

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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September 26, 2019

Start: 1:21 p.m.

Recess: 4:03 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: PETER KOO
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Carlina Rivera
Andrew Cohen
Andy King
Mark Gjonaj
Francisco Moya
Jimmy Van Bramer
Adrienne E. Adams
Eric A. Ulrich
Justin Brannan
Joseph C. Borelli

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

Mitchell Silver, Commissioner
NYC Parks

Liam Kavanaugh, First Deputy Commissioner
NYC Parks

Mark Focht, Deputy Commissioner and Chief
Operations Officer
NYC Parks

Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations
NYC Parks

Sam Biederman, Assistant Commissioner
NYC Parks

Lynn Kelly, Executive Director
New Yorkers for Parks

Adriana Espinoza, Program Director
New York League of Conservation Voters

Corey Provost
Prospect Park Alliance

Chuck Wade, President
Kissena Corridor Park Conservancy

Dorothy Woo
Kissena Corridor Park Conservancy

Aziz Dekhan, Executive Director
New York City Community Garden Coalition

Roxanne Delgado
Friends of Pelham Parkway

Joe Pulio, President
Local 983

Daniel Clay, President
Local 1507

Martha Lopez Gilpin
Astoria Park Alliance

Christin Glass, Manager of Environmental
Leadership Programs
Girl Scouts of Greater New York

Chantal Fairer
Community Gardens

Adolfo Al Morales, Owner
Yorkville Sports

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

5

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Sound check. Sound
3 check. This is a sound check for the Committee on
4 Parks and recreation. Today's date is September
5 26th, 2019. Location committee room. Recorded by
6 Pedro Lugo.

7 [gavel]

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Good afternoon. I am
9 Peter Koo, Chair on the Committee on Parks in
10 Recreation and I would like to welcome all of you to
11 this hearing which will examine how we can best
12 maintain our savings parks system. Over the course
13 of the last few decades, the city gradually reduced
14 its contributions to the park system as the shares of
15 Parks funding and city budget fell from a high of one
16 and a half points and nine 1960s to the 0.86 percent
17 in the mid-80s and to half a percent of the budget of
18 2013. Recent years have **seen** a slight reversal of
19 the trend. Of that trend. However, while the recent
20 parks budget was the largest ever in terms of dollar
21 amount, about 580 million dollars, it is still only
22 represents 0.6 percent of the entire expense budget.
23 The trend over the last few decades has been to real
24 ion more private dollars to fund our parks, which
25 decrease the political view of the city to the

2 property from the parks department resulting in
3 [inaudible 00:02:14] public parks budget to have
4 limited the ability to properly maintain our parks.
5 The land resources is clear. For example, as of
6 2017, the city spend about 178 dollars per capita on
7 these parks while others cities like Washington DC
8 and Minneapolis spend 270 dollars and 233 dollars per
9 capita respectively. Additionally, the parks
10 departments were [inaudible 00:03:01] 143 percent
11 between fiscal year 2006 and fiscal year 2016. From
12 40 million dollars to almost 34 million dollars.
13 However, in fiscal year 2016, only 12 percent of the
14 request was actually funded, which was one of the
15 lowest wage among all city agencies. Staffing wage
16 has also suffered. From a high in 1976, about 11,000
17 full-time employees, the full-time staff dropped to
18 an average of about 700-- no. 275 recently, with
19 some slight increases recently of about 11 percent
20 from 2014 to 2016. The harm done to the parks from
21 this lack of maintenance resources is clear.
22 Numerous reports site infrastructure issues with Park
23 Beach is, drainage systems, and park bathrooms. For
24 example, recent comptroller's reports from the men
25 the comfort stations are in disrepair. Out of the

2 1428 parks department bathrooms, nearly 400 sinks,
3 toilets, walls, ceilings, changing tables, among
4 other features were damaged or missing during the
5 latest inspection. The parks department has done a
6 good job working with the little that they have, but
7 I think we, as a city, can do better. While the
8 city-- while the Council in the administration of
9 words together to reasonably increase the parks
10 budget and fund new programs to renovate parks, such
11 as community and [inaudible 00:05:13] and they said,
12 there is simply no avoiding the fact that we need to
13 begin restoring the city's parks budget back to
14 historic levels. That is why I was a supporter of
15 the fair initiative and other work of the Council to
16 vastly increase the parks budget. Through this
17 year's budget process, we were able to add 44 million
18 dollars in new funding for the parks system. This
19 funding well help to hire more parks maintenance
20 workers and an additional 40-- no. I'm sorry. An
21 additional 50 urban park rangers. Send an additional
22 80 parks enforcement patrol officers. More funding
23 for forest stream management and additional funds for
24 all community gardens. While there was a major
25 achievement, it is not enough. If we are to truly

2 ensure that our parks have all the resources they
3 need, this funding will, at a minimum, need to be
4 baselined and future budgets so that we may continue
5 the work to devote more of the budget to bring our
6 parks to a level of quality that all New Yorkers
7 deserve. I look forward to discussing this issue at
8 today's hearing and examining what other
9 possibilities are out there to continue on the path
10 of greater equity for all our parks. Thank you. Now
11 I ask the Council to administer the oath.

12 LEGAL COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell
13 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth
14 in your testimony before this committee today?

15 MITCHELL SILVER: I do.

16 LEGAL COUNSEL: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Yeah. You
18 may start your testimony. Yeah. I have two announce
19 the present of our park member. Part committee
20 members. Council member Adams, Council member
21 Borelli, Council member Ulrich, Council member Van
22 Bramer, Council member Moya, Council member Levine,
23 and Council member Cohen, and Council member Rivera.
24 Thank you.

2 MITCHELL SILVER: Good afternoon, Chair
3 Koo, members of the Parks Committee, and other
4 members of the city Council. I am Mitchell Silver,
5 Commissioner of New York city Parks. Joining me
6 today is the agency's First Deputy Commission, Liam
7 Kavanaugh, as well as Mark Focht, our Deputy
8 Commissioner and Chief Operating Officer and our
9 Director of Government Relations, Matt Drury.

10 Firstly, we would like to express our congratulations
11 to Council member Koo for presiding over his first
12 meeting Parks Committee Chair into Council member
13 Adams and Rivera on their nomination to the Parks
14 Committee.

15 [applause]

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We have had the
17 pleasure of working closely together for the past few
18 years on issues important to your districts and look
19 forward to working with you more specifically on the
20 issues and policies being examined by the committee.
21 Thank you all for allowing us the opportunity today
22 to discuss the agencies maintenance and operational
23 practices. With a portfolio of over 30,000 acres,
24 NYC Parks is responsible for the maintenance and
25 upkeep of nearly 4500 individual properties ranging

2 from parks and playgrounds to ball fields and green
3 streets. Keeping these parks in good condition
4 requires focused attention of thousands of employees
5 who consistently labor on the ground and behind the
6 scenes to make sure New Yorkers can fully enjoy our
7 portfolio of picturesque spaces which are indeed
8 across the country, if not the world. The
9 administration recently released the mayor's
10 management report or MMR for fiscal year 2019 which
11 tracks progress in our agencies primary services and
12 goals, including our focus on ensuring that all parks
13 and playgrounds are clean and in good condition. We
14 are pleased to highlight, for the second year in a
15 row, our readings for overall Park condition and
16 cleanliness either increased or held steady across
17 all part categories. We are pleased to be here today
18 to offer the Council and overview of our maintenance
19 approach so you can better understand the successes
20 we have achieved, as well as the challenges we face.
21 Over the course of this administration, NYC Parks has
22 evolved into a more modern, data-driven, innovation
23 focused organization and improving our operational
24 practices has been a primary focus of my time as
25 agency Commissioner. I am proud to have created a

2 new agency leadership role held by the Deputy
3 Commissioner, Mark Folk, which is now the-- he is
4 now the chief operating officer. Chief operating
5 officer who works in close coordination with the
6 First Deputy Commissioner Kavanaugh to standardize
7 our maintenance efforts across the city and improve
8 our management practice says, providing a more
9 enjoyable park experience for all New Yorkers. Under
10 their supervision, the agency is able to execute its
11 maintenance strategy in a thoughtful and targeted
12 manner. We have invested in technology to help us be
13 more effective using detailed data metrics to improve
14 efficiency of our mobile cleaning routes, providing
15 handheld devices to our operating staff on the
16 ground, to report and track their efforts in real
17 time, improving our process for work order
18 implementation and reorganizing our burrows
19 storehouses for the parks equipment and supplies. We
20 have also changed our approach to maintenance and
21 staff deployment. For example, we all know that many
22 of our parks and playgrounds are heavily used seven
23 days a week. In previous years, many of these
24 hotspot parks were only being cleaned five days a
25 week, resulting in overflowing garbage bins and

2 litters strewn throughout parks come Monday morning.

