was a time in the
5 city's history, and I think, and I think Ms. Kelly
6 mentioned it, where the parks budget was one percent
7 of the entire city budget and there were times in the
8 early 60's when it was close to 1.2 percent. If that
9 were the case today, we'd be in over a billion
10 dollars in expense money alone for parks which would
11 be absolutely amazing.

12 JOE PULEO: And we wouldn't be here begging
13 either.

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Probably not. My Clay?
15 Are you done Mr. Puleo?

16 JOE PULEO: Yes, thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: He yields the remainder
18 of his time. Go ahead Mr. Clay.

19 DAN CLAY: Hi there, good afternoon. Thank you
20 for your time Mr. Chair and everybody else. I am
21 Daniel Clay, the brand new President of Local 1507
22 and I'm very happy to speak on behalf of Local 1507
23 gardeners, some of the strongest members of the boots
24 on the ground in my opinion and I'd like to urge the
25 City Council to restore and compel the Administration

1
2 to baseline at \$10 million for the 50 gardeners and
3 the 100 CPWs as well and I really hope that you
4 strongly consider the \$100 million budget increase to
5 for the 100 groups of Play Fair.

6 With the amount of acreage and how few the
7 gardeners and the rest of are, I should also mention
8 how tough it is to maintain and do the work on
9 natural land and horticulture and everything.

10 Lastly, I'd just like to thank you again for your
11 time and I appreciate it really.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you for being here
13 today. Ms. Benn, good to see you.

14 DILCY BENN: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. Good to
15 see you to.

16 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Good to see you madam
17 President.

18 DILCY BENN: Good afternoon Mr. Chair and fellow
19 Park's Committee Members. My name is Dilcy Benn, I
20 am the President of Local 1505 representing city park
21 workers in the New York City Parks and Recreation
22 Department. My members work in all five boroughs
23 conducting maintenance in all city parks.

24 I want to first out by thanking the Council for
25 the funding restoration in the Fiscal Year 2019 for

1 the Parks Department. This funding was used to
2 maintain the city funded lines for the 100 city park
3 workers as well as the 50 gardeners. I'm here today
4 to say although the local appreciation of
5 restoration, it is not enough. The Administration
6 must baseline the \$10 million for these positions.
7 If this funding is not restored in baseline, there
8 will not be enough workers in the CPW titles, which
9 is City Park Worker titles. Furthermore, the
10 maintenance and upkeep of the parks will suffer
11 leading to the belay and neighborhood decay. We are
12 here today in solidarity with the Play Fair Coalition
13 which consists of over 90 different groups to urge
14 the Administration to add additional \$100 million to
15 the Parks Department Budget. The successful turnout
16 at the Press Conference last week demonstrates how
17 important parks are in the lives of New Yorkers and
18 how important it is to increase funding for Parks
19 Department Budget.

21 As we approach the start of the spring season in
22 the next several weeks, there's a lot of work to be
23 done to prepare the parks for the millions of New
24 Yorkers who will be taking strolls and enjoying the
25 warm weather in the parks. The beautification of

1 parks is important to all New Yorkers as well as the
2 thousands of tourists who visit these areas.
3

4 Once again, I'm urging the City Council to
5 restore and urge the Administration to baseline the
6 \$10 million for the City park workers and the garden
7 Alliance. Thank you for the opportunity to testify
8 here today, Barry and all the Committee Members and I
9 will be happy to take any questions if you have any.

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I may have some but let
11 me get to Ms. Giga. Am I pronouncing your name
12 correctly?

13 MARLENE GIGA: Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

15 MARLENA GIGA: My name is Marlena Giga and I have
16 in the PEP office for 18 years. I am also proudly
17 from the Pelham Bay area in the Bronx living walking
18 distance to Pelham Bay Park. I believe growing up so
19 close in this park gave me the ammunition to work for
20 parks and ultimately become a union rep. I want to
21 talk about first the PEP division. PEP is proactive
22 while on duty. Everyday PEP offices enforce rules
23 and anything they come in contact with. PEP is not
24 only eyes and ears, PEP offices are dedicated to the
25 community they work in. There is also a high

1 turnover rate due to the requirements, four-year
2 college degree and the low salary. There is also a
3 shortage of vehicles within PEP division which
4 hinders the offices to be utilized effectively.
5

6 Our park rangers also committed to doing nature
7 programs but have been cut to the bare bones and
8 currently charged for some of their programs. The
9 mounted unit has also dwindled to eight offices and
10 six horses. When I first started, we had a mounted
11 unit in every single borough. The mounted unit is
12 effective because they're able to patrol where
13 vehicles are not able to reach.

14 I also want to talk about the APSW maintenance
15 employees. They are also spread to the bone. Many
16 of the APSW's are not even able to take a meal
17 because they have to go to so many locations while
18 their working.

19 And last, I want to talk about the CSA title.
20 They are the backbone of the Parks Department and
21 they really service the members there out on the
22 frontline at our beaches, at our parks, and at our
23 pools. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you all for being
25 here today. We know, we struggled last year with

1 restoring that \$9.6 million, it's out there again and
2 I know that it would effect the membership of your
3 union and I just wanted to, if one of you or more
4 than one of you wanted to take about that, what that
5 would mean in your opinion for parks and I think I
6 know it mean but I'm not on the front lines with you
7 and so, Joe if you'd like to take or Dilcy?

9 DILCY BENN: Joe can talk and then I'll speak.

10 JOE PULEO: Okay, this will be devastating. Any
11 cut will be devastating. The parks, if they're not
12 clean, it's the old broken windows concept. People
13 are going to be afraid to enter the parks. There's
14 going to be broken glass, there's going to be people
15 out there that are going to look less than friendly
16 occupying these parks and playgrounds. It's just
17 going to have an overall increase in crime. The
18 reason why the numbers I believe, are what they are,
19 is because of the additions that were placed there in
20 the past. Any reduction will put it back to critical
21 mass as it once was before. I also have one quick,
22 if I may, solution to the capital projects.

23 We have APSWs, those are Associate Parks Service
24 Workers who operate heavy machinery. They can do a
25 lot of the construction work. When you talk about

1
2 construction prices doubling, our guys didn't get
3 that sort of raise, so you can imagine the rate that
4 we would charge for doing a lot of this work.

5 We have the workers to do the work, why not
6 insource it.

7 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Ms. Benn?

8 DILCY BENN: Yes, basically, the 100 CPWs that we
9 need baseline, are only really seasonal and I get
10 like 400-500 seasonal's every year and that's still
11 not enough. We don't have enough. If you even give
12 us the money for these lines, we still don't have
13 enough people. Most of my people are out during the
14 summer time. I don't think the parks should only be
15 taken care of during the summer time, I think it
16 would be taken care of all year around. So, to take
17 these 100 would even make it more devastating then it
18 is already. We got over 8,000 acres and its crazy
19 that these people are being over worked and utilized
20 everywhere but we still don't have enough people to
21 cover ground.

22 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Sorry Dilcy, its 26,000.

23 DILCY BENN: 26,000, okay, I was close. But no
24 matter how much it is, we don't have enough to do
25 what we do now and to take these lines would even be

1 more devastating. During the summer time, we got
2 more usage because I got 500,600 seasonal' s that
3 come out here. Your figure they're only out here
4 until Labor Day. Okay, so I'm asking that you all
5 restore the money for the gardeners, and I got to
6 give the gardeners credit to because the
7 beautification of parks is mostly on them with the
8 flowers and everything. So, we need as much help as
9 we can get. So, I'll take the \$10 million and
10 another \$10 million if you want to give it to us.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: How about \$100 million?

13 DILCY BENN: \$100 million sounds good to.

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, I want to thank
15 you for being here today. You want to say something
16 Mr. Clay?

17 DAN CLAY: Can I say one more thing? You think
18 of gardeners as planting flowers but there is so
19 much, we do during the winter time besides just the
20 snow control. I work as hard as I do during the
21 winter time as I do during the summer time.

22 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I'm glad to hear that as
23 a tax payer. Thank you for being here today and we
24 look forward to working with you over the next few
25 months to ensure that our parks are more than

1
2 adequately funded and certainly to end once and for
3 all this budget dance that threatens not only our
4 park system but the livelihood of 150 New Yorkers who
5 depend on those jobs to support their families.

6 DILCY BENN: Thank you, Mr. Chair and I
7 appreciate all that you're doing to help us, I really
8 do.

9 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I thank you for your
10 efforts and being such a strong voice. Thank you.
11 The next panel Mr. Raymond Figueroa, Jr. of the New
12 York City Community Garden Coalition. Cory Provost
13 of Prospect Park Alliance, Hunter Armstrong from
14 Natural Areas Conservancy and Charles Krezell of
15 LUNGS.

16 Mr. Figueroa if you'd like to begin. I called
17 you first, you're the foreman.

18 RAYMOND FIGUEROA: Hello, yes, good afternoon.
19 First, I'd like to thank the leadership of the
20 Committee Mr. Chair and the other Members of the
21 Committee for convening this vitally important
22 hearing today. My name is Raymond Figueroa, Jr., I
23 am President of the New York City Community Garden
24 Coalition. The New York City Community Garden
25 Coalition is a proud member of the Play Fair

1 Coalition. We in the coalition regard this issue
2 from couple of perspectives as extremely vitally
3 important. We view it as a critical environmental
4 justice component of open space equity. That is to
5 say, supporting funding for parks where in
6 marginalized underserved communities in the South
7 Bronx, Brownsville, and similarly situated
8 communities, we just don't have enough of the
9 distribution, the fair distribution of open space and
10 so, funding parks to be able to not just to maintain
11 but to expand will be critically important.

12
13 The second point that I want to make is that
14 about seven or eight years ago, a report was issued
15 by Furman Center for real estate. It was actually,
16 how should I say; the lead investigator was none
17 other than Vicki Been, former Commissioner of Housing
18 Preservation and Development. That report that they
19 produce is called, The Effect of Community Gardens on
20 Neighboring Property Values, and so, I just want to
21 allude to that very, very briefly. What they
22 conclude, I'm not going to go through the entire
23 report to be sure, but what they concluded over the
24 course of a 20-year longitudinal study is that
25 community gardens, which are a very infinite

1 testimonial fraction of park land, very small,
2 contributed enhanced property values and as such
3 contributed half a billion with a B, \$500 million in
4 tax revenues to the city and that's just an infinite
5 testimonial part of the land base of parks. If one
6 were to extrapolate the entire acreage of New York
7 City Park Land which I have not prepared to present,
8 but its obvious that we are contributing, not just
9 from an environment justice perspective, from an
10 ecosystem, ecological ecosystems perspective. That
11 is to say air filtration of particulate matter, storm
12 water run-off mitigation, urban heat Island
13 mitigation, carbon sequestration, not to mention food
14 production and so, all of these really speak to the
15 value of open spaces in our communities and plus, out
16 of our community garden and I'm just going to wrap up
17 with this last point. We actually use it, our
18 community garden as a venue for work force
19 development and entrepreneur initiatives folded into
20 an alternative to incarceration. We are actually
21 saving the city millions of dollars in incarceration
22 costs via and lower crime via this workforce
23 development with the Department of Probation.

24
25 Thank you very much for this opportunity.

2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you, Mr. Figueroa
3 for your testimony and for bringing points that I
4 have not heard yet, so I appreciate that. Mr.
5 Provost.