3 In this administration, we have reconfigured our

4 staffing patterns to provide additional maintenance

5 on weekends focusing on the 100 most intensely used

6 parks, the hotspots. Another traditional challenge

7 we face was managing the redeployment of park

8 employees that step up during the peak summer season

9 to take on seasonal positions at beaches and pools to

10 address the various operational and maintenance needs

11 of those very busy summer destinations. This

12 redeployment had been something of a strain on our

13 agency resources in light of the longer daylight

14 hours and increased usage at other park properties

15 outside of beaches and pools, so the mayor provided

16 12 million dollars in base line expense funding in

17 fiscal year 2017 budget from parks to create our

18 seasonal districts staffing levels through the summer

19 peak season to offer our 141 step in replacement for

20 those temporarily vacated maintenance and operation

21 positions. And we could continue to maintain our

22 parks and playgrounds on busy summer days to the

23 standard we have all come to expect. I would now

24 like to introduce the Deputy Commissioner, Mark

25

2 Focht, to outline in more detail how our daily
3 maintenance efforts are structured and managed.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Thank you,
5 Commissioner Silver. Good afternoon Chairman Koo and
6 members of the committee. I am Mark Focht and I am
7 parks Deputy Commissioner and chief operating
8 officer. The maintenance and operations of parks or
9 M and O, as we refer to it, staff our New York City
10 parks varies in size throughout the year expanding
11 with seasonal hires during our peak park usage in the
12 warmer months. Depending on the time of year, the
13 agency employees between 3000 and 5300 M and O staff
14 members with and FY 20 operational budget of 230
15 million dollars. Full-time year-round staff
16 constitute a large portion of our workforce, but we
17 also benefit from partnerships with fellow city
18 agencies to create employment opportunities. Our
19 signature program, the parks opportunity program, or
20 POP, hires applicants referred by the human resources
21 administration Department of social services to clean
22 and green are parks, playgrounds, and other
23 facilities citywide. These POP workers receive on-
24 the-job training, career coaching, and specialized
25 training opportunities during the six months they

2 serve with parks, which help them to succeed both
3 while at our agency and also helps them in their
4 search for their next job. Our seasonal hires are
5 vital members of our team, helping address conditions
6 brought about during the season such as cutting
7 grass, raking leaves, shoveling snow, etc., as well
8 as preparing for season specific park uses enjoyed by
9 the public such as ball fields, beaches, and pools.
10 Both the POP and most seasonal workers are a critical
11 pipeline to the entry-level city Park worker or see
12 PW position. In terms of organizational structure,
13 individual parks and properties are managed into 75
14 park districts which largely correspond to the
15 community board district boundaries. Those are
16 overseen by park supervisors who manage crew chiefs,
17 see PW's, and other employees. These park districts
18 are then organized into 45 park factors, which are
19 overseen by park managers and those sectors are
20 further clustered into 14 park regions overseen by
21 our regional managers. These regional operation
22 efforts are then organized into the five individual
23 boroughs which are led by a chief of operations and
24 the borough commissioner who report them myself and
25 first Deputy Commissioner Kavanaugh. Borough

2 operation staff care for our parks every day and
3 serve as our eyes and ears in the ground observing
4 any problematic conditions and tackling them head on.

5 As Commissioner Silver mentioned, our work is
6 compiled-- is completed by staff is tracked in real
7 time using one of his called a daily tasks app on
8 mobile devices, which are supplied by parks to our
9 employees. This includes fixed post staff that are
10 stationed in a single Park location, as well as
11 mobile crews to clean multiple parks in predetermined
12 routes. Their work is monitored by supervisors who
13 is also equipped with the mobile devices. The
14 frequency of park cleaning varies, depending on the
15 nature, location, and intensity of use for each
16 property. The frequency of maintenance is defined
17 what we call a service level agreement, or an SLA.
18 Parks which are highly used in well traffic areas
19 receive five to seven visits a week. Those with
20 moderate use are cleaned three to five times a week,
21 and those with lesser used sites are maintained
22 weekly or on an as needed basis. Beyond the daily
23 maintenance efforts performed by district staff,
24 certain tasks require additional resources or
25 technical expertise. This is managed through our

2 work order process which our work required or routed
3 to skilled trades people at both our borough shops
4 and borough specialized crews. This could include
5 target improvements and-- targeted repairs. Excuse
6 me. And improvements involving plumbing, electrical
7 work, masonry, metalwork, painting, as well as fence
8 repair, pressure washing, and ball field grooming.
9 These teams to not just reactively address concerns.
10 They perform ongoing preventive maintenance and play
11 a key role in many of our exciting strategic
12 initiatives. As part of the community parks
13 initiative, this administration's signature effort
14 dedicated to the park equity, our specialized crews
15 implemented transformative targeted improvements such
16 as basketball court sports coating and nearly 100
17 parks and playgrounds throughout the city. They were
18 also the linchpin in making our cool pools initiative
19 a reality. Over the past two years, we gave a
20 vibrant new look and feel to a live in outdoor pools
21 in underserved neighborhoods throughout the city
22 which have seen few improvements since they were
23 built in the 1970s. We utilize the creative approach
24 to reactivating these pools by providing colorful art
25 and cabana style shade structures to help keep

2 swimmers cool. This could not have been possible
3 without the hard work of our specialized crews. Cool
4 pools has been a tremendous success in improving the
5 outdoor pool experience so much that attendance
6 increased 22 percent at the 11 cool pools, which
7 people in these neighborhoods have begun to call
8 their resorts. These boroughs specific efforts are
9 further bolstered by hours citywide services division
10 which provides broader repair and maintenance
11 services for our property is and facilities
12 throughout the city and things such as installing
13 green roofs, dressing conditions at pool filter
14 plants, replacing inefficient boilers. Additionally,
15 our borough for his street teams are specifically
16 dedicated to keeping our urban tree canopy in good
17 condition, maximizing all of the environmental land
18 social benefits of trees both in parks and along the
19 streets. I also have to recognize our dedicated
20 staff that manages our fleet, which ranged from
21 small, durable, four-wheel utility vehicles, known as
22 gators, to heavy duty pickup trucks, vans, and larger
23 packers which transport park trash to DSNY trash
24 management facilities. Without these vehicles,
25 transporting our staff between parks and within our

2 larger parks would not be possible. This
3 organizational structure allows the agency to have
4 the ability to address maintenance and cleanliness
5 concerns as they arise, but also ensure that we are
6 marshaling our resources in a consistent and
7 efficient manner across the five boroughs. Behind
8 the scenes, the talented individuals of our
9 innovation and performance management team work with
10 data created by our operations staff to help us
11 assess current practices and apply new approaches so
12 that we can optimize our finite resources. Through
13 their efforts, all alongside ongoing internal review
14 and analysis of our maintenance practices, we have
15 been able to implement an innovative maintenance
16 approaches like assessing the efficiency of our
17 routes being used by mobile crews and our zone
18 management maintenance approach which has been
19 successfully piloted in Crotona [sp?] Park in the
20 Bronx, as well as Fort Greene and McCarran parks in
21 Brooklyn. In addition to me on the ground
22 observation and monitoring perform daily by our
23 staff, we also received feedback directly from the
24 public through 311 and these complaints are routed
25 directly to our staff to address. Further, our park

2 supervisors inspect every site in their park district
3 on a monthly basis and, in addition to all this, New
4 York City parks has a separate division dedicated to
5 performing independent inspections and reviews of our
6 park properties to make sure they are in the best
7 condition possible. The park inspection program,
8 known as PIP, is a comprehensive outcome based
9 performance measures system that generates detailed
10 inspections of our parks and playgrounds managed by
11 our operations and management planning division
12 independent from operations. PIP inspectors conduct
13 annually 6000 inspections using rigorous review of 16
14 different park features to develop park ratings and
15 each site is judged on both cleanliness and overall
16 condition. Alongside local staff observations and
17 311 reports, these PIP ratings guide the agency's
18 effort to target areas of concern and to efficiently
19 utilize resources. PIP data for each park is fully
20 available to the public, the NYC Parks the website,
21 and the ratings are ultimately compiled and reported
22 for each fiscal year in the Mayor's management
23 report. As Commissioner Silver referenced earlier,
24 in the most recent MMR for fiscal year 2019, the
25 overall condition for parks was 90 percent, a

2 substantial increase from the rating of 85 percent in
3 fiscal year 2013 and our part cleanliness rating
4 increased to 95 percent, a significant improvement
5 over the 90 percent rating and FY 13. More
6 specifically, our inspection ratings focus on Park
7 litter, during the past three summers, has shown a
8 six percentage point improvement since 2017. These
9 positive outcomes are a reflection of our strategic
10 efforts to more effectively allocate resources and
11 monitor maintenance staff. We are very proud of the
12 progress we have made. Regardless, we consistently
13 seek to find new ways to improve our practices and
14 procedures and gave devoted employees the tools they
15 need to care for their parks. To this end, we would
16 like to thank the Council and the Play Fair Coalition
17 led by New Yorkers for Parks for their incredible
18 support and advocacy for the agency which led to the
19 increased baseline funding Councilman Koo referenced
20 for city Park workers and gardeners and additional
21 one-time expense funding for the agency to provide
22 more maintenance staff. This funding will help us to
23 continue to deliver valuable services efficiently and
24 a challenging economic environment. As hard as we
25 work to maintain our parks, the agency cannot do it