6 CORY PROVOST: Good afternoon.

7 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: It's getting almost
8 evening but that's okay.

9 CORY PROVOST: That's true, that's true. I
10 promise to be brief.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: That's alright.

12 CORY PROVOST: Once again, my name is Cory
13 Provost and I serve as a Director for Government and
14 Community Affairs for Prospect Park Alliance on
15 behalf of Susan Donahue our President, who couldn't
16 be here today. It is my honor to really just submit
17 this testimony. So, as you may know the Prospect
18 Alliance is a non-profit that partners with the New
19 York City Parks Department and the community to
20 foster stewardship of Prospect Park. We were
21 established in 1987 and since then the Alliance has
22 helped to care for the natural environment, preserve
23 the parks historic design, provide facilities and
24 oversee over more than 25,000 permitted events,
25

1
2 mainly consisting of small birthday parties and
3 family picnics.

4 Over the past 31 years, we have enjoyed a great,
5 great working relationship with the City of New York,
6 with our colleagues in government, Mayor de Blasio,
7 our Council Members Brad Lander, Mathieu Eugene,
8 Majority Leader Cumbo, Bureau President Eric Adams,
9 Speaker Cory Johnson and the list just really goes
10 on. We really do enjoy the relationship that we have
11 with our City leaders and we have restored over 50
12 projects, close to 120 acres of park land and the
13 park is just something that has been enjoyed by over
14 almost 10 million visitors per year. So, we're
15 thrilled to really be here today. We're thrilled to
16 join this coalition of 100 members from all around
17 the city and encouraging this body to play fair with
18 the City Budget.

19 For well over a decade, it's been established
20 that the Parks Department has not received what we
21 believe is their fair share on despite the parks
22 accounting for 14 percent of city land. It would be
23 great to see 14 percent of the City Budget.

24 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I'll take one percent.
25

1
2 CORY PROVOST: But I think today, right now, we
3 are joining the call and asking for the \$100 million
4 fund. We think that is adequate to help us and help
5 the city really maintain the city parks, maintain the
6 city's infrastructure with the parks. It will help
7 us in this battle for climate change that is going to
8 impact us in numerous, numerous ways as well as being
9 able to secure new jobs, green jobs for all the
10 communities around New York City as the gentleman
11 just here just mentioned the work that they do in
12 rehabilitating individuals. Their work is so vital
13 and so crucial as we're moving forward. So, again
14 Prospect Park Alliance and the City of New York has
15 enjoyed a great, great relationship and we would like
16 to definitely continue that relationship going
17 forward.

18 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you and I've been
19 to the park; we love the park. Just an outstanding
20 park and thank you for being here today. Mr.
21 Armstrong?

22 HUNTER ARMSTRONG: Yes, thank you for the
23 opportunity to speak. My name is Hunter Armstrong
24 and I'm speaking today on behalf of the Natural Areas
25 Conservancy. We appreciate the opportunity to voice

1
2 our support for increased funding for parks and New
3 York City's Natural Forests. The Natural Areas
4 Conservancy is an independent non-profit organization
5 that was formed in 2012 with the goal of increasing
6 the capacity of NYC Parks and its partners to restore
7 and manage the 10,000 acres of forest grasslands and
8 wetlands under the agency's jurisdiction. We
9 appreciated the opportunity to present our recently
10 released 25 years plan. The Forest Management
11 Framework for New York City, which I have in my hand,
12 also available online to this Committee on October
13 25, 2018. We created the framework in partnership
14 with NYC Parks and it includes a 25-year budget and
15 management plan to protect, restore and make more
16 accessible New York City's 7,300 acres of natural
17 forests. This resource constitutes one quarter of
18 the entire park system.

19 At the October 25th hearing, more than 18 groups
20 and individuals testified in support of the
21 management framework and for increased funding and
22 resources for forests and parks. These forests cover
23 a land area that is eight times the size of central
24 park. They stretch across the four corners of the
25 city, Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, Alley Pond

1 Park in Queens, Marine Park in Brooklyn and
2 Conference House Park in Staten Island as well as
3 many other locations. We are pleased to testify
4 today in support of the Play Fair Platform and
5 specifically in favor of increased investment in
6 forests. Adding \$100 million to the Parks
7 Department's Budget would have profound impacts on
8 all the agencies efforts. This should include \$4
9 million to manage the one quarter of NYC Park land
10 that is comprised of natural forests making them
11 healthier and safer for New Yorkers, \$4 million in
12 Capital funding to restore forests, \$3 million for 50
13 new urban park managers to connect New Yorkers with
14 the nature that surrounds us, \$6 million for 80
15 additional PEP officers to preserve and protect our
16 parks.
17

18 New York City's natural area forests are critical
19 to mitigating the effects of climate change reducing
20 extreme heat, capturing storm water to reduce
21 flooding and absorbing green house gases. They also
22 represent the primary means of access to nature for
23 most New Yorkers. New Yorkers deserve better. We
24 urge you to increase funding for Parks and Forests,
25

1
2 which are essential to our quality of life and future
3 resilience. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you. Mr. Krezell?

5 CHARLES KREZELL: My name is Charles Krezell, I
6 am the President of LUNGS which is Low East Side of
7 United Neighborhood Gardens which is a network of
8 gardens, community gardens on the lower east side in
9 the east village. I am also a member of the New York
10 City Garden Coalition. I am here to ask for more
11 funding for green thumb which is the administrator
12 for the community gardens in the city. There are 600
13 community gardens, they make up 100 acres. The but
14 last year for green thumb was \$3 million. The
15 gardens are completely run by volunteers. Gardeners
16 spend their own time and money maintaining the city
17 property and I don't believe get the proper respect
18 from the city for doing that and I think we need to
19 have more money put into green thumb. We're waiting
20 for relicensing right now from the city, its been
21 four years. We're four months behind the
22 relicensing. We don't even know what that's going to
23 be like, but we still want to work with the City and
24 we still want to work with Green Thumb, and I think
25 the gardeners deserve that. I'm also a member of the

1 East River Alliance, which I have some questions
2 about what was presented today. As far at the East
3 River Alliance, there was no money talked about for
4 mitigation. They want to close down a 58-acre park
5 on the east river.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: We did have a hearing on
8 that.

9 CHARLES KREZELL: I was at that hearing and I
10 spoke at that, but within this budget the City,
11 where's the mitigation for that? If its closed down.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I believe that there was
13 money added to the Capital Budget for that project.

14 CHARLES KREZELL: There are \$600, \$700 million
15 average of the Capital Budget which is the \$700
16 million their asking to take away from everybody
17 else's budget. It's interesting how that's going to
18 work.

19 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Well, just starting the
20 process. It's a long dance.

21 CHARLES KREZELL: Commissioner Silver also
22 mentioned within his budget he wants to spend \$57
23 million for a flyover bridge at the Conrad Plant
24 which is part of that project. That money is going
25 to come out of the Parks Department Conrad should pay

1
2 for that. Conrad is the one that has that pinched
3 area, why doesn't Conrad have anything to do with
4 this? I would ask that question.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, I appreciate that.
6 Thank you very much for your testimony and thank you
7 for loving parks as much as you do. I'm going to
8 call up the next panel. Lynden Miller New Yorkers
9 for Parks, Kristina Taylor from the friends of Van
10 Cortlandt Park, Martha Lopez-Gilpin from the Astoria
11 Park Alliance, and Brad Taylor from Friends of
12 Morningside Park.

13 Good to see you. Please lead off.

14 LYNDEN MILLER: Nice to see you.

15 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Nice to be seen.

16 LYNDEN MILLER: I have a very short but impassion
17 statement to make.

18 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I'm sure you do; I'm not
19 worried about you.

20 LYNDEN MILER: I'm Lynden Miller and I've
21 designing and carrying for over 45 public open spaces
22 in this city for 36 years. From personal experience,
23 I know first hand the enormous importance of having
24 gardeners to care for our parks. As important as it
25 is to pick up trash and mow lawns, it's also

1 extremely important, we need gardeners. Right now,
2 we have only 100 full time gardeners for more than
3 1,700 parks. That works out to approximately 17
4 acres per gardener. Our parks and precious open
5 spaces are sanctuaries for the souls of all New
6 Yorkers. For them to survive and thrive, we must
7 baseline at least another 50 parks gardeners in this
8 year's budget. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you very much.

11 Now here from Kristina Taylor, Friends of Van
12 Cortlandt Park. Good to see you as well.

13 KRISTINA TAYLOR: Good to see you, thank you.

14 Thank you for allowing me to be here today. I want
15 to first of all thank you for your support of all of
16 our parks. I also want to thank our Bureau
17 Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, she is amazing to
18 work with. We are very lucky to have her.

19 We all know that New York City Parks is
20 underfunded. They have been for many, many years and
21 this needs to change and I feel like I can't remember
22 how many years in a row, that I have come and said
23 the same sentences. There is not enough personal
24 working equipment to properly maintain our parks at
25 the level park users deserve. For example, in the

1
2 Bronx, our vehicles sometimes spend more time in the
3 repair shop than they do out in our parks and when
4 our comfort stations breakdown, we have to wait for
5 one of four Bronx plumbers to have time to fix it.
6 This has resulted in our main comfort station for
7 cross country races being closed during major races.
8 To address these issues and other issues throughout
9 parks, the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park would like
10 to request that the City Council work with the Mayor
11 to finally commit the \$10 million needed to baseline
12 the 100 city park workers and the 50 gardener
13 positions that we have to beg for each year and to
14 increase the Parks Department Budget by \$100 million.
15 Specifically, we are asking for maintenance funding.
16 We are not able to maintain the parks at the level
17 that they should be, so each year we have capital
18 projects that invest more money into our parks but
19 those quickly fall apart and we have to once again
20 have another capital project because there is no one
21 there to restore them and keep them going.

22 The Budget should allocate more money to
23 dedicated maintenance staff gardeners, plumbers, and
24 other staff for our parks.

1
2 Safety, there is not enough parks and enforcement
3 patrol officers to keep our parks safe and as it was
4 stated earlier, the PEP officers are not paid enough
5 so that they will stick around and stay with us and
6 not leave for other jobs with better pay.

7 Currently, there are only 58 PEP officers that
8 patrol over 6,000 acres of park land in the Bronx.
9 These officers are split among multiple shifts and
10 during evening patrols, there's often only a hand
11 full on duty and the sad fact is that this is
12 actually the largest number of PEP officers the Bronx
13 has had for many years and it's still not enough. We
14 need funding for our natural areas, Van Cortlandt is
15 the third largest park in the city with 1,146 acres
16 and over half of that is natural areas. However,
17 typically there is only three to five parks employees
18 that are dedicated to maintaining these natural
19 areas. The Friends do what we can to help but more
20 work is done. Our natural areas are at a tipping
21 point and projects such as Daylighting Tibbetts Brook
22 need to happen in the near future.

23 In addition to these expenses, funding requests,
24 we are concerned about the Capital process. This was
25 all addressed earlier but we would like to work with

1
2 you guys to fix the Capital process. We do fully
3 support the Parks Department and realize they do the
4 best they can with the funding they have but they
5 need much more funding.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you. Your Council
7 Member Mr. Cohen is certainly an ardent supporter of
8 fixing that Capital process. I hear from him all the
9 time. Thank you for being here today and I look
10 forward to coming back to Van Cortlandt this summer,
11 we'll have to work on that.

12 KRISTINA TAYLOR: I'll be there.

13 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: And at a few acres a
14 year, it will take me a few hundred years to visit
15 the whole park, but we'll get there.

16 KRISTINA TAYLOR: We'll get it.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Martha Lopez-Gilpin from
18 Astoria Park Alliance. Good to see you.

19 MARTHA LOPEZ-GILPIN: Good to see you. My name
20 is Martha Lopez-Gilpin for Astoria Park Alliance. I
21 am the President of the Board of Trustees. It has
22 been a thrill to witness participatory budgeting and
23 Parks Equity Initiatives bring resources to Astoria
24 Park. It is a humbling and miraculous thing and
25 frankly, I cried when we were informed that Astoria

1
2 Park would be the first Queens Park to benefit from
3 the Anchor Parks program. My next thought was more
4 realistic. How the hell are we going to take care of
5 all of that? New Yorkers are practical people. It
6 is simply impractical and unsustainable to bring
7 these essential upgrades to our parks and not put a
8 plan of action in place to take care of this huge
9 investment. Astoria Park Alliance has been working
10 in Astoria Park for ten years, but we cannot take the
11 place of a dedicated staff gardeners and
12 horticulturalists, PEP officers, and full-time
13 employees.

14 I am here to intreat you to invest in the Play
15 Fair for Parks Coalition. Every cent of this money
16 will go to services that have already fallen behind
17 in funding. Please show your faith in volunteers,
18 park users, and community members who love New York
19 City Parks. Invest in us, the practical hardworking
20 scrappy New Yorkers and we will do the rest. Thank
21 you.

22 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you for your
23 testimony and your passion. Mr. Taylor.

2 BRAD TAYLOR: Thank you, Chair Grodenchik and
3 we'd love to see you up in Morningside Park. I know
4 you've been in the District.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: We have been in the
6 district and we'll continue to circulate as my time
7 allows but I love visiting parks, schools and parks.

8 BRAD TAYLOR: My name is Brad Taylor. I am the
9 President of the Friends of Morningside Park.
10 Morningside is the only designated scenic landmark
11 park in Harlem and is the largest park to be fully
12 contained in Council Member Levine's Council District
13 7. Established in 1981, our organization has been
14 and continues to be the primary community partner
15 with the Parks Department in the remarkable
16 revitalization of the park.

17 We are proud member of the New Yorkers for Parks
18 Play Fair Coalition calling for an additional \$100
19 million in expense funding in the city budget. In my
20 19 years with our organization I have seen first hand
21 how inadequate expense funding has had a negative
22 impact on our park even while the NYC Park Staff
23 responsible for the park does a tremendous job with
24 very limited resources. In those years in after
25 school program and summer program in the park have

1
2 been terminated. The park no longer has any PEP
3 officers dedicated to patrol its 30 acres and it
4 seems that instead they rely on roving crews of PEP
5 officer and it seems that NYC Parks has to rely
6 increasingly on a seasonal workforce with a high
7 turnover that provides few prospects for securing
8 stable green jobs. Morningside is a park with steep
9 winding paths and challenging rough topography.
10 Maintenance of these areas is extremely labor
11 intensive and if neglected, these paths are quick to
12 become overgrown with poor site lines and a decrease
13 sense of safety for park users.

14 Every spring and summer, the existing park staff
15 has a nearly impossible task of keeping up with the
16 horticultural needs of our park. Our park, like so
17 many others is in dire need of the additional staff
18 this \$100 million would provide. We are proud of our
19 Council Members passed leadership of this Committee
20 and the current leadership of Chair Grodenchik. We
21 are heartened by the support of so many Council
22 Members like Mark and Barry and the Play Fair
23 Initiative and strongly urge all our Council Members
24 and the Mayor to support this vital funding. Thank
25 you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you all for your
3 testimony. Thank you for your support of this
4 initiative that we are putting forward. I know that
5 we're going to be successful. It's going to take a
6 lot of work, but this is where it starts. It starts
7 in our communities and we got to let those people on
8 the other side of City Hall know that we're serious
9 and that we love our parks and that our parks are not
10 negotiable.

11 I thank you. I hope you'll stick around and
12 listen to some more testimony. It gets lonely here
13 at 4 something five o'clock, six o'clock. The next
14 panel is Meryl Brodsky from the Friends of Dag
15 Hammarskjold Plaza, Sherrill Kazain also from the
16 Friends of Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, we got a triple
17 thread here and now, Anne Hersh as well from the
18 aforementioned Friends of Dag Hammarskjold Plaza.
19 Are they here? Here they come.

20 While they are getting ready, so you know the
21 next panel will be, after this one will be Tara
22 Gitter from the New York Restoration Project, Molly
23 Adams with New York City Audubon, Eli Dvorkin of CUFF
24 and Johanna Clearfield from the Urban Wildlife
25 Coalition.

1 SHERRILL KAZAIN: Good afternoon, good evening.
2
3 I'm Sherrill Kazain [speaking in a different
4 language], and I'm giving you my full name just to
5 prove a point.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: That's a long name.

7 SHERRILL KAZAIN: That I am very at home with my
8 multiethnic neighborhood of which I am representing
9 today.

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

11 SHERRILL KAZAIN: So, I am the President of World
12 Council of Peoples for the United Nations founding in
13 1946 and at the United nations since 1967. We
14 advocate for many things but especially the UN 17
15 sustainable development goals of which healthy cities
16 and green space is included but I'm also the
17 President of Friends of Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, a
18 501C3 Community organization, non-profit which is the
19 unique space in the park between first and second
20 avenue and east 47th Street. The most multi-cultural
21 ethnic and linguistic place in Manhattan. My
22 building which is embassy house, was the first new
23 building to built on the block when the city property
24 was named Dag Hammarskjold Plaza to honor our second
25 Secretary General who was killed in a plane in 1961.

1 I have always seen this park from a global
2 perspective. I walk through it daily on the way to
3 the UN into the evening, it's a unique experience.
4 This is a gateway to the United Nations and is
5 arguably the most internationally visible park in New
6 York City. Because its footprint is only 1.5 acres,
7 this plaza can easily be overlooked in the city's
8 vast park system, but its importance cannot be
9 denied. We have a lot of attention thrown at us when
10 the UN General Assembly meets and Heads of State
11 visit every September, but the fact is, protest and
12 rally's occur year around. It is the city's town
13 square accommodating 8,000 plus people. The plaza
14 was a staging area for the first woman's march, the
15 largest in New York City history. All of this
16 accounts for a lot of wear and tear on infrastructure
17 and demands on service cleaning and security. Since
18 the park's reconstruction 20 years ago, our
19 organization has contracted the Doe Fund to provide
20 daily cleaning and trash removal as well as weekly
21 cleaning on the parks six majestic fountains. But
22 cleaning costs have ski rocketed and we can no longer
23 shoulder this burden alone. To play fair, the city
24 must do its share and fund the Parks Department with
25

1 a budget that matches the size of its Park System and
2 additional \$100 million for maintenance and
3 operations is a good starting point. Next year,
4 close to \$1 million of Capital funding will provide
5 for a complete renovation of Hammarskjold Plaza and
6 today, you the City Council will determine how this
7 park and others will be maintained. As a volunteer,
8 non-profit organization, we believe in the public
9 private partnership, but the Parks Department can
10 only do its job with ample funding. Thanks to
11 private contributions we have completely restored the
12 parks Katharine Hepburn Garden, we have worked with
13 the Parks Department to bring world class sculpture
14 exhibitions to the Plaza, but all the beautiful
15 plants, sculpture, fountains, are blighted when the
16 park becomes loaded with trash and it only takes one
17 warm day with a lunch crowd, a rally, the green
18 market, the homeless, for the park to look trashed
19 out.

21 After 20 years, we have concluded that this plaza
22 requires a full-time park custodian especially in the
23 warm season when its so heavily used. My colleagues
24 at the UN repeatedly ask why a city that calls itself
25 the financial capital of the world and encourages

1
2 global tourism and investment would allow a park of
3 this prominence to fall into disarray. Is my time
4 up? Well, you get the message.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I got the message,
6 believe me but its important. Your message is
7 important but the fact that you're here today is
8 important as well because this is a big crowd to
9 testify at a Preliminary Budget Hearing and it shows.
10 We have people from all over the city. We of course
11 had our Commissioner and the leading members of his
12 staff but its so important that people who love their
13 parks are here, like I do. I'm on this side, but so
14 many of you are on the other side today.

15 SHERRILL KAZAIN: And you're a great diplomat,
16 thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I am a diplomat,
18 sometimes. Don't ask my wife that question. Ms.
19 Brodsky if you'd like. Okay, who ever wants to go
20 next, Ms. Hersh.

21 ANNE SAXON-HERSH: My name is Anne Saxon-Hersh.

22 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Would you press that
23 button so that the light comes on? Okay, thank you.

24 ANNE SAXON-HERSH: My name is Anne Saxon-Hersh
25 and I serve as Director of Development for Friends of

1
2 Dag Hammarskjold Plaza. The deplorable condition of
3 the park once bided the UN Turtle Bay neighborhood.
4 Today, it is a shining example of the public, private
5 partnership. I fought for the park's reconstruction
6 with the Turtle Bay Association and then we formed
7 Friends and I took on the role of President to make
8 sure the newly designed park with its elegant
9 architecture, six fountains and a large public garden
10 would stay clean, green and vibrant. Today, the park
11 is thriving, but we face challenges beyond the scope
12 of our non-profit 501C community organization. Let's
13 start with clean. For 20 years we have contracted
14 the Doe Fund to sweep the block long park and bag the
15 garbage twice daily for an annual fee of about
16 \$5,000. Now, we're told they can no longer service
17 the park at a 70 percent discount and must charge us
18 \$40,000 to perform the same work. Other service
19 providers quoted annual fees from \$80,000 to
20 \$130,000, way beyond our budget. Our street fair
21 income in City Council Grants once covered the cost
22 of sanitation and weekly fountain cleaning but with
23 the consolidation of street fairs, our share of
24 proceeds continues to shrink. Then the 30 percent
25 restriction on subcontracted labor for city grants

1
2 added another obstacle. Now, we're priced out of the
3 market by the Clean Street Program that has the
4 Social Service Organizations competing for big bucks.
5 We don't have the staff and neither does the Parks
6 Department, so who will provide the essential
7 maintenance? Parks mobile crew, the Welfare to Work
8 Program picks up litter several times a week but
9 there's no set schedule and on a summer day one busy
10 lunch hour will fill the trash bins to overflowing.

11 Now, lets talk about green. Private funding has
12 enabled us to completely rejuvenate the parks
13 Katharine Hepburn Garden and it is a jewel featured
14 in Hotel Guides and Tour Books. Grants and donations
15 support the garden, but donors expect the city to
16 provide litter control and sanitation.

17 There are nine trees missing from tree beds. One
18 pit near the entrance dome has been a safety hazard
19 since 2015. The Million Trees Program sounds lovely
20 but what about a realistic budget for tree pruning?
21 The fountains require cleaning, or the pump systems
22 fail. We provide that service through contractors
23 and those cost have escalated. We pay for
24 replacement pumps. This budget hearing comes at a
25 fatuitous time. In 2020 Dag Hammarskjold will be

2 completely renovated with capital funding. Every
3 year I read about the city's acquisition on more park
4 land and new construction, but every park needs boots
5 on the ground.