2 alone. Our staff are dedicated public servants, but
3 cannot be everywhere at all times and cannot always
4 control how some people of the public treat their
5 public spaces. With thousands of properties serving
6 millions of visitors, we rely on New Yorkers to treat
7 those spaces as they would their own homes or
8 backyards and we hope the Council will join us in
9 reminding their constituents that they also have a
10 responsibility to our parks and a role to play in
11 keeping our city clean. On a similar note, I want to
12 recognize the many volunteers and community
13 organizations that take time out of their busy
14 schedules to help beautify the green, open spaces
15 dear to their hearts we rely on the generous support
16 from these volunteers still words to create a
17 positive environment in which people can interact
18 with their parks and help make them even better
19 places. Volunteers, such as those participating in
20 the Its My Park program, spearheaded by Partnerships
21 for Parks division and co-administrated by the city
22 Parks foundation participated in volunteer events and
23 programs that roughly 336 park locations last year
24 bringing New Yorkers closer to their parks and
25 getting them even more engaged and invested. To

2 conclude, we always welcome feedback from Council and
3 to invite you to continue alerting us about incidents
4 or maintenance concerns regarding the conditions of
5 your local parks. We hope that the next time you
6 visit park, you will be able to smell the fresh air
7 and enjoy the scenery with a comprehensive
8 understanding of everything it takes to keep our
9 parks in the best condition possible. Thank you for
10 allowing us to testify before you today. We look
11 forward to continuing to work with you to create and
12 care for an incredible park system for New Yorkers.
13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Commissioner
15 Silver and Deputy Commissioner. We are joined by
16 Council member King and Council member Gjonaj. I
17 will begin asking a few questions and then the other
18 members of the committee can ask questions.
19 Commissioner, Department of-- DPR, Department of
20 Parks and Recreation received 43 million dollars in
21 additional expense funding for the fiscal year 2020
22 budget. Can you specify how that funding is being
23 allocated and how many positions have been filled
24 today with those funds?

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, thank you for
3 the question, Council member Koo. First, we are
4 implementing the funds are exactly as it was
5 suggested. There were very specific categories with
6 the 43 million and including both baselining of the
7 existing staff that prior only had one shot funding,
8 which included CPW's and gardeners. It included
9 funding for green thumb, for additional PEP officers,
10 rangers, forest management framework, street, tree
11 stump removal, and beach and pool extension. All
12 those programs are underway to go more specifically
13 about, the positions. Clearly, the baseline
14 positions are now going from one shot to the baseline
15 is already underway. In terms of the specific 50--
16 44 to 50 rangers that were given have now been hired
17 and I know would-- 52 of the 80 PIP officers have
18 also been hired and will be starting the Academy and
19 I will now referred to Commissioner Focht for some of
20 the specific numbers on the boat CPW's and gardeners.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: So, of the 100
23 CPW city Park workers that were one time employed--
24 one time funding, they have all been hired, so we
25 have hired full 100 of them in, of the 50 gardeners,

2 we are about halfway through hiring the gardeners.

3 The gardeners are more select position. It's taking
4 a bit longer and a higher the gardeners.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: How many positions
6 remain to be filled? And what is the timeline to
7 fill those positions?

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, in terms of
9 both the PEP and the rangers, they are always in the
10 process of receiving applications. These are very
11 specialized positions. They require qualifications
12 and background checks, so our expectation is that we
13 are going to fill these in as quickly as possible,
14 but as I stated, for those positions, they are 52, so
15 there are 38 last for PEP hires and six left for
16 ranger hires. And, again, I'll defer to Commissioner
17 Focht for the numbers. I believe he shared with you
18 already the process that we have had most of them
19 hired to date. Gardeners are the one that will take
20 a little bit more time because it is specialized
21 position.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: For the
23 remaining gardener positions, we are currently
24 interviewing for those and we expect to fill the

2 positions definitely before the end of the calendar
3 year.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. According to
5 the Center for an Urban Futures report on park
6 infrastructure, DPR has a staff of over 11,642 in
7 1970s, at the height of the fiscal crisis. So, what
8 is the current full and part-time maintenance
9 workforce?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: So, for
11 maintenance, the fall count ranges between 3000--
12 about 3000 employees and then, during our peak
13 season, which we are just coming off of the summer,
14 we increased to about 53-- 5500 employees with our
15 seasonal employees. That's the operations component
16 of employees.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: What is this number
18 broken down by borough or by [inaudible 00:28:31]
19 district?

20 [background comments]

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yeah. We can
22 provide that information after this meeting.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Oh. Can you tell me
24 about what are the most common challenges or the

2 biggest obstacles to keep our parks clean and parks
3 and our playgrounds well-maintained?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, I couldn't
5 say there is a challenge. It's just that our parks
6 are heavily used. We roughly get about 130 million
7 visits per year and, as a result of that usage,
8 people tend to have litter that's there. They tend
9 to use our parks. So, it's just part of our
10 operation to handle for the volume of traffic. Of
11 the Deputy Commissioners stated, we have service
12 level agreements based on the usage of the park, we
13 send cruise out to clean it. So, we know those that
14 are more heavily trafficked clearly is more
15 challenged. And so, we go out there to make sure we
16 give it the proper surveys on a weekly basis and some
17 cases multiple times during the week. We just want
18 to make sure we communicate that to the public. Were
19 also looking to make sure we are putting the trash
20 receptacles in the proper place so we minimize the
21 litter that is placed in our parks. But it certainly
22 is part of our daily routine. We want people to use
23 our parks and we have to make sure we keep up with
24 that demand to keep them clean. So I wouldn't say
25 it's a challenge. It's just something we have to do

2 as our normal operation. From a technology side, we
3 want to analyze to make sure what routing works,
4 staffing patterns work to make sure we maintain our
5 parks system.

6 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Yeah. I'm
7 going to ask something in my district. Yeah. In my
8 letter dated September 16th, I wrote to the Parks
9 Department regarding lead paint and asbestos in parks
10 facilities, especially ones used by young children
11 like pools and skating rinks. Can you share with me
12 if the Parks Department has found evidence and lead
13 and asbestos in parks facilities?

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, as you know,
15 lead was outlawed as the use in New York City in
16 1960s and so, the pools, for example, those are
17 scraped and cleaned interior almost every year.
18 There is no longer a practice of using lead paint.
19 If it is a rare case that we discover it, we address
20 it and remediate it immediately. Asbestos, for
21 example, is, typically, in locations subsurface,
22 whether it is boiler rooms where it's no contact with
23 the public. Our staff is well aware whether we to a
24 capital project. We will do some testing and
25 assessment to make sure there is the existence of

2 sisters. If there is, that is also remediated. We
3 want to make sure that the public is not in any
4 danger of lead pay or asbestos in park facilities.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: The problems that
6 Kissena Park [inaudible 00:31:01] are constantly
7 blinking and we are hearing reports on toxic algae.
8 What is the parks department doing to change this?
9 To address this?

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, first, I want
11 to clarify for the record there was some stories over
12 the summer. No individuals or dogs were harmed by
13 any toxic algae in the city of New York. This has
14 been a problem both here in New York and across the
15 country. I am pleased to say that we've been doing
16 extensive research and we will be launching a pilot
17 this fall in Prospect Park called and eco-wheel to
18 see whether that approach will work. The good news
19 is that toxic algae is weather dependent. You will
20 start to see it dissipate as the weather gets colder.
21 But, clearly, with climate change in the increase
22 with heat in our cities, we are keeping a close eye.
23 So, we are doing the research. We are working with
24 our partners to determine exactly what we can do to
25 reduce the toxic algae. In addition, we encourage

2 people to keep their dogs on a leash in these
3 locations. We have signage throughout those parks.
4 We are optimistic that we are going to attempt in
5 Prospect Park will be successful and that we can
6 deploy it to other parks throughout our parks system.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. I'm going to ask
8 some of my members to ask questions. Council member
9 Adams?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Thank you, Mr.
11 Chair. Thank you very much. Commissioner, very good
12 to see you, as always, and we welcome you and your
13 Deputy Commissioner, Commissioner Dir. here today to
14 offer testimony. Just have a few questions for you.
15 According to-- okay. That's not what I wanted to
16 ask. How does the agency determine where fixed post
17 cruise are allocated or stationed?

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, I'm going to
19 refer to either one of the Deputy Commissioners. We
20 just want to clarify may be an explanation of what
21 fixed post versus mobile means.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Please.