6 Finally, we love our Parks Café, but concessions
7 should help support the parks where they are located.
8 Thank you for listening to our story today bringing
9 communities together are what Parks are all about.
10 Vote to fund maintenance and operations and help all
11 City Parks thrive.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you very much and
13 our guests and I will hear from Ms. Brodsky.

14 MERYL BRODSKY: Thank you very much Speaker. I
15 want to just say that I corroborate.

16 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Can you just press that
17 red button please.

18 MERYL BRODSKY: Sure.

19 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you. I want to
20 corroborate everything that Anne Saxon-Hersh as well
21 as Sherrill Kazain has already said about the obvious
22 need for maintenance and operations to improve the
23 status of the Parks, which as League of Conservation
24 Voters has already informed us is a huge asset to
25 energy conservation in the health of this city.

1 I speak for every park. I speak for the parks in
2 my own district where I'm a party official and on the
3 board of the Friends of Dag Hammarskjold as well as
4 the Turtle Bay Association. So, I also speak for the
5 MacArthur Playground and the Robert Moses Playground
6 and **[Inaudible 4:16:32]** Park.

7
8 The UN area particularly is the park to the
9 world. It is an International Park. There is no
10 argument that some parks should be funded, and some
11 parks ought not and in fact, we ourselves, think that
12 our park is the only park in the world and that we
13 ought to get all of the money, but we will settle for
14 additional maintenance and operations funds. I just
15 thought that I would repeat that.

16 I also want to mention that these people have
17 worked enormously hard to do things that the Parks
18 Department should be doing in the way of maintenance
19 and clean up and generally rehabilitation and
20 facility upgrade. So, I think this money has been
21 missing for a long time as a tax payer, as a party
22 official, as a member of the Board of the Turtle Bay
23 Association and the Friends of Dag Hammarskjold, I
24 thoroughly support the addition from the budget of
25

1 \$100 million for maintenance and operations of parks
2
3 I this city. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you so much for
5 your testimony. It's important, we're going to hear
6 from people from all over the city and the east side
7 of Manhattan is just as important as anywhere else.
8 Tara Gitter, Molly Adams, Eli Dvorkin and Johanna
9 Clearfield are the next panel and we're just getting
10 started here folks. Fay Hill will be on the next
11 panel, Kay Webster, Lucia Makin and after that also
12 in that panel will be Roxanne Delgado.

13 Somebody didn't make it to the dance. Tara are
14 you there, okay, Molly? Eli, I know you. Johanna,
15 maybe she left. Okay, Tara if you'd like to start.

16 TARA GITTER: Good evening.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Good evening.

18 TARA GITTER: I thank you to the Members of the
19 Council for convening this hearing and thank you to
20 Chair Grodenchik for your leadership and support. My
21 name is Tara Gitter and I am here today on behalf of
22 New York Restoration Project.

23 We at NYRP are dedicated to transforming open
24 space in under resourced communities to create a
25 greener, more sustainable New York City. As the only

2 land conservancy operating in all five boroughs, we
3 strongly urge New York City to commit an additional
4 \$100 million to baseline funding for New York City
5 Parks.

6 Since our founding in 1995 by Bette Midler, NYRP
7 has planted trees, renovated gardens, restored parks,
8 and transformed open space for communities throughout
9 New York City's five boroughs. We bring private
10 resources to spaces that lack municipal support,
11 fortifying the city's agent infrastructure and
12 creating a healthier environment for those who live
13 in the most densely populated and least green
14 neighborhoods.

15 Currently, NYRP supports New York City Parks by
16 actively maintaining the northern half of Highbridge
17 Park as well as Sherman Creek Park in upper
18 Manhattan. These beautifully reclaimed spaces along
19 the Harlem River demonstrate the sustainable
20 management of public lands in an underserved
21 community and recognize the remarkable value of
22 natural resources found in Northern Manhattan.

23 A dedicated crew of NYRP operations and
24 horticulture staff work full time to manage and
25 restore the parks and NYRP educators provide

2 environmental education programming to thousands of
3 New York City children each year.

4 As a city, we rely on public, private
5 partnerships to help fund our parks. I am here today
6 to tell you as a representative of the only land
7 conservancy operating in all five boroughs in New
8 York, specifically in under resourced communities,
9 that this system is insufficient in the communities
10 we serve.

11 The care of our parks is a fundamental duty that
12 our city owes to all citizens. Social justice
13 includes access to safe, clean, open space, so we
14 must make it a priority to adequately fund New York
15 City Parks operations. We must stabilize city parks
16 workers and gardeners' jobs and invest adequately in
17 our ability to care for land and make necessary
18 improvements. Our parks and gardens are not a
19 luxury. Even with shrinking budgets, parks and
20 gardens yield outsize financial returns in terms of
21 reduce crime and prove to public health, storm water
22 management and improved air quality. NYRP stands
23 here today with New Yorkers for Parks and the Play
24 Fair Coalition to strongly urge New York City to
25 commit an additional \$100 million to baseline funding

2 for the New York City Department of Parks and Rec to
3 be able to deliver critical maintenance and stabilize
4 parks workers and gardeners' positions.

5 It is incumbent upon us as New Yorkers to
6 recognize the value of investment in our city's
7 resilience. The spirit of New York City is tough and
8 to keep it that way we need the New York City Council
9 to demonstrate its commitment to its parks and
10 gardens. Thank you for the opportunity.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you for being here
12 today. You have my commitment. I think you have 41
13 of my colleagues and we are glad that you are part of
14 this Coalition. I'm going to ask Pamela Pettyjohn to
15 come up and Join this panel, so they don't feel
16 lonely but, in the meantime, if Ms. Adams, if you
17 could bring your remarks please.

18 MOLLY ADAMS: Thank you for the opportunity to
19 speak at this important Preliminary Budget Hearing
20 for Parks and Recreation. My name is Molly Adams and
21 I am the advocacy and outreach manager for New York
22 City Audubon. We are a science-based conservation
23 organization whose mission is to protect the 350 plus
24 bird species, almost a third of all species in North
25 America amounting to millions of individual birds

1 that live in or pass through New York City each year.
2 Some 40 percent of these birds are species of
3 conservation need or endangered. Protecting these
4 birds and their habitats also improves the quality of
5 life for all New Yorkers. New York City Audubon is
6 just one of the over 90, now 100 organizations that
7 are part of New Yorkers for Parks Play Fair
8 Coalition. The millions of birds that pass through
9 or live in New York City depend on the habitat
10 available in our urban parks. Many of these birds
11 fly for thousand of miles each spring and fall before
12 resting temporarily. Feeding on local plants and
13 insects in our city parks all year around but
14 especially during these times, New York residents and
15 visitors flock to our parks to observe this
16 phenomenon. Many of these migratory bird species
17 again, are endangered or threatened.

19 We stand with New Yorkers for Parks and are
20 asking the city to commit \$100 million just 0.1
21 percent more of the overall budget in additional
22 funding for New York City Parks Expense Budget. This
23 will provide funding for more parks to have full time
24 dedicated staff working in sustainable jobs that help
25 maintain safe, health habitats for people and birds.

1 Again, thank you for this opportunity.

2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you, I saw a red-
3 tailed hawk this morning on Hillside Avenue.

4 MOLLY ADAMS: Awesome.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I don't know what he was
6 doing there but we have a lot of hawks in Queens, but
7 I'm told reliably by the Alley Pond Environmental
8 Center that a bald eagle was sited attacking and
9 eating a duck on Oakland Lake this week, so that's
10 good for some birds, not so good for others.

11 Thank you for your testimony. Mr. Dvorkin.

12 ELI DVORKIN: Thank you Mr. Chairman. My name is
13 Eli Dvorkin and I am the Editorial and Policy
14 Director of the Center for an Urban Future. As many
15 of you may know, CUFF is a non-profit, non-partisan
16 think tank focused on expanding economic opportunity
17 and strengthening communities across all five
18 boroughs and nearly two years ago, our team of
19 researchers set out to understand the role that parks
20 play as vital urban infrastructure and the treats
21 facing the system in the years ahead and what we
22 found frankly is alarming. Our report, A New Leaf,
23 which I have right here, reveals for the first time
24 that the average New York City Park is 73 years old
25

1 and most parks are at least a half a century old.

2 One park in ten we found, was built before 1898.

3 Now, the age of our system comes at a cost. Over the
4 past decade, state of good repair needs has increased
5 by 45 percent from \$4 and \$5 million in FY 2007 to
6 \$589 million in FY 2017. Yet just 15 percent of the
7 recommended maintenance needs were funded among the
8 lowest levels of any agency. Moreover, we found that
9 parks in every borough are struggling with aging
10 asset that are at or near the end of their useful
11 lives including drainage systems, retaining walls,
12 and bridges.

13
14 To manage all of this, New York City has fewer
15 skilled parks maintenance workers and other skilled
16 professionals than other big city systems do, which
17 means smaller issues end up growing into bigger
18 problems. For instance, the city has about 150
19 gardeners for nearly 20,000 acres of park land, a
20 ratio of one gardener to every 133 acres. By
21 comparison, the San Francisco Parks Department has
22 over 200 gardeners for 4,100 acres, a ratio of 1 to
23 20.

24 Since the 1970's Fiscal crisis, full time
25 staffing at the Parks Department has dropped from a

1 high of 11,642 in 1976 to a little over 7,600 today,
2 a 35 percent decline. This shortage echoes a larger
3 trend. The City's park system has suffered
4 disproportionately from previous budget cuts. What's
5 saved in the short term is more than offset by the
6 enormous costs of deferred maintenance and
7 debilitated infrastructure. Now our concludes with
8 more than 20 practical recommendation, I encourage
9 you all to check them out, but here are four critical
10 next steps. One, support the Play Fair for Parks
11 Campaign. We recommend increasing the Departments
12 Maintenance and Operations Budget by \$100 million,
13 which can allow the Department to baseline
14 desperately needed skilled staff positions, increase
15 the number and range of asset that receive regular
16 maintenance, improve data gathering and focus on
17 mitigating problems before they grow. The Council
18 should also increase long term funding for Parks
19 Capital Projects. We recommend at least \$100 million
20 annually in new Capital funding to be allocated at
21 the discretion of the Commissioner and his team and a
22 10 year capital plan that actually reflects the full
23 needs of the systems aging infrastructure and given
24 these growing the needs, the City and the Parks
25

1
2 Department should identify new opportunities to
3 increase revenues while maintaining a quality
4 experience for park goers as the priority and this
5 could include a small sure charge in greens fees, at
6 golf course, a modest increase at dockage fees at
7 publicly owned marinas on the larger yachts and
8 boats, new opportunities to develop concessions in
9 areas with few options and more systematic inclusion
10 to parks as part of rezoning agreements.

11 And finally, to wrap up, the Council should
12 support efforts to reform the Capital Construction
13 Process from the ground up. Under Commissioner
14 Silver the Department has implemented some important
15 reforms but there's so much more work to be done.
16 Staffing limitations contribute to excessive
17 timelines for example.

18 In addition, DDC the Department of Design and
19 Construction is in the process now of launching the
20 first major overhaul of the capital construction
21 system ever, but these efforts will only be
22 successful if every agency with a hand in the process
23 commits to the shared goal of improving project
24 delivery and we encourage the Mayor and the City
25

1
2 Council to hold every agency accountable to this
3 urgent goal.

4 Thank you so much for your time.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you. We are
6 working on that. I'm encouraged that DDC is now run
7 by Lorraine Grillo who is one of the sharpest knives
8 in the drawer, so she is able to do as it seems like
9 most of the Mayor's and Commissioners are doing two
10 jobs now. So, Ms. Pettyjohn, welcome all the way
11 from Coney Island.

12 PAMELA PETTYJOHN: Thank you, yes, thank you.
13 I'm Pamela Pettyjohn, President of Coney Island
14 Beautification Project, also a member of the Brooklyn
15 Parks and Open Spaces Coalition and a proud member of
16 Play Fair for Parks. We work as a post super storm
17 Sandy civic volunteer group with the Parks Department
18 by organizing the Coney Island Community around
19 planting and neighborhood street tree beds. Blooming
20 from several successful years of commemorative
21 service, we migrated into Kaiser Park and Coney
22 Island Creek. We've always worked with dedicated
23 park workers. Kaiser Park is a destination for
24 seniors playing tennis and practicing tai chi.
25 Students eating breakfast and lunch, engage

1 residents, holding community meetings, families
2 enjoying the playgrounds, youth shooting hoops,
3 sports teams and baseball diamonds, runners of long
4 tracks, picnics, fishing and just enjoying the sunset
5 or so on.

6
7 Where would we be without parks? Coney Island
8 Beautification Project volunteers in a park because
9 we appreciate the value of the park, but volunteers
10 cannot replace skilled park workers to maintain, to
11 upkeep the parks, enough workers must be
12 appropriately assigned to each park. In previous
13 budget years, the Council has cut parks budget line.
14 This must not happen again. At this stage, these
15 monies should be restored as well as increased above
16 that for wages lost due to last years reduction.

17 Thank you, Council Members who have supported
18 parks, in the past and those who have now recognized
19 the value of parks. Vote with courage, vote for
20 parks. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you very much and
22 I very much enjoy working with your Council Member
23 Mr. Treyger and I know he's a big fan of parks as
24 well. I'm going to call up the next panel, which
25 I've already called, maybe I haven't called, yes, Fay

1 Hill, Kay Webster, Lucia Makin, and Roxanne Delgado.
2 While you're getting settled, I'm going to settle
3 something else. I'll be right back.

4 I'm going to add one to this panel, Scott Daly
5 for the Junior Tennis League. I know he's here. Ms.
6 Hill.

7
8 FAY HILL: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: If you'd like to begin,
10 I would love to hear your testimony.

11 FAY HILL: Good evening Chairman. My name is Fay
12 D. Hill. I am a resident of Springfield Garden in
13 Southeast Queens. I am a retired Executive Legal
14 Secretary and Present Executive Director of
15 Volunteers for Springfield Park. I am also a board
16 member of Community Board 13.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I know that.

18 FAY HILL: And Chairperson for the Parks and
19 Environment Committee for the past six years. I'm
20 here to testify on behalf of the communities as a
21 whole and to thank the New Yorkers for Parks on the
22 remarkable work they have contributed to our
23 communities. These are hardworking leaders who have
24 contributed to the awareness and the improvement of
25 our parks and green spaces around New York City. I

1 would like to take a pause to thank my Council Member
2 Donovan Richards who have made it possible to budget
3 for the parks in southeast Queens and for Rockaway
4 for the past five years. Major improvements have
5 been done to our park and we hoped it continued to do
6 so. I live in Springfield park for 40 years and I've
7 seen our parks with deteriorated conditions with
8 prostitution, being drug infested, and our residents
9 were unable to use the park in Springfield Gardens,
10 Rosedale and the surrounding communities under other
11 City Council Administration. We are totally ignored
12 for many years. The upper respiratory and asthma in
13 our communities has increased and if you don't have
14 trees and green spaces, our residents will continue
15 to suffer.

17 We are advocating to the Budget Committee to be
18 Fair with Parks. Presently our parks have improved
19 the quality of live and have become a part of our
20 residents' expectation in enjoying their parks,
21 however, we need more funding so more parks workers
22 can be hired. For increased patrol, for tenants with
23 the required equipment to upkeep our parks. We wish
24 to continue to enjoy our parks after all of this hard
25 work has been done. We would like all our Council

1
2 Members, well, they're not present here today, to
3 consider.

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I represent them all
5 right now, so it's okay.

6 FAY HILL: To consider in your upcoming budget
7 for additional allocation of funding to the
8 Department of Parks and Recreation is a major
9 priority. Be Fair with our Parks because our parks
10 and green space here in New York City are vital to
11 our wellbeing to all of citizens. I thank you for
12 your attention to my testimony respectfully submitted
13 Fay D. Hill.

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you Ms. Hill.
15 It's always good to see you. It's a great park that
16 you represent. Kay Webster?

17 KAY WEBSTER: Yes, that's who I am. I am the
18 President of the Theodore Roosevelt Park Community
19 Coalition and I'm also on Community Board 3 in
20 Manhattan. I am the Vice Chair of the Parks
21 Committee, although I am not speaking in that
22 capacity right now.

23 So, our park in the 1980's, fought very hard to
24 take it back from drug dealers, pimps, etc., etc., it
25 sounds like yours, and very proudly have built

1
2 different stewards community gardens etc., and we
3 want to just join in New Yorkers for Parks in
4 requesting the entire Play Fair Requests. I will say
5 that as wealth an income and equality grow in greater
6 and greater divide between the haves and have nots,
7 New York City Parks are the last true democratic
8 meeting spaces in this city and they are the air
9 conditioning, vacation home, vacation spot, backyard
10 and get away places from the increasingly harsh life
11 here for many especially those in financially poor
12 neighborhoods. We believe parks, public open spaces
13 should stay public not reliant on the whims of the
14 very wealthy where some parks get lavish funding and
15 other go wanting, especially in neighborhoods that
16 arguably need it the most. We think parks are
17 essential to a livable green and equitable New York
18 City and should be funded as such. Park workers
19 should have job security that only comes when a
20 steady source of income exists, and I will say that
21 we have asked our park workers to do an awful lot of
22 hard work. We have 50 homeless people sometimes a
23 night sleeping in our park. They're our neighbors
24 but it means that their work gets harder and harder
25 and that is only getting worse including needles etc.

1
2 We think our park workers deserve to be given job
3 security at the very least and a decent living wage.
4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you and I thank
6 you for bringing attention to the inequality that
7 sometimes exists in our system although I will tell
8 you I have observed at some of the best parks are in
9 neighborhoods that are not as well off as others.

10 KAY WEBSTER: That's why I said financially poor.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Well, financially not so
12 well off but we have great parks across the city, but
13 I think that as I said in my comments before, the
14 most important park is every park and every New
15 Yorker is entitled to an outstanding park experience.

16 KAY WEBSTER: I'll just say that my park got a D
17 rating from New Yorkers for Parks.

18 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Well, work on that. I
19 hope I don't get a D rating from the New Yorkers for
20 Parks. Thank you, Ms. Webster. I'm not sure if
21 Lucia or Roxanne.

22 ROXANNE DELGADO: Roxanne.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Roxanne, Lucia went
24 south on us, okay, that's alright. She's a parks
25

1 gardener from 142nd Street, so Ms. Delgado, I'd love
2 to hear from you.
3

4 ROXANNE DELGADO: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: All the way from Pelham
6 Bay?

7 ROXANNE DELGADO: Pelham Parkway.

8 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Pelham Parkway.

9 ROXANNE DELGADO: Yes, I am speaking on behalf
10 Friends of Pelham Parkway, a friends of park group
11 that organizes It's My Parks events on a monthly
12 basis since July of 2017. Our events include basic
13 cleanups as well as mulching trees, planting roses
14 and daffodils and feeding squirrels. We do tabling
15 at all our events and informing people on Park Rules,
16 healthy eating and respecting our Earth, as well as
17 handing out, free dog poop bags and reusable bags.

18 This group was formed after I witnessed a
19 squirrel on a pile of garbage. So, this groups
20 mission goes beyond keeping our Pelham Parkway clean
21 and safe but also spreading our love for our Earth.
22 This is why I am here to express the dire need for
23 more money for our Parks operation and maintenance.

24 We have lost lots of trees in Pelham Parkway and
25 our grass is not healthy green nor grown throughout

1
2 the parkway. It is great when a Park has a Friend of
3 Park group, but a Park needs dedicated full-time
4 staff that cares for the trees and for the grass as
5 well as the gardens. The trees tht we have lost are
6 irreplaceable. It will take decades or more before
7 we see our parkway full of large trees and healthy
8 green grass as it should be.

9 We are in dire need of more enforcement. Last
10 summer we had issues of homeless people squatting in
11 the parkway. We also have people at night drinking
12 and barbequing nearby the trees. Not to mention all
13 the illegal dumping of trash in our parkway. Often
14 park advocates have to compete with each other for
15 parks limited staff and enforcement. I don't think
16 it is fair for communities and neighbors to fight
17 with each other for resources that we are all
18 entitled.

19 So again, Pelham Parkway needs dedicated staff to
20 care for the trees and grounds as well as enforcement
21 to educate and enforce park rules. Don't let our
22 Parks deteriorate to the point of no return.
23 Increasing the Parks Department's Budget just an
24 additional 0.1 percent of the proposed City Budget
25 will make a significant impact on our Parks as well

1
2 as our Earth and I would like to thank my Bronx Parks
3 Commissioner because she is amazing. This is why
4 we're so dedicated to the Parks because she leads by
5 example and also, I would like to thank my Outreach
6 Coordinator Guzman who created this Friends of Park
7 group and for the great small team of park workers at
8 Pelham Parkway, they are amazing. Every time I click
9 and play in the **[inaudible 4:50:07]** they were so
10 great.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Your job is to complain.
12 That's your job, so don't worry you do it well. I
13 could have been Friends at Pelham Parkway, but we
14 didn't get into Pelham Parkway Houses growing up. My
15 mother's great disappointment. We made it to the
16 Holy land of Queens, so for my mother, she was a
17 Pelham Parkway young woman. She grew up on Burke and
18 Wallace, so she was just north of Pelham Parkway and
19 I visited there many, many times as a young boy and
20 it's one of the great Parkways.

21 ROXANNE DELGADO: It the artery that connects the
22 two largest parks, so if you don't take care of the
23 artery, you have a heart attack. So, we need to take
24 care of Parkways.

CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: You have a heart attack.
Well, that's why we're here today.

ROXANNE DELGADO: Thank you, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you for being
here. Scott Daly with New York Junior Tennis League,
which serves so many so well throughout the City of
New York.

SCOTT DALY: Good afternoon Council Member, or
should I say good evening everybody instead.

CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: We're getting close.
I've handed up my testimony and rather than reading
it and I know everybody is capable of going through
it. Let me just highlight some of the things that we
do.

I am the Director of the New York Junior Tennis
and Learnings, free tennis programs throughout the
City of New York. We service every Council Member
District throughout the City. We are in Parks in all
five boroughs. We have 90 separate programs that we
run through the seasons. One third of those programs
from six, seven, eight, nine, weeks during the year
are run at the City Parks. I holey back everything
that everyone has said here today about the value of
the parks. We serve kids throughout all backgrounds

1
2 and cultures. They are from mostly the lowest
3 economic Strada. 25 percent of our population that
4 participate through the parks come from the Asian
5 community, about 25 percent are African-American and
6 25 percent are Latino. The value cannot be
7 understated of the beautiful jewel that is our city
8 park system.