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: and, and staff
24 dedicated to parks, we to within, quote unquote,
25 fixed post parks also have mobile crews within them,

2 but it does require, one, a park house or a
3 Fieldhouse where supplies can be stored, but then we
4 look at the nature of the park and we do have some
5 parks that have zoned management. But I will defer
6 now to what of the Deputy Commissioners to answer
7 your question.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Councilman,
9 the primary focus for fixed post staff are two
10 things. One, as the Commissioner just said, is there
11 a physical place to fix post staff? So, we need a
12 park that has a building in it so that staff
13 literally has a place to go to hang up their hat in
14 store supplies and equipment. So, with fixed post,
15 you need a bricks and mortar building. And then, the
16 second thing is the site needs to be large enough in
17 order to have a full day's worth of work in order to
18 fix post the staff there. Those are the two primary
19 factors that we look at when choosing where to fix
20 post staff. I do want to note that we fix post more
21 staff in the summer because, again, when we
22 exponentially grow the volume of park workers we have
23 out there in our peak season, we simply have more
24 staff to fix post. So, during the summer, we fix

2 post more staff at heavily used playgrounds and other
3 sites that may not be fixed post in the off-season.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS:

5 Thank you very much for the clarity.

6 And, likewise, Deputy Commissioner, in speaking of
7 staff, in your testimony, you have referenced
8 seasonal hires and how vital they are to shoveling
9 snow, raking leaves, etc., and just maintaining the
10 parks overall. How much of the agency's maintenance
11 and operations the work is done by seasonal or
12 temporary staff?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: So, the staff
14 that is working in maintenance doubles in the summer.
15 So, again, we have about 3300 full-time employees and
16 we generally pull in about 3400, plus or minus
17 seasonal staff. So, we about double in size during
18 our peak season. Those numbers are separate from the
19 POP, the Parks Opportunity Employees that we have
20 engaged in operations year-round. That's kind of the
21 study number to the 12 months.

22 [Background comments]

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Yeah. I keep
24 referring the peak season. So, peak season for us
25 is, obviously, this summer. It generally starts--

2 as staff starts to ramp up as early as mid-to late
3 March through April. By mid-May, we are fully
4 staffed for our season. Calm mid-September, we start
5 to ramp down and, by November 1, we are out of what
6 we consider our peak season and we are back to our
7 off-season staff levels.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Okay. And what
9 does the training look like for seasonal or temporary
10 workers?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: So, each
12 grouping of seasonal workers are trained in their
13 respective boroughs consistent with what their title
14 is. So, if they are a CPW, the insurance level
15 position, when they come in, there is a training
16 program done by the operations staff in the borough
17 to which they are assigned.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: And I just have one
19 more question for you. It has to do with friends of
20 groups partnerships with New York City Parks
21 Department. Can you explain how the role of private
22 organizations, such as friends of groups and park
23 foundations to refer from the role of DPR regarding
24 park maintenance and improvement?

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, it varies.
3 We have levels of conservancy and friends of
4 relationships. You have one like, for example,
5 Central Park Conservancy where we have a license
6 agreement that paid to the bulk of the maintenance
7 and operations, although, there are still some New
8 York City Park staff working in those parks. Then
9 you have some hybrids like Prospect Park where they
10 have some staff that they hire, but, we have a
11 significant number of parks employees also working in
12 the park staff with the manager overseeing park
13 operations. And so, there is just as shared
14 responsibility. Need to hire some and pay for
15 workers, but there is also city of New York workers
16 there, as well. For the friends of groups, these are
17 more volunteer efforts to do strategic cleanups. It
18 could be weekly. It could be more than that. But
19 those parks are still maintained by New York City,
20 but it is offset by the work done by volunteer
21 groups, but it tends to be very specific to what
22 they're good at doing. So, it may be gardening. It
23 may be raking of leaves. It may be planting flowers.
24 It just varies. So, again, it depends on the friends
25 group and what their capacity is. But, as was

2 stated, we too have an organization, partnership with
3 parks which works with all those friends groups and
4 so they to supplement some of the work, but it may
5 vary to once a week to one some months to seasonally,
6 but it does add a great deal of value to maintaining
7 our parks system.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Sure. And I said
9 balance my last question, but, of course, you just
10 made my brain spark. So, with regard to your
11 relationships with parks and those types of groups,
12 how does that-- how is that relationship usually
13 honed between those groups in the parks department?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: It is a very strong
15 relationship and I also want to include a lot of the
16 private sector service days. We have organizations
17 coming in and doing specialized cleaning. It is a
18 very treasured relationship. We value the
19 relationship. We recognize them. Reward them. We
20 come out ourselves to stand by them to clean. I'll
21 always say a park that has a friends group does far
22 better than those that don't. And so, we understand
23 their love for that public space. Their guardians,
24 as well, is a value to the city and that is why we
25 applaud them, recognize them, and support them in any

2 way that we can, offering training. There's ways
3 that we are a fiduciary agent, in some cases, to
4 holding some of their funds, if they are a very small
5 nonprofit. So, there is a very tight relationship
6 between our friends group and New York City Parks
7 foundation.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Okay. Thank you
9 for your testimony. We're going to speak more, I'm
10 sure, in the future, about parks in my district,
11 District 28. We've got Baisley [sp?] Palm Park, a
12 very beautiful park. We've got some smaller parks
13 which need some work and some help. So, thank you
14 for your testimony. I look forward to our continued-
15 -

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: relationship.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: And if I could add,
19 Councilwoman, if there ever a time that a group want
20 to start a friends group, let us know. We will be
21 out there. We are always looking for new groups and
22 are willing to lend our support with resources to
23 help them thrive and grown.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Terrific. Thank
25 you very much.

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

4 Commissioner, I want to ask you about a couple of
5 local questions again. My office received frequent
6 complaints about lawns not mowed for weeks about
7 local neighborhood parks, including an [inaudible
8 00:39:42] ground and [inaudible 00:39:45]. Is mowing
9 built into the maintenance schedule?

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Answer to that
11 question is yes, but there are other factors that may
12 interfere with mowing with weather being one of them
13 and heavy rains, but we need to have an expectation
14 of what the mowing cycle will be and it does vary
15 from parks to ball fields. I will defer to
16 Commissioner Focht or Kavanaugh to answer more
17 specifically, but the answer is yes. It is, in some
18 cases, weather dependent. And if we have all of our
19 equipment that is operating so that we can actually
20 execute the work.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Then, how come it's not
22 mowed? Some lawns are not mowed for weeks and there's
23 some people that like complain?

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: As stated, I
25 believe the expectation is about every two weeks. If

2 there is heavy rainfall, we are unable to cut it at
3 that time. And so, it does depend on the weather.
4 It does depend on making sure we have the equipment
5 that is operational. But the expectation is, for at
6 least of the general Park, is to cut it about every
7 two weeks.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Yes,
9 Councilman. As the Commissioner said, our cycle is
10 every two to two and a half weeks on all lawns,
11 however, weather is the biggest impediment to that.
12 I will just take you back. For example, you may
13 recall, but it rained every single Wednesday in July
14 this year, so we lost every Wednesday to mowing
15 because you can't blow when it is raining or when the
16 grass is wet. So, you lose one of several days a
17 week and a mowing cycle and it pushes the cycle back.
18 And, also, obviously, rain contributes to the growth
19 of grass, so the two things are running counter to
20 each other. But, clearly, there are ever sites in
21 your individual districts where you feel like they
22 haven't been mowed in an appropriate time, please
23 reach out directly to the borough Commissioner who
24 is, obviously, direct connections with the staff.

2 But the staff is on a constant mowing cycle around
3 all the boroughs.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Yeah. We
5 are joined by Council member Brannan. Yeah. So, my
6 next question is about my essay right subject, which
7 is bathrooms. Yeah. We all know bathrooms are
8 important, in your own house or in restaurants, so it
9 is also very important in parks. I especially--
10 like the population is aging. If there is no public
11 bathroom, senior citizens, they won't stay too long
12 in the bathroom. I mean, they won't stay too long in
13 the parks because they worry about going to the
14 bathroom. Right? So, how many bathrooms are located
15 in parks in total?

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We currently have
17 about 690 comfort stations in our parks system.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: 690?

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: 690. Almost 700
20 comfort stations in our parks system.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: And how often are they
22 maintained and cleaned? Is it depending on the
23 season and use?

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Edson daily and, in
25 some cases, at our beaches, and daily and it could be

2 several times during the day to make sure that the
3 supplies are there and that they are clean. So, you
4 are correct. Depending on the location, but it is
5 daily and it could be many times throughout the day.

6 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Just to add,
8 Councilman, all of those 690-- 700 plus
9 conversations are locked and unlocked every day, so
10 when I staff goes there every morning to unlock the
11 comfort stations, they unlock the door, they turn on
12 the lights, they check to make sure there's toilet
13 paper and etc., that the comfort stations are in good
14 shape, they are then generally checked to be cleaned
15 at some point throughout the day and then, in the
16 evening, we return the lock them up and there is
17 another check done then.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, what time do you
19 lock those bathrooms?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: So, during the
21 season, during our peak season, again, which is
22 summer, we are committed to keeping our comfort
23 stations open until 7 p.m. or later seven days a
24 week. During the winter months, the comfort stations
25 are closed more around 4:30-- 5 o'clock. It gets

2 lighter. Excuse me. It gets darker much earlier and
3 I staff is on a single shift, so during the winter
4 months they are closed 4:30-- five. During the
5 summer months they are closed 7 p.m. or later.

6 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, what happens when
7 the bathrooms are locked? I mean, people need to use
8 it.

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It is a practice
10 and a safety concern that we do not keep our parks
11 op-- I'm sorry. Comfort stations open. They are
12 locked for security reasons and then are reopened
13 again in the morning. So, those comfort stations are
14 not available to the public and, in most cases, they
15 coincide with the closure of parks where you should
16 not be in the park in the first place. But, in terms
17 with we have to work with our shifts and, 7 p.m., as
18 it was stated, in peak season, and then much earlier
19 on the non-peak season.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, how many bathrooms
21 are closed for winterizing and at what point in the
22 year two such bathrooms have their water shut off?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: So,
24 Councilman, will get you an exact number, but is a
25 very small handful. A few dozen. Maybe 20+ or minus

2 of the 690 that to not have heat in them, so they
3 have to be winterized. And winterized means that the
4 functioning of them wraps down in November or so.
5 So, by December 1 for generally winterized and then
6 they are brought back up to functioning in the
7 spring. It all depends on when it starts to get
8 warm, but it could be some point in March into mid-
9 April. But we will get you the list of comfort
10 stations that have to be winterized.

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, can you give us a
12 list of the bathrooms that every year you have to
13 close because of--

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: We will get
17 you that.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: How many bathrooms are
19 able to be open year-round? So, only those few
20 bathrooms need to be winterized. There are open
21 year-round except for--

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: those ones.

24

25

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct. So,
3 that's 20. So roughly 670 can stay open year-round.
4 20 have to be closed to be winterized.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. I want to ask
6 Council member Ulrich. You want to question?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Yes. Thank you,
8 Mr. Chair. Thank you, Commissioner. Always good to
9 see you. I think the last time I saw you were in
10 bike shorts on the boardwalk in Rockaway. So, I'm
11 glad--

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [inaudible
13 00:46:04]

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: to see you are
15 making a weekend inspection of the conditions where,
16 but--

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes. I was.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: And Commissioner
19 Kavanaugh, of course, is a frequent visitor to the
20 beach. Not in bike shorts, though, but--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Oh, gosh. All
22 right. First want to commend. I don't know if he is
23 here, Commissioner Docket, the new Queens
24 Commissioner. He does a terrific job. Is really hit
25 the ground running. He is mad not only with me and

2 my fellow elected officials in my neck of the woods
3 in Queens, but with all of the civic and nonprofit
4 leaders in the community. So, I wanted to say that
5 Dottie Levondowski [sp?] left some very big shoes to
6 fill. She did a phenomenal job, but Commissioner
7 Docket really is hit the ground running and I think
8 he's doing a fine job and I want to thank you for
9 appointing him to that position because he is doing
10 great. I'd like to talk a bit about Rockaway and
11 also Forest Park, if I can. Rockaway Beach, as you
12 know, has seen a wonderful resurgence since hurricane
13 Sandy. With the ferry coming back, it's product, you
14 know, millions of additional visitors, but that
15 requires more service and maintenance in one of the
16 many complaints that I got this seer to my district
17 office and to my Facebook account was pictures of
18 these overflowing garbage bins on the beach and on
19 the boardwalk and I know that halfway through the
20 season, I think, parks stepped it up and add an
21 additional service, but how do you actually plan for
22 that? What does that look like and then how do you
23 make change? How long does it take to make changes
24 to a plan like that?

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, one, first of
3 all, I appreciate your comments and it's always good
4 to see both of you here or on the boardwalk. As you
5 know, some photographs are always taken on a snapshot
6 in time and I always tell them that we have dedicated
7 crews that will go up there. If you go out there
8 some hours later, it is gone. But it's that peak
9 time when people take a snapshot, but we have crews
10 out there that make sure that before the days up, the
11 beach is clean. We have made adjustments. We've
12 added additional staff out to Rockaway. We've
13 listened. We all know that the Rockaway community is
14 not shy at all so we make sure we make the
15 adjustments necessary. We have an administrator out
16 there, a new administrator, so we make sure that we
17 make those adjustments that the park maintains, the
18 beach maintains as clean. I've been out there many
19 times. I've not seen what people are referring to,
20 but certainly that is a heavily, heavily used beach
21 and, on some of those very hot days, there is excess
22 trash. We want to make sure through the way we
23 approach collecting them, they are in a location
24 where we are not disturbed being and having gaiters
25 going up and down the beach. But by the end of the

2 day, by the next morning, those beaches are pristine
3 and cleaned.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: One of the parks
5 employees confidentially told us that there were five
6 pieces of equipment that could be used for cleaning
7 the beach, but that at any given point this season,
8 there were four of them being repaired or serviced by
9 DCAS and how long that takes. And so, sometimes
10 there were times throughout the summer that there was
11 only one piece of equipment available to new the
12 entire, you know, stretch of the beach there. I
13 thought that that was a bit silly. Why is parks able
14 to repair some of their equipment in-house? I
15 don't--

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: I always, as a
17 rule of thumb, is the people to speak to an
18 administrator. I don't know if a park worker with a
19 beach 5.5 miles at him to be taking care of, may know
20 all the details about what vehicles are in or out of
21 operation. But it is something that we make sure we
22 have the proper vehicles to maintain. That sounds
23 highly unusual that a four to five vehicles beyond
24 the service, but it is something that we watch on a

2 daily basis and we rectified and we have ways of
3 backfilling vehicles, if needed, in situations. So--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Is parks able to at
5 any-- At any given point able to have a vehicle
6 impaired and not have to wait three weeks for it to
7 come back from DCAS? Either do it in-house or go to
8 private mechanic shop and have it done? I mean, just
9 for the sake of, you know, such as short beach
10 season, seems unusual to me that certain pieces of
11 equipment could be out of commission for almost a
12 month. In, we only have three months or four months
13 out of the year to really make it work.

14 Commissioner?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: So,
16 Councilman, we monitor our equipment and our vehicles
17 on a daily basis in what is called the out of service
18 report that is generated very early every morning.
19 So, we look at in and we determine which vehicles
20 need to be prioritized for maintenance to get them
21 back in service. Clearly, during the beach season,
22 we always prioritize page vehicles. We do have
23 different agreements. DCAS maintain some of our
24 vehicle types because they are very specialized. We
25 maintain other vehicle types and a third are

2 maintained by contractor. So, it completely depends
3 on what vehicle you are speaking about, who is
4 responsible to maintain it, and it depends on what is
5 wrong with the vehicle. Some of the beach vehicles,
6 the beach rakes, they are called, are very
7 specialized equipment that need specialized parts
8 and, unfortunately, if it does go down, it may take
9 longer to repair. Often time, they are not simple
10 repairs.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: And that may be
12 the-- I think there were five of them in the
13 rockaways and then, at one point during the summer,
14 there were four of the matter out of service. So, I
15 believe that was the equipment. We had a meeting
16 with the other elected and some of the community
17 people about a month and a half ago and that actually
18 came up. Lastly, because I know there are a lot of
19 questions and I want to speed this up, Forest Park I
20 also represent. My district goes, literally, from
21 Park Lane south down to the Rockaways. It's quite
22 large. That Forest Park, you know, we do, I think,
23 pretty good job of investing a lot of local
24 discretionary money and other capital monies.
25 Myself, Council member Holden, and the borough

2 president in trying to restore not only the Pine
3 Grove, but other parts of Forest Park that have not
4 seen investment in a very long time. What I would
5 like to see, though, is a commitment from the
6 administration, a long-term commitment, maybe, in the
7 five year capital plan or something to show that
8 Forest Park, which requires tremendous upkeep and,
9 obviously, investment and maintenance is a priority
10 for the administration because, so far, the only
11 projects that have been initiated and completed have
12 been funded by the local or borough elected
13 officials. We haven't quite seen the type of
14 investment that we would like to see in Forest Park.

15 COMMISSIONERS SILVER: Your [inaudible
16 00:52:21] is noted. I'll go back to see exactly what
17 those capital investments have been from the city
18 side. But your recommendation is noted.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Thank you,
20 Commissioner. Mr. Chair, thank you very much. Thank
21 you.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, Commissioner, I'll
23 go back to some local questions again. Regarding
24 jointly operated playgrounds, they are called JOP's,

2 right? What agency is responsible for their
3 maintenance?