9 You know, I heard earlier on today them talking
10 about fixed post positions, then they said the word
11 parkees and I remember when I was a kid growing up, I
12 remember eating in Arthur. I still remember them to
13 this very day.

14 Programming in the park are important. We need
15 the increased funding; the City Parks need the
16 increased funding. We, on behalf of NYJTL through
17 the help of the City Council, we've been able to do
18 this for many years, but we have remained flat in our
19 funding. So, I am here for two grounds. Number one,
20 to say, continue to support the Parks, the Parks need
21 everything, and we need an increase in the Parks and
22 I also on behalf of NYJTL to continue to bring the
23 programming which was mentioned. We need an increase
24 in our programming. I want you to know that we
25 offer, because of the City Council's help, we're able

1
2 to offer opportunities to kids who wouldn't otherwise
3 have these opportunities. We give them the sport of
4 tennis when somebody to associate only with
5 communities. It is again because of the parks and
6 because of the city that we are able to do this. I
7 want to thank you for your continued support and
8 advocacy and I almost beat the clock, I'm sorry.

9 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Well, you know, you
10 almost beat it. My parents are both Bronx people and
11 my father learned to play tennis in 1935 in Crotona
12 Park. I was there to see with Councilman Salamanca
13 and with Commissioner Rosa last summer, that great
14 tennis complex that was built, really world class and
15 he played for 62 years until he couldn't play
16 anymore. So, I want to thank you all for being here
17 late this afternoon and for loving our Parks. The
18 next panel, Toba Potosky from Cadman Park
19 Conservancy, I was there the other evening.
20 Katherine Conkling Thompson from Friends of Bushwick
21 Inlet Park, Jerilyn Sackler who is a volunteer in
22 Prospect Park and Tessa Huxley who is from Forsyth
23 Street. Are they all here? Are they not here? Tessa
24 is gone, alright. Who else is gone? They're both
25 gone, okay. I only see one of them up here. I'll

1
2 get to you, I promise. And you are? I got to get my
3 P's and Q's straight here.

4 JERILN SACKLER: I'm Jerilyn Sackler.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, so I'm going to
6 call a few more people, so you're not lonely up
7 there.

8 JERILYN SACKLER: Yeah, I'm a little alone up
9 here.

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Katherine Conkling,
11 okay. Alright, so we have now Lo Vander Valk from
12 Carnegie Hill Neighbors. I told you I would get to
13 you. Joanna Oltman Smith, she's been tweeting, I
14 know she's here and Joel Kupferman from the New York
15 Environmental Law and Justice.

16 Okay, so, Tessa? Did I get that right? Tessa
17 left, Katherine she left to and Toba left, okay.
18 That's why I have them holding those, those are the
19 ones that left. Jerilyn?

20 JERILYN SACKLER: Yes.

21 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you for your
22 volunteer work and please start with your testimony.

23 JERILYN SACKLER: First of all, I'd like to thank
24 our officials who care about quality of life issues
25 for all New Yorkers. My name is Jerilyn Sackler. I

1
2 am a member of Prospect Park Alliance and a Park
3 volunteer. Throughout my childhood, my dad took my
4 brother and me to explore and play in Prospect Park
5 and these are some of the most beautiful memories of
6 my life. Our parks are a vital resource for all city
7 children. Our parks enrich the lives of New York
8 families of all backgrounds and income levels, for
9 people of all ages our parks provide a free place for
10 healthy exercise and connection with nature. Our
11 parks are essential to the biodiversity of our urban
12 environment. Visitors to the city are delighted by
13 the exquisite and unique parks including those
14 designed by Olmstead and Vaux. Our parks are the
15 green beating heart of New York City. They are
16 treasures, but we maintain them and pass them on to
17 future New Yorkers. The maintenance workers, park
18 workers, and gardeners who do this important work
19 deserve good salaries and job security. The park
20 budget should allow for hiring and maintaining
21 adequate staff to maintain the parks well. Job
22 security and new job creation bring important
23 benefits to the workers and to the city.

24

25

1
2 And in closing, I urge the City to show
3 generosity to our parks and to those who care for
4 them.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you for your
6 testimony and thank you, you got a lot of fans here I
7 see. Thank you for your testimony and thank you for
8 your work, it's important. Lo Vander Valk?

9 LO VANDER VALK: Thank you, Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Just press that button.
11 Otherwise it doesn't count.

12 LO VANDER VALK: Yes, okay. Thank you Chair for
13 your commitment to the issues we're discussing today.

14 My name is Lo Vander Valk, I am President of
15 Carnegie Hill Neighbors. Our catchment area is in
16 the neighborhood of the Guggenheim Museum and the
17 Andrew Carnegie Mansion and stretches to Third
18 Avenue. We were formed in 1970 in the wake of the
19 new landmarks law of 1965 to support the landmarking
20 of the individual landmarks in historic districts and
21 our mission was expanded within ten years to include
22 parks because of the New York City Fiscal crisis of
23 the 1970's. The park avenue malls that are in the
24 center of Park Avenue between 86 and 96th Street had
25 become dog runs at the end of the 70's and our then

1
2 President Ron Spenser organized all the surrounding
3 building to fund annually just the maintenance and
4 the landscaping of the Park Avenue Malls and that was
5 since replicated for the other malls going all the
6 way to Grand Central Station. So, in that sense, we
7 are relieving the Parks Department of personal that
8 could be used elsewhere but also, I want to emphasize
9 that we deeply care about the green environment and
10 we also sponsor in the spring and fall tree care for
11 our street trees.

12 Finally, I want to say that we fully support the
13 initiative of New Yorkers for Parks in their request
14 for \$10 million additional.

15 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Don't sell me short a
16 \$100 million.

17 LO VANDER VALK: Excuse me, absolutely, \$100
18 million, thank you for that correction. We think its
19 essential and we think the city deserves it and we
20 think it can make a huge difference and we know it
21 will take time, but we're there to support the cause
22 in the long run. Thank you so much.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you very much for
24 being here today and thank you for your work on the

25

1
2 Park Avenue Malls which are a great treasure of our
3 city.

4 LO VANDER VALK: Thank you.

5 JOANNA OLTMAN SMITH: Good evening. My name is
6 Joanna Oltman Smith. I am here tonight as a Park
7 lover and private citizen, but I also am a Member of
8 Community Board 6 in Brooklyn. I sit on the Parks
9 Recreation and Environmental Protection Committee
10 there and I just wanted to point out how our
11 Community Board has joined all those issues into one
12 Committee because they're so interrelated. I also
13 serve on Prospect Parks Community Committee.

14 Much has already been said about the importance
15 of parks for all New Yorkers mental and physical
16 health as well as climate change related resiliency
17 which are all reasons, I find park advocacy essential
18 to my role as a professional citizen. This evening,
19 I saved the really nitty gritty stuff for late. I
20 want to take us all on a brief dive into what exactly
21 deferred maintenance do to insufficient funding looks
22 like on the ground for an everyday park user. I
23 could regale you tails of over flowing garbage bins,
24 empty sand boxes, impassable paths and large capacity
25 dumpsters marring the beautiful landscape of our

1 national historic landmark treasure. Instead, please
2 listen as I describe one public comfort station that
3 more closely resembles a gulag interrogation chamber.
4 This bathroom is located directly within the New York
5 City Parks Department Headquarter at Litchfield Villa
6 in Prospect Park where top officials work every day.
7 So, I'm confident that it is a bellwether for
8 conditions around the City. It is heavily used both
9 by park staff and visitors most notably children and
10 families who come to visit the third street
11 playground. This bathroom features exposed wires
12 dangling from the ceiling, shipping lead paint at
13 child level, sharp bolts and nuts projecting from
14 walls, leaking pipes held together with duct tape and
15 coat hangers and every other manner of degradation
16 about which one could have bad dreams. It is truly
17 dangerous and disgusting and it's due to years of
18 neglect. In addition to being a lawsuit waiting to
19 happen, it sends a very poor message in deed about
20 our City's priorities to our youth who rely upon it.
21 If their beloved park can sink to this level of
22 hazardous shame, what else is our adult generation
23 not attending to that will impact them in future
24 years. Let's do what we can do now by increasing
25

1 parks operating budget by \$100 million in the next
2 Fiscal year. We need to protect all of our important
3 open space capital investments as well as provide
4 basic human level amenities in our cherished parks.
5 Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you for your
7 testimony and I did see the picture earlier. It's a
8 stinker, so to speak. Mr. Kupferman?

9 JOEL KUPFERMAN: Thank you very much for waiting
10 here this long until the wee hours.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I'm not going anywhere;
12 I'll be the last one here.

13 JOEL KUPERMAN: Alright, New York Environment Law
14 and Justice Project, I have sat here many, many
15 times. Many, many years ago, was to apprise City
16 Council that this building was contaminated with
17 World Trade Center dust that the city didn't say. I
18 am also here to tell you that we are asking for a
19 budget cut. Everyone here is for increasing budget,
20 we're asking that your remove any spending for
21 Roundup. Roundup is a cosmetic herbicide that's
22 being used in the City and its also used in City Hall
23 Park to this day. The World Health Organization has
24 considered this to be a probably carcinogenic to
25

1 humans. They evaluated all relevant evidence
2 available to public domain for independent scientific
3 review. Currently, no determination of
4 classification is in New York City EPA, but despite
5 this classification, New York City Parks is still
6 using Roundup as a cosmetic herbicide. The Health
7 Department survey of pesticide use states in their
8 report of 2016, some evidence that heavy use of
9 glyphosate in warm climates with soil high in certain
10 in toxic metals could present significant risk in
11 developing severe kidney damage to agricultural
12 workers. Cases right now are being brought against
13 Monsanto throughout the whole country and if you see
14 the picture that we gave you, this is an agricultural
15 park worker that's suffering from lymphoma. \$260
16 million lawsuit, it was just reduced to \$92 million.
17 There are lawyers lining up now to sue the City and
18 other municipalities for the use of Roundup and its
19 effects, so we're demanding that the city stop using
20 Roundup immediately.

22 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I appreciate that, and I
23 know that the First Deputy Commissioner is still with
24 us and I think he's heard your testimony.

1
2 JOEL KUPERMAN: Okay, but just further also, I
3 represent the tenant's association at Smith Houses
4 that's just right down the block, \$56 million rebuild
5 for Hurricane Sandy, the trees have been destroyed by
6 the City's contract. They're actually doing improper
7 methods. They're not protecting the trees. NYCHA
8 has 50 to 100,000 trees under the domain. NYCHA does
9 not have an arborist. So, we're really concerned
10 that if your concerned about parks and trees, that we
11 make sure that the Parks Department be allowed to
12 take over some of the tree maintenance there and
13 another thing also, the trees are coming down all
14 over the city because the city is not enforcing its
15 own rules. Okay, people are getting small summons
16 for parking their trucks, for cutting the roots of
17 those trees, they're not collecting those fees and I
18 think that's one way that the city could definitely
19 maintain the trees that are out there and also
20 increase its revenue. And we also just want to
21 express our out position to the East River Park
22 that's going to entail the cutting down of hundreds
23 of trees there but I just want to say that its really
24 important that we look at the Roundup issue in terms
25 of the health of the workers and the people going in.