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: Good
5 afternoon, Chairman Koo. The Parks Department is
6 responsible for the maintenance of the jointly
7 operated playgrounds.

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. What is the
9 inspection process for JOP's? Is the same or similar
10 to the inspection process PIP?

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: Yes.
12 And there are two components. There is the park
13 inspection program. The JOP's are inspected at least
14 twice a year as part of that program, but are Park
15 supervisors also inspect every property that they
16 supervise on a monthly basis. So, there are many
17 more than just two inspections done for the JOP's and
18 every other park in the system.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, are JOP's built and
20 financed up by private entities completely accessible
21 by the public?

22 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: They
23 are not financed by private entities. They are
24 completely funded through the Parks Department budget
25 and they are fully accessible to the public, except

2 portions of which are closed when school is in
3 session to accommodate recess and other uses by
4 schoolchildren.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Because, in the past,
6 those playgrounds are open all the time, so, but,
7 recently, a lot of neighborhoods complain that they
8 cannot use those playgrounds if the school-- if the
9 school is open they cannot use it, but once the
10 schools closed, they cannot use it because they don't
11 have a budget for the custodian in school.

12 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH:

13 Councilman, I think you may be referring to the
14 schoolyards to playgrounds program. Those parks are
15 managed exclusively by the Department of Education.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Uh-huh.

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: We
18 have no maintenance responsibility, inspection
19 responsibility, or operational responsibility at the
20 sites.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. Yeah. Thank you.
22 Yeah. Now I turn to Council member Rivera for
23 questions.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Hello. Hey, guys.
25 I was going to start by complementing the Manhattan

2 borough Commissioner, Bill Castro, but he owes me an
3 answer on the annual Thompson Square Park Halloween
4 Dog Parade, so tell him to call me back. It's very
5 important. It's an important tradition. So, if
6 anyone hasn't been there, please join us. It's super
7 fun. So, I want to just get right into I think that
8 maintenance and operations really does impact our
9 local gardens and I want to ask a couple questions
10 about the recent license agreement that I think you
11 are currently negotiating with some of the local
12 gardens. So, 1 million of the 43 million dollars
13 that was allocated is to community gardens. How is
14 that maintenance plan? How is that being
15 distributed, and when will we see community gardens
16 and our districts start to benefit from the funding?
17 And if they have, what are some of those things?

18 COMMISSIONERS SILVER: The division will
19 hire additional staff. This was 8.2 million help
20 engage our universe of 550 community gardens. The
21 350 of which that are on Parks property, but managed
22 by groups licensed within the city will benefit from
23 target in infrastructure improvements. For the
24 entire universe of the 550 of registered community
25 gardens will benefit from tools, materials,

2 equipment, as well as increased guidance and advisory
3 services from the agency. So, it would be a
4 combination of actual tools, as well as resources.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: And so when you say
6 resources, do you mean staff for some of these
7 gardens? My people will come through some of the
8 garden space is more frequently and to help them out?
9 Because, for those who don't know, these gardens are
10 independently run by countless volunteers who give
11 tons of hours and have created incredible spaces that
12 people come from all over the world to see.

13 COMMISSIONERS SILVER: Right. Again, I'll
14 underscore the additional staff provides guidance and
15 advisory services and it may vary from garden to
16 garden. What we do know is that we need to have some
17 of those tools and other hard resources, so to speak,
18 that we can-- such as soils, material, and other
19 equipment that we can make available. But in terms
20 of the additional staff, it's to offer that
21 additional guidance and advisory services on an ad
22 needed basis. But, again, it may vary from garden to
23 garden.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Okay. So they're
25 more tangible than I guess, personnel. So the

2 advisory services you bring up, the license agreement
3 that has been in discussion, one of the major
4 challenges for some of our local group says the
5 advance that you have to give for the events held in
6 the gardens. And some of these events are well
7 planned out and there are amazing. There are
8 backpack giveaways, there are barbecues. It
9 Shakespeare. It's really amazing stuff. But some
10 stuff is planned a little bit last minute. Press
11 conferences, community gatherings, family events,
12 they can get planned last minute and they could
13 potentially be out of compliance with that sort of
14 short term planning under the new license regime.
15 How are gardens supposed to operate independently
16 with this very strict garden agreement and no other
17 services with the additional funding besides advisory
18 services?

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Bringing up
20 Assistant Commissioner Sam Biederman, we knew the
21 hearing was about maintenance and operations, but
22 since it's a question about gardening, Commissioner
23 Biederman is most of today. I assume that he is
24 deemed sworn in. If not, he can do that now.
25 Before--

2 LEGAL COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell
3 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth
4 and your testimony before this committee?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: I
6 do, sir.

7 LEGAL COUNSEL: Thank you.

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: Hi.
9 So, thank you for the question, Council member. So,
10 the license agreement does ask that gardens submit
11 their events four times a year, right? So there is a
12 quarterly schedule for events admission, but after
13 conversation with guarding groups who did raise some
14 very reasonable objections to that, the items that
15 you brought up. You know, last minute press
16 conferences, last-minute festivals, whatever. You
17 know, not all of these gardens, we understand, can
18 planned for months in advance. Our volunteer groups.
19 We adjusted the handbook that governs the rules and
20 regulations around the gardens to provide that the
21 green done staff can work with gardens in the time
22 between those quarterly check-in periods so, turn
23 around event approvals as quickly as possible.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: From what I
25 understand, the agreement would be somewhat ironclad

2 and it would put these groups in a binds in terms of
3 trying to host a gathering. If they don't follow
4 these new administrative kind of code like to the
5 letter, couldn't that potentially jeopardize their
6 status as an open space?

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: I
8 don't want to get into hypotheticals about, you know,
9 what might happen. I do want to underscore that we
10 did adjust the handbook to explicitly allow garden
11 groups to submit their proposals for events far
12 closer to the date of the event. You know? Not on a
13 quarterly basis.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: I hear you. I
15 don't like speaking in hypotheticals, either, but I
16 do finds, I guess, of the newer version of what you
17 originally proposed to be problematic and I just urge
18 you to stay in contact with the gardeners here to
19 make sure that you are negotiating something that is
20 fair, considering the history and culture of what
21 these spaces represent. We like to talk about how
22 proud we are of these garden spaces and, without them
23 being able to somewhat freestyle and respond to local
24 happenings and what is going on in current issues, I

2 think it kind of takes away from what's the spirit of
3 these gardens.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: And, as you know,
5 we've enjoyed a decade's long relationship with our
6 gardeners. We celebrate them. We enjoy them being
7 there in the service they offer. Every few years we
8 are up for renewing these licenses and new issues,
9 that we have to discuss, but your points are well
10 taken. We have been in active negotiation for many,
11 many months and this is something that we will
12 continue to do as we get to resolve some of these
13 thorny issues that are there for a small percentage
14 of the gardens. We still have a significant number
15 who did sign and we are continuing to work out some
16 of the issues with the few who have not signed.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Okay. I will be
18 sure to follow up. I just have a couple more
19 questions. So, we added-- the Council added 34
20 million dollars in one shots in this year's budget,
21 including additional maintenance workers. And, in
22 your opinion, so we can be helpful, what are the top
23 one shot items that Parks would want to see ideally
24 baselined in the next fiscal year, and why?

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, that is a
3 good question. That is a question I'll be prepared
4 to discuss in more detail in March when,
5 traditionally, we have these conversations. But, as
6 you know, it was very beneficial in terms of the 43
7 million that was given to parks this year and we look
8 forward to the conversation to continue when we have
9 the preliminary budget hearings in March.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Okay. And this is
11 my last two question, Mr. Chair, if that's? One
12 more? Okay. One more. Okay. I better make a
13 good. Wow. I have so many. I guess I want to ask--
14 going to make it local. So, Union Square Park, great
15 Park. Great place. We have a little bit of a trash
16 issue there. There tends to be-- it's clearly a
17 very busy park. It's legendary. All of these
18 things. So, when you go to pick up the trash, you
19 have these push carts and they put them at the side
20 of Union Square East and when the trucks calm to
21 empty the push carts, there is-- they park in the
22 bike lane. So, we have been talking to Parks and I
23 know the Department of Transportation, you have to
24 work together to find a solution for maybe the west
25 side or the north side, but we been able to get a

2 timeline on when we could find a solution so that way
3 we can get the trash out, keep the bike lane clear,
4 and then keep it nice and clean. So, if you could
5 just maybe get back to my office on that and,
6 additionally, the last thing I wanted to mention was
7 talking about the citywide Conservancy that was
8 mentioned in the report in terms of the Center for
9 and Urban Future and how we could, maybe, work
10 together on whether it is citywide or more nuanced
11 and support the smallest parks to make sure there's
12 equitable resources. So thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Yeah.
14 Commissioner, you mentioned that you have an app to
15 mobilize the maintenance crews to different parks.
16 Can you give us some details on how you use the app
17 system?

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: You want to know
19 more information about how the app works?

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: No. No. How you
21 mobilize the-- How you assign people to different
22 parks. Yeah. And how you make sure these workers,
23 when they go there, they did a good job? How the
24 supervisors know they're doing a good job or not
25 goofing off.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: So, the app
3 that I mentioned is called daily tasks. It tracks
4 the daily tasks done that are associated with
5 cleaning of parks. So, there are two components of
6 daily tasks. One is the component followed by the
7 staff that are sent out on predetermined routes and
8 it's on a handheld device like this that we provide
9 to staff and they, literally, record everything they
10 do in the park. When they show up, what they did,
11 when they leave, etc. Then there is a separate
12 component of daily tasks which is called the
13 supervisor application of daily tasks. And the
14 supervisors do the inspections referred to by
15 Commissioner Kavanaugh and follow the routes to make
16 sure that the work was done to an appropriate level
17 in all of that is recorded in as close to real time
18 as possible on their mobile devices.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: What is the ratio of
20 supervisor to workers? How many workers they are
21 supervising for each supervisor?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: It varies. We
23 can look into that and get you the range. It varies
24 greatly depending on the time of year, because as
25 Commissioner Silver mentioned earlier, during our

2 peak season, we step up many folks in the supervisor
3 roles because, again, we almost double the number of
4 staff that we manage. So, we will get you that
5 range.

6 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, if a constituent or
7 anyone complains about a park not being clean, what
8 is the process? They call 311 or they call you guys?

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, one, I'm
10 pleased to say that it is rare that a park is not
11 clean, but in the event it is not clean, they can
12 contact 311-- or I would say 311 would be the best
13 way of doing it. If they are aware of who their
14 borough commissioner is, they can always call the
15 borough office, but 311 would be the best. I guess
16 is, by the time that call comes in, about problem has
17 been abated because we clean the parks so many times
18 during the week.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Council member Gjonaj to
21 ask questions.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Thank you,
23 Chairman. So good to see you, again, Commissioner.
24 I was so happy and pleased with the last meeting that
25 we recently had. I know that we have a few things to

2 follow up on and I know that we are going to continue
3 this partnership of ours, but I can't help but
4 mention, since our meeting-- I represent the largest
5 park in New York City. 2700 acres. We don't have
6 the equipment necessary to maintain the largest park
7 in New York City. We don't have the manpower.
8 Although the grass does get cut, we have a problem
9 with the hedges that don't seem to follow
10 simultaneously and I know that is a lack of time and
11 maintenance issues, but we had to hold the first-
12 ever, believe it or not, grass Summit meeting in my
13 office with-- actually, Assemblyman Michael
14 Benedetto's office-- where we brought in state DOT,
15 city DOT, sanitation, and Parks Department to address
16 some very fundamental conditions of Pelham Parkway.
17 To my surprise, no one knows cut the grass for years
18 or was willing to admit to cutting the grass on
19 Pelham Parkway, the median and the sides of Pelham
20 Parkway. This is the major park way leading into
21 Pelham Bay Park, Orchard Beach. The first impression
22 that our visitors get where you yourself may have
23 seen the pictures. It was more like a wheat field
24 than Parkland where it was as tall as me. And I was
25 months of trying to figure out who is going to be

2 responsible. Before you answer that, pocket parks
3 don't have a dedicated routine maintenance staff.
4 And those are the Greenleaf pocket parks I am
5 referring to. What do you refer to them as?

6 Green streets?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Green streets. No
8 dedicated staff. I don't see a steady funding stream
9 for abandoned boats for waterfront communities and
10 debris that washes up on our shorelines and, although
11 parks department is the agency responsible for these
12 properties, we know that there is agreements in place
13 with other agencies that you've indicated you would
14 be continuing with the Commissioners at your next
15 meeting. I hope to get an update on that. But they
16 abandoned boats that create a life and health safety
17 issue to other boaters, as well that I have polluted
18 our shorelines, it takes years to have the most
19 minuscule investment made into removing those eyes
20 sores and potential safety issues. Your partnerships
21 with friends and not for profits is great, but they
22 cannot be police officers. We have a very active
23 group that pursues illegal barbecuing and homeless
24 encampments and we haven't been brought up to date on
25 the posting of when a park opens and when a park

2 closes or Parkland, I should say, in particular.
3 Pelham Parkway. So we can better enforce the
4 regulations. On the last point I want to bring up as
5 we recognize there is a real shortfall in the budget
6 that you have when it comes to capital and
7 maintenance requests. Why would we put the
8 jurisdiction of Heart Island into parks
9 responsibility when you currently don't have the
10 means necessary for maintenance and improvements?
11 Taking on such a large responsibility is one that I
12 would love to hear how parks is currently going to
13 meet the needs of maintaining the largest public
14 cemetery in the country. Thank you.

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you for those
16 questions, Council member. There were quite a few.
17 I will try to take them in order and then ask the
18 deputy commissioners to respond. As you know, we are
19 having conversations about those green assets that
20 are maintained by multiple jurisdictions and we will
21 get back to you once we understand the resolution.
22 In terms of green streets that are assets, anything
23 that we are in charge of does get maintained.
24 They're going to be by mobile crews. We will not
25 have fixed crews for greenways or green streets, but

2 we do have mobile crews that are assigned to address
3 them over a specific time. Some green streets,
4 because they are traffic islands, we want to make
5 sure they are safe for our maintenance crews to
6 maintain them so there is no fear of having any type
7 of accident. But they are part of our maintenance
8 operations per borough. The other question you had
9 mentioned-- and that includes the green streets. In
10 terms of the Part Island, that right now is a bill
11 that is pending. That is something that the Council
12 will have to deliberate on. If it is ultimately--
13 impassive, then this is something that there is a
14 timeline that we will be asked to take care of that
15 facility. But that is now part of an active
16 discussion and legislation that, I believe, is
17 already moving forward. And so, certainly, we can
18 have conversations with you about that, but that,
19 right now, discussion is already taken place. I
20 don't know if I missed any of the other questions,
21 but I think I covered all the--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: No. Abandoned
23 boats.

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Oh. Abandoned
25 boats.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: And debris.

3 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Let me refer that
4 to--

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH:

6 Council member, since hurricane Sandy, the city
7 and the parks department have had contracts to remove
8 abandoned boats and other vessels and marine debris
9 in general from places all over the city. If there
10 are particular places within your district, let us
11 know and we will get those contracts to remove them.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Are you going to
13 commit to me? Because I have both set of been out
14 there for a decade. Before hurricane Sandy and after
15 hurricane Sandy and I have not been removed and you
16 all.

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: If
18 they are on our property, we will remove them.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: They are on
20 waterways. You are responsible for removing--

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: We
22 are responsible for some waterways, yes. And we take
23 care of them. The Department of Citywide
24 Administrator of Services, who administers the
25 contract and who we work with very closely on that

2 program is responsible for more waterways than we
3 are. Give us the list. We'll take a look at it and
4 we'll let you know what we can do.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Why do I have a
6 funny feeling I'm going to have a boat summit next to
7 find out who is responsible for what? You know what
8 the problem is? New Yorkers don't really care. They
9 don't care if it's sanitation, parks, or if it's city
10 DOT or state DOT. They want basics. Cut grass. It
11 grows. You're supposed to have a program in place to
12 get it cut. If there is a sunken boat or if there is
13 debris that washed up on our shoreline, they don't
14 care who is responsible. They expect someone to be
15 doing that work and when we get into this gray area
16 about, well, I'm not sure if I'm responsible or
17 they're responsible, it looks like government is
18 failing and it is failing them. These are basics.
19 If there is a sunken boat out there, it should be on
20 everyone's radar. You don't need me or the community
21 to bring that to your attention. If there is
22 overgrown grass, you don't need the elected officials
23 or the community to bring it to your attention.
24 There are multiple agencies responsible to oversee
25 this. Which leads me to my last point. I am one of

2 the few council districts that does not have the
3 luxury of a pool. It's unfortunate that 170,000
4 residents do not have use of a public pool. I have
5 brought this up before. I have offered alternatives
6 where we can use our existing waterways and have
7 these new pools that are being looked into as a very
8 viable and inexpensive option. And before I turn
9 over the microphone to you, I am very fond of our
10 borough parks commissioner, Iris Rodriguez. She does
11 an excellent job.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Council
13 member King. Your ask questions?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Thank you, Mr.
15 Chair and Commissioner and the wonderful team at
16 parks. Go Iris. We are Iris fans here. My
17 questions are very brief in regards to the
18 maintenance of our parks. I would like to know what
19 kind of system that's in place that actually tracks
20 when a call comes in and how do we know that the job
21 is finished? And is there a timeline by the time a
22 r-- a complaint or a request comes in that the
23 systems in place that you have two weeks to handle
24 this or one week to handle this? Because Council
25 member Gjonaj mentioned and I know I have parks in my

2 district that, because of weather, bushes are six
3 feet tall. We had a young lady that was stabbed and
4 injured because of visibility because the trees were
5 blocking the lights. So I did share that because it
6 was all on the news, but still it hasn't been cut
7 yet. So I'm asking you what is that process that you
8 all have to make sure that this gets managed and
9 taken care. What timelines that you work with so you
10 know someone is responding and being held
11 accountable. If they haven't [inaudible 01:16:28]
12 then why and why not? My second question goes to the
13 fact of your workers, your seasonal workers.
14 Summertime is a good high-spirit time, but come in
15 the winter when you do downsize, what do we do with
16 these workers? Can we find ways to utilize them
17 because parks still need help in the wintertime? You
18 may not need as many workers, but how do we still
19 maximize them in our system so not every season
20 you're training a whole bunch of new workers every
21 day to keep stability within your Parks Department?
22 I understand from bodies there can be shortages at
23 any given time of people getting appointed to certain
24 because of personnel. I'd just like to know how you
25 manage that. And then the last question I have for

2 you is what maintenance challenges that you know that
3 you have that we in the city Council can help you out
4 with?