1
2 The effects on the floor but more importantly, is
3 that the city is just waiting to be sued and is just
4 ducking the issue. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you for your
6 testimony. Thank you all for being here and for
7 waiting. I appreciate it, believe me. Mitchel Cohen
8 from the No Spray Coalition against pesticide, Juan
9 Gonzalez with the New York Road Runners, Michael
10 Schnall with the New York Road Runners. Mike Schnall
11 left, okay. You're standing in, okay. You're going
12 to sit down to testify though right okay. Is Mitchel
13 here? Okay, Mitchel if you'll take a seat. Juan
14 Gonzalez, he went to the latrine, okay. Alright, I
15 know Michael left and Charles, I can't read this but
16 you're with Queens college graduate school. You're
17 observing, are you testifying? No, okay, that's
18 fine. Luke O'Brien of Austin Street? We'll keep
19 going. Greg Mihailovich from the American Heart
20 Association, okay, we got a winner there. Alright,
21 so okay, Mr. Roadrunner. The roadrunner always wins,
22 the coyote still hasn't but we do have coyotes in New
23 York City, we don't have any road runners, though do
24 we. Only human road runners. And Mr. Mihailovich, he
25 had to leave, alright, I'm going to keep going until

1 I get the four. Aldolfo Morales, Yorkville Sports?
2 Raphael Schwizer? Okay, David Harrison, Star Trek
3 Cyclists, Laura Apruzzese, is she here? Marlene
4 Pantin from Red Hook Conservancy, you're here, good.

5
6 Alright, it took us a lot to get to four there
7 but whoever else is left you're in the next panel. A
8 lot of people, over 50 people have signed up.

9 Alright, so, after all that, Mr. Cohen?

10 MITCHEL COHEN: Yeah, thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: All the way from Cropsey
12 Avenue.

13 MITCHEL COHEN: Yeah.

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Good to see you here
15 this evening. Now, I can say this, by Sunday though
16 the sun will be up later.

17 MITCHEL COHEN: So, my name is Mitchel Cohen and
18 I work with the No Spray Coalition Against
19 Pesticides. I coordinate that group. We
20 successfully sued the City about 12 years ago against
21 the spraying of pesticides to kill mosquitos and we
22 achieved the settlement with the city with a number
23 of stipulations in it, but I'm in a quandary now and
24 maybe you could help me.

25 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Maybe.

1
2 MITCHEL COHEN: Maybe because while I recognize
3 and support the need for money to go to parks for
4 expansion of programs to get more workers, for all
5 the things that people were talking about, I have to
6 go along with what Joel Kupferman was saying and
7 second that, that I don't want any of that money
8 going to spray Roundup or other dangerous pesticides
9 which cause non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. So, that's a
10 problem because I want the money to go to the parks
11 but I don't want it to go to this Administration that
12 is consciously poisoning people and wildlife in the
13 city and they know it and they're doing it anyway and
14 it started under Mayor Giuliani and then it went to
15 Mayor Bloomberg and now it's under unfortunately
16 under Mayor de Blasio where there was a planned
17 attrition of workers in the parks. So, that the
18 workers in the parks were cut by around 70 percent
19 over a 20-year time period and instead, they decided
20 to chemicalize what the workers used to do. So, they
21 used to weed by hand or with different machines and
22 they decided to take a chemical approach to save
23 money, supposedly, and to lay off these workers. And
24 this is a planned thing and I was just doing some
25 research for, my book just came out, so on Monsanto's

1 Roundup, it just came out the other day and in doing
2 the research for it I came across notes that I had
3 from 2007 meeting with Brooklyn Parks Commissioner
4 Julius Spiegel, who is great but the City Biologist
5 who was there at the time we had raised the issue of
6 glyphosate and Roundup in the park and he said, "oh,
7 it's totally harmless", and we said, no, it causes
8 cancer and you'll find out in a few years and he
9 said, no it won't and this was the city's whole
10 approach and it continue to be the city's approach to
11 mass spraying throughout the parks, throughout the
12 sidewalks, the cracks in the sidewalks that get
13 sprayed for cosmetic reasons and there are other ways
14 of achieving if you want to kill the weeds and get
15 rid of them. There are other ways of doing that
16 without poisoning everyone and without poisoning the
17 wildlife, which not too many people have talked about
18 here and I'd like to know what the Parks Department
19 plan is for protecting the wildlife in the Parks.
20 The Parks Department has gone along with officials
21 that killed all the geese, that gassed the geese in
22 Prospect Park. That just happened two years ago or
23 three years ago and it continues. What are the plans
24 for protecting the wildlife and for protecting the
25

1
2 people? So, I would love the City Council, I would
3 love a lot of things for the City Council to do, but
4 I would love to put in a stipulation that whatever
5 money is awarded to the Parks Department and again,
6 it should be awarded that it cannot be used and that
7 they have to stop the spraying and the use of
8 chemical pesticides in the parks. It saves the lives
9 of workers who work there with the stuff. It saves
10 the lives of people who use the park and with
11 children. One last thing, when I was looking at the
12 research, I was out there in Coney Island, there
13 where I live and all these little kids were rolling
14 around in the sprayed areas because there was a dye
15 that was added to the spray, that yellow dye and blue
16 dyes that were done to notify the people around that
17 this area was sprayed, so stay away from it but the
18 kids didn't know it for that and so they played in
19 those areas. It's almost like it a come here and
20 they road their bicycles through it and so forth.
21 So, this all is a concern and I would love that to be
22 a stipulation in any award.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Well, if you'd like to
24 send me testimony, I'd be happy to receive it and
25 maybe we can look into this matter further.

1 MITCHEL COHEN: Sure, thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you for being here
3 today. Mr. Gonzalez?

4 JUAN GONZALEZ: Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Do you run?

6 JUAN GONZALEZ: Yes. Good afternoon Chairperson
7 and panel. I'm Juan Gonzalez and I'm 67 years old
8 and I was 325 pounds. I'm a diabetic 17 years,
9 double knee surgery and I as lost. I didn't know
10 what to do until I joined the senior citizens at the
11 Bronx Park Chester and there, I met a group of
12 people, fascinating people, the New York Marathon
13 Striders Organization. I got into that. My diabetes
14 has come down 80 percent, I'm walking up to seven
15 miles a day. My health has gotten better, my
16 diabetes, everything has gone perfectly, and I just
17 hope you continue to fund these organizations at the
18 Senior Citizens and the New York Marathon Association
19 Striders. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you for being here
21 today and for that compelling testimony. Ms.
22 Casanova?

23 CELINDA CASANOVA: Correct.

24 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.
25

1
2 CELINDA CASANOVA: Good evening, Chair
3 Grodenchik.

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Good evening.

5 CELINDA CASANOVA: As I mentioned, my name is
6 Celinda Casanova. I am the Senior Manager of Road
7 Runner engagement programs at New York Road Runners
8 standing in for Mike Schnall Vice President of
9 Government Relations and Community Investment at New
10 York Road Runners and he apologizes that he had to
11 leave.

12 Thank you for this opportunity to testify before
13 the Committee on Parks and Recreation on the FY 2020
14 Preliminary Budget and as Moose, as we affectionately
15 call him.

16 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I wouldn't call him
17 anything else.

18 CELINDA CASANOVA: He's a member of our New York
19 Road Runners open run and New York Road Runners
20 Striders Programs. New York Road Runners mission is
21 to help and inspire people through running. We
22 achieve this mission by creating running and fitness
23 opportunities and programming for people of all ages
24 and abilities and we're here today to talk about
25 specifically open run which is getting thousands of

1
2 New Yorkers out and running weekly in sixteen New
3 York City Parks across the City with two more sites
4 to open this year.

5 The New York Road Runners Striders program also
6 utilizes the parks for their walking sessions, so
7 while we're known best for the Marathon and our free
8 school based programs, our organization is a
9 dedicated provider of free community programing for
10 parks in all five boroughs using the parks and we
11 hope that the Committee today will encourage the
12 funding for these free community wellness programs in
13 the FY 2020 Budget. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you very much.
15 Thank you. Ms. Pantin?

16 MARLENE PANTIN: Hi.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: All the way from Red
18 Hook.

19 MARLENE PANTIN: Yes, all the way from Red Hook.

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Not that its that far.

21 MARLENE PANTIN: No, no, no, no, best place to
22 be. So, thank you for being here Chair Grodenchik.
23 So, I'm Marlene Pantin, I'm the Founder and Executive
24 Director of Red Hook Conservancy and I'm also a
25 Founding Member of our recently formed, as couple

1 months ago, Brooklyn Parks and Open Spaces Coalition
2 that we have created, where we are trying to bring
3 all the parks and garden groups in Brooklyn and any
4 other folks who take care of green spaces together
5 under one roof, so that we can have a stronger voice
6 around parks.
7

8 Over the past eight years, our organization has
9 helped to maintain sixteen parks, ball fields,
10 playgrounds, and other open spaces in Red Hook which
11 has a population of approximately 20,000 individuals.
12 Every year, we partner with other to mobilize
13 hundreds of volunteers to spend three hours every
14 other Saturday throughout the year to beautify and
15 preserve parks and playgrounds, thus saving the city
16 millions of dollars each year in labor costs. Our
17 volunteers have painted benches and so forth, removed
18 weeds, cleaned debris, planted flowers, and
19 maintained street trees which include lugging
20 combust, mulch and tools blocks and blocks away from
21 the pickup site and raked, lots of raking. We
22 recently had 45 youth, adults, retirees, and even
23 children who came out in the bitter cold and raked
24 over 180 bags of leaves in 3 hours. We are committed
25 and so, we're looking for the same level of

1
2 commitment from the city. I want to point out that
3 you know, the request for \$100 million to support
4 after school programs, green thumb community gardens,
5 dedicated staffing for positions such as 100 city
6 park workers and 50 gardeners and to preserve natural
7 areas as bull work against the effects of climate
8 change is not unreasonable. What is unreasonable, is
9 expecting the Red Hook Park staff with 12 permanent
10 staff members insufficient day to day temporary park
11 workers and no gardener to clean and beautify daily
12 52 park spaces. Things don't have to be this way.
13 At one time, the budget for the New York City Parks
14 Department that we talked about was above one
15 percent, now it's much less. And so, we ask that
16 there be a new agenda in which the budget for the
17 Department of Parks and Recreation increases and not
18 decrease. Starting with \$100 million in expense
19 funding will show that you are committed to
20 supporting and preserving parks and open spaces,
21 which all New Yorker claim as their own backyards.
22 Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you so much for
24 being here today and thank you for your work. I was
25 happy to be with you the other evening and shockingly

2 I got home from Borough Hall in Brooklyn, I confess,
3 I did not take the train. It took me seven minutes
4 to get to the highway, but once I go to the highway,
5 it was only 17 minutes from there which to eastern
6 Queens, I may live to be a thousand, but that will
7 never happen again.

8 MARLENE PANTIN: Does that mean you should move
9 to Brooklyn?

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: No, my wife's family is
11 from Brooklyn, so thank you all for being here
12 tonight. I love my mother in law, that's all I'm
13 going to say, east Flatbush okay. We are getting
14 down to the last panel. We may have had the last
15 panel. Karen Argenti? You here Karen, you may be
16 the last one to testify depending on who else, Laura
17 Spalter? Okay, your partner is here, your partner in
18 parks. Robert? Okay, we're hot here on the end and
19 Heather Gallagher? Heather, you still here?
20 Alright, no Heather.

21 Ms. Argenti, all the way from somewhere in the
22 Bronx. I don't want to give your address out.

23 KAREN ARGENTI: North Bronx.
24
25

2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: North Bronx. My father
3 was Belmont Avenue, my mother was Wallace Avenue
4 which is North Bronx Wallace.

5 KAREN ARGENTI: I grew up at the Sedgwick
6 Projects.

7 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, also NYCHA.

8 KAREN ARGENTI: Right NYCHA, right. My name is
9 Karen Argenti, I am a member of the Board of
10 Directors of the Bronx Council for Environmental
11 Quality. For the past 48 years, we have been the
12 Environmental advocate volunteers from the only
13 county that has its own non-for-profit environmental
14 organization, the Bronx. You are trying to balance
15 your checking account, but the roof is falling down.
16 Management by budget is the most effective and
17 transparent method to running government. The Mayor
18 makes the budget, you should judge, did he do the
19 right thing? See the report card on the back but you
20 might have remembered it from the speak up. The
21 report card is grading the Mayor on his parks.
22 First, if you know that the facilities need capital
23 investment every ten years then the question is, does
24 this budget protect all park facilities in a state of
25 good repair to meet the four-year capital commitment

1
2 plan and the ten-year capital strategy. This is
3 followed by, does the budget protect vehicles and
4 equipment according to the manufacturers recommended
5 schedule? Transparency is whether or not the public
6 is involved. This hearing, although well attended,
7 is a clear example about how you need to have more
8 public participation.

9 The next question is, does the budget integrate
10 the priorities of the borough President, the Council
11 Member, and the Community Board. Second, the
12 staffing and operation to protect capital investments
13 work the same way, does this budget provide adequate
14 staff for maintenance and operation in order to
15 protect your infrastructure and equipment. If there
16 was not enough staffing at all appropriate levels of
17 programming missions you should ask, what will this
18 do to our capital investments and how much more will
19 it cost to replace? And review job descriptions as
20 well as the ratio of management and administration to
21 field workers for adequacy.

22 Third, monitor the Fiscal Administration, not
23 starting a new one but staying on top to make sure
24 the Mayor's priorities remain stable. You should be
25 the monitors for the people, you can ask, are

1 contracting decisions rational in the best interest
2 of the constituent and save time and money? Are
3 programs like daylight [inaudible 5:38:02] inside the
4 CSX right away to the Harlem River on schedule or
5 swept under the rug?
6

7 Fourth, there are things the Parks Department can
8 do like, can the Commissioner prove state of good
9 repair projects? Does the agency have borough in
10 house professional construction teams to handle every
11 day repairs? Can they replace New York State Design
12 Build Programs? Does the DEP fund the Parks Green
13 Infrastructure Program to enable design, build and
14 maintain the project?

15 Finally, we should remove things that are not
16 park things like, buying in parks which is DOT and
17 installing storm drains which is the DEP. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you. Laura
19 Spalter?

20 LAURA SPALTER: Yes. Good evening.

21 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Good evening. We've
22 qualified for evening.

23 LAURA SPALTER: Okay. My name is Laura Spalter
24 and I am Chair of the Broadway Community Alliance.
25 Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony on

1
2 behalf of the Broadway Community Alliance, a north
3 Riverdale Civic Group dedicated to the improvement of
4 the Broadway Carter and its environments. We are
5 blessed to have a unique jewel Van Cortlandt Park as
6 our back yard. We flock to the Putnam Trail to enjoy
7 peaceful time with nature, jog on rustic trails, play
8 soft ball, soccer, cricket and so much more. My
9 brief comments today address inadequacies in the
10 Preliminary Budget that effect park maintenance and
11 operations and enforcement. Maintaining a safe,
12 viable park is critical to our quality of life, but
13 how can the Parks Department function when their
14 current enforcement level is a mere 32 enforcement
15 officers for the entire borough of the Bronx? We
16 desperately need to increase the expense budget to
17 hire enough PEP officers to cover multiple shift,
18 special events, and conduct regular patrols
19 especially on weekends. While we're freezing today,
20 we must plan ahead for legal barbeques and other
21 perennial summer time issues. In case anyone is
22 wondering why the grass is growing up to your knees,
23 here's the answer. The Department fleet and
24 maintenance equipment is old and must be replaced.
25 For year, Bronx Community Board 8 of which I am Vice

2 Chair, has requested new equipment such as small
3 tractor and trailer, lawn mowers, wood chippers, as a
4 budget priority.

5 According to Parks Department data, the
6 Department has to rely on vehicles that are over five
7 years old and constantly out of service. In 2018,
8 the Departments out of service rate was about 25 to
9 30 percent. The stock answer to Community Board 8's
10 request from the Parks Department for essential
11 equipment is "the agency will try to accommodate this
12 issue within existing resources". The perennial
13 problem is that existing resources for parks
14 equipment and adequate personal to operate it and
15 maintain our parks are not enough and never will be
16 unless park advocates and the City Council fight for
17 Parks Fair Share. Thank you for this opportunity and
18 I must say, Chair, I was very impressed with your
19 presentation at the Bronx Parks Speak Up two weeks
20 ago.

21 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you very much.
22 Thank you for listening, I was glad to be there. I
23 look forward to being back there next year.

1
2 LAURA SPALTER: And I want to give a shout out to
3 Iris Rodriguez, our wonderful Bronx Commissioner.
4 I'm a good whiner also.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Iris is a long-time
6 public employee, Commissioner, I urge you to take it
7 when you can get it. We are now down to the final
8 person. If I could read your handwriting I would
9 tell, Mr. Robert is it Fanuzzi. Okay, and he is with
10 the Bronx Council on Environmental Quality.

11 ROBERT FANUZZI: That is correct. I am a member
12 and the newly elected President of this 45-year-old
13 volunteer organization and we're happy that you came
14 to Bronx Speak Up, we are the originator of it. I am
15 also a former Community Board in Bronx Aid and former
16 Chair of the Road and Filtration Moderating
17 Committee, so I do know where \$200 million in parks
18 capital spending goes. I spent a lot of time with
19 that budget and it issued, so we are very proud to
20 have the greatest Borough Commissioner as our
21 partner.

22 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: You know, she started in
23 Queens. I just want to point that out.

24 ROBERT FANUZZI: Well, we also love Queens. I am
25 a Met fan and I also want to thank Deputy

2 Commissioner Kavanagh for all the dialog that he has
3 given our wonderful organization and we are working
4 off some interests now in capital side from our
5 remarks and I just want to reference that we
6 thoroughly commend the work of Center for Urban
7 Future, New Leaf and also Charles McKinney's
8 presentation on We Can Fix This, about the capital
9 process that you referenced before.

10 So, I'm focusing there because I really do
11 believe that we do run into parallel when we let the
12 budget do our managing and in this interim between
13 your testimony, hearing this testimony reporting back
14 and negotiating with the Mayor, I believe that this
15 Committee has a golden opportunity to reinstate
16 management priorities, community priorities, agency
17 priorities over and above the Fiscal plan that's been
18 placed in your lap. So, I do want to bring attention
19 to a couple of issues that reflect what happens when
20 you do let budgeting do your managing rather than the
21 other way around and that is found in the Preliminary
22 Budget and the Capital Plan of 39 plans that are now
23 in the Preliminary Budget. Only 3 are Bronx only and
24 there are 2 others that the Bronx will benefit from
25 that are citywide capital in parks acquisition and

1
2 that really means that the budget proportion on
3 capital for the Bronx is, in the Preliminary Budget
4 is 52 percent of Brooklyn's and 38 percent of
5 Manhattan's. Now this may be based on population or
6 proportional share of the budget as a whole, but it
7 actually does not represent the actual needs of the
8 Parks Department in our Borough, the district needs
9 statements, the Community Board priorities are more
10 importantly community activists and watchdogs like
11 the ones that came to Speak Up. So, I'm just going
12 to leave you with four quickly recommendations if I
13 may. Number one is please expand the expense portion
14 of your budget that will benefit the capital division
15 of parks. They're seriously underfunded. That an
16 easy thing to benefit the capital process itself.
17 Number two, use your initiative to fund and expand
18 community parks initiative, which really does speak
19 to the most underserved areas of our parks as well as
20 parks without borders. Those are discretions within
21 your control. Lastly, lean on interagency funding
22 for things that do effect runoff and erosion that are
23 properly drainage issues. We want to find ways for
24 you to increase your capital share of this budget
25 interagency may do it and I just want to intreat you,

1
2 please stay in the park land business, park
3 acquisition business, open space agreement and win-
4 win tradeoffs are no substitute for the work of our
5 wonderful government. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you. Especially
7 on the runoff you talked about, Commissioner Silver
8 has testified about that previously about they've
9 purchased eight trucks, I don't know if they're here
10 yet, I know they are coming. So, that they can clean
11 their own drains because there is an awful lot of
12 flooding that occurs. Many of our parks as we stated
13 before in low lying areas, beach front areas, and you
14 know, water sits and its bad in the summer because
15 you get unwanted mosquitos and other things and in
16 the winter you get ice and ice just destroys our
17 parks, so that is important. I want to thank you for
18 waiting, we are over four hours into this hearing, so
19 I'll give you a round of applause for waiting. I
20 don't know if they're still in the other room but
21 frankly, I really don't care. I want to thank some
22 people who have helped to make this possible, Chima
23 Obichere, who is the Unit Head of Finance and
24 oversees this Committee. Chris Arturi [SP?] my
25 Council. Monika Bujak our Finance Analyst, Patrick

1 Mollyhill [SP?] who is in the corner quietly all day,
2 the Policy Analysts, our Sergeant at Arms for keeping
3 everybody in order. Not that it needed much but you
4 never know. I want to thank First Deputy
5 Commissioner Kavanagh for being with us this entire
6 hearing and I want to thank Commissioner Rosa who
7 you've heard about for being here as well. I don't
8 know if any other parks people still with us today.

9
10 Thank you very much for being here. Its late,
11 I'm not going to talk much more but I think that, I
12 know we had over 50 people who signed up to testify.
13 The vast majority of them stayed until the end after
14 four hours to testify and it demonstrates the great
15 love, in my opinion, it demonstrates the great love
16 that New Yorkers have for their parks. Again, we are
17 just 0.59 percent of the city's Expense Budget. When
18 I was born it was well over one percent in 1960. We
19 have got to correct that. Our parks increasingly are
20 called on to do all sorts of things. IF you haven't
21 read the CUFF report, the Center for Urban Future,
22 Mr. Dvorkin was here today from the Center, I urge
23 you to do that. We've had hearings recently on the
24 Big U and the first phase that will be with lower
25 eastside resiliency. These are important things that

1
2 are not just for parks lovers but really to protect
3 every single New Yorker from the ravages of climate
4 change. We can do them both. We can have great
5 parks and we can have great resiliency. We need the
6 money and once we invest that capital money, as we
7 are doing, New Yorkers are very generous, we love our
8 parks, but we need to ensure that our parks are fully
9 funded. So, over the next three months or so, I look
10 forward to working with everybody who is here in this
11 room and those people who were here and those people
12 who may be watching on TV at home or those people who
13 just love their parks and we know that is millions
14 and millions and millions of New Yorkers. So, the
15 fight is on, the process has begun. I want to thank
16 all of you for being here today. I want to thank
17 everybody who worked today to make this hearing
18 possible. We await the Mayor's Executive Budget but
19 there is a lot of work to do and we will do that work
20 to ensure that New Yorkers have the best possible
21 parks that they have.

22 With that at 6:15, I call this meeting to an end.

23 We are adjourned. [Gavel]
24
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date April 1, 2018