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you for those
6 questions, Council member King. To answer your first
7 question, 311 is always the best approach. That is
8 tracked and we will respond on 311 about how that
9 issue was addressed. Clearly, people fax us, call
10 us. There are a lot of methods. We prefer 311
11 because it is tracked and we are able to address it
12 through that system. In some cases, what someone may
13 see as a concern after going out and inspecting it,
14 we may have a different perspective. That's always
15 difficult to share, but we do look at the 311 calls
16 coming in and we do have an obligation to respond
17 back so that the person that's calling it in, whether
18 it's by app or by call, gets a response. So all
19 those vary. If it's a different situation, we do ask
20 for a high level of intervention. If some [inaudible
21 01:18:13] took place and there seems to be some
22 visual obstacles-- as you all know, the whole parks
23 and boarder is to provide more visibility to the
24 parks, reducing fences, removing vegetation. That is
25 a high priority. So that is something we certainly

1 take a look at. In terms of the seasonal workers,
2 they sign on knowing that it is for a season. The
3 good news about retraining is many of them return
4 again and again whether they are retirees or they
5 just are-- like working in parks in a seasonal
6 basis. You heard the period can be quite long. They
7 are comfortable with that schedule and so we are very
8 blessed to have a lot of our seasonal workers return
9 again and again, which minimizes the retraining of
10 these employees. I did answer earlier, but in terms
11 of our challenges, we really don't have any
12 challenges, per se, on an operational maintenance
13 side. It's something that we embrace as part of our
14 daily operation. Our staff takes great pride. I
15 think the challenge coming in-- I was somewhat
16 frustrated when I found out that parks were open
17 seven days a week, but we were only cleaning some
18 parks only five days a week and I felt that had to be
19 rectified. So we were able to get infusion baseline
20 funding from the mayor in FY 2017 and that was-- now
21 we are able to, for the top 100 hotspot parks where
22 barbequing and other things take place, they are now
23 cleaned seven days a week for the first time. And so
24 that was a challenge because I kept getting calls and
25

2 photographs of overflowing garbage cans come Monday
3 morning and now staff is very grateful because they
4 are not confronting that mess come Monday morning and
5 they are able to intercept and take that trash out
6 over the weekend. So, as part of our operations, we
7 don't see it as a challenge. We see it as something
8 that it is a privilege to keep these parks clean for
9 New Yorkers and visitors.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Thank you for your
11 answers and that you, in advance, again, with your
12 help with Haven Park and the pool. Thank you for
13 that. We're excited about what that finished product
14 is going to look like. So, thank you again for all
15 the work that you gentleman do, and ladies do, to
16 make sure our parks look great in the city of New
17 York. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Council
19 member King. And, Commissioner, I want to ask you a
20 couple questions and then we will turn to other
21 Council members again. What is the role that the
22 Park Inspection Program, PIP, plays in determining
23 what types of maintenance is needed in a particular
24 park?

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: The PIP program,
3 the Parks Inspection Program, has been around for
4 almost 30 years and it is a valuable part of our
5 operation. It's somewhat of an audit function, so
6 it's outside of the maintenance and operations. They
7 inspect-- do about 6000 inspections every year and
8 almost every park property is inspected about twice a
9 year. It is instrumental in telling us what needs to
10 get fix. It is very detailed. We have overall
11 condition and then we have cleanliness. So we are
12 able to in and staff does not know when these
13 inspectors are showing up. And then we meet once a
14 month to analyze that data. Just like the police
15 have CompStat, it's kind of ParkStat--

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Uh-hm.

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: so to speak and it
18 let's both the Chief Operating Officer and the Deputy
19 Commissioner-- First Deputy Commissioner understand
20 where we need to make some adjustments. There could
21 be a variety of reasons, but it also gives us an
22 indication of what capital improvements are already
23 needed. Also needed. It tells about some of the
24 trends. We may see some districts trending more
25 positive. Some trending in a different direction.

2 But we are able intercede early to find out exactly
3 what was going on. Is it the right crew? Is it
4 weather? Is it the supervisor? So we can go in and
5 give the support of what is needed. Was it
6 equipment? To that particular district. So it's
7 instrumental and critical to our operation so much so
8 that it is part of the mayor's management report and
9 that is something we are very transparent about. We
10 are very pleased with the 95 and 90 percent rating
11 for condition and for overall cleanliness.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, does the department
13 reallocate or increase maintenance workers if a park
14 or ground does not meet the PIP inspection criteria?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It is possible.
16 I'll let the Deputy Commissioners respond. It is
17 possible. We first try to see exactly what is going
18 on. We have our Chief of Operations, we have our
19 Commissioner level to determine what exactly what the
20 issue is before we try to make adjustments to
21 additional staff. So I'll let the Commissioners
22 respond, but it does vary.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay.

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Yes. As
25 Commissioner Silver said, we look at the data at

2 almost a daily basis. So we won't adjust staff based
3 upon one report. One PIP report. But if we start to
4 see trends over a number of weeks or months of a
5 district or a sector that is performing poorly in one
6 function or another within a borough, we can adjust
7 staff to address the conditions to elevate the
8 cleanliness and the overall condition at those site.

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: So, not on a
11 day by day basis, but over a trend basis, yes.

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So, the good news
13 is because we meet monthly, you do not see problems
14 surfacing in parks on the maintenance side. We know
15 right away and we are able to intercede right away
16 and not wait for several cycles to take place.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Are these reports
18 available online for the public to see?

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: All of the PIP
21 data is available through our website. Through
22 Parks. And then through the open data. NYC Open
23 Data.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. Thank you. Now,
3 I turn to Council member Cohen to ask questions.
4 Yeah.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you, Chair
6 Koo. Good to see you, Commissioner. We actually
7 spent a fair amount of time this summer. I think we
8 did a couple of groundbreaking. Some ribbon
9 cuttings. We had a good summer. So it's good to see
10 you back here at City Hall. I have a bunch of
11 questions that are sort of all over the map. A
12 couple of years ago, we had a hearing of PEP and the
13 high turnover rate on PEP. Has there been any
14 progress made on that front on PEP retention?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There has been. We
16 were able to work with the unit to increase the
17 number of hours per week which increased the salary.
18 And we also did employee survey to find out some of
19 the concerns. This was across the board with all
20 agencies. We recognize retention for PEP was an
21 issue. A lot of them were moving on to NYPD and
22 other, you know, corrections because we are told we
23 have some of the best and brightest in recruiting and
24 our standards of being a peace officer. But we have
25 seen that stabilize a bit. Personally, at all

2 events, during my personal recognition and showing my
3 appreciation, giving them all the support they need.
4 We're doing new training facilities. So we are doing
5 whatever we can to upgrade their experience because
6 we care deeply about the work that they do. So we
7 have seen those numbers stabilize. Do we still have
8 some attrition? Yes. Many, after being with parks,
9 realize they have hire pay in other opportunities in
10 the city of New York or elsewhere, but we were very
11 pleased that we were able to address some of the
12 severe retention losses we were experiencing in the
13 past.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: And along those
15 lines, I was a little surprised to learn, I guess,
16 PEP is not on the job 24 hours a day. There's not
17 PEP-- because I think all of us have probably
18 experienced a lot of times where there will be a
19 disturbance in the park, noise, and it's all the
20 police department at that point. I don't know what
21 hour PEP wraps up, but--

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct. We have
23 the two shifts and there are some special occasions
24 when we have certain events, but most of those events
25 end around 10 o'clock, but they do have to stay

2 whether it's New Year's Even or some events in some
3 of the larger parks. They do have to stay beyond 10
4 o'clock. But we do have primarily two shifts to do
5 our coverage in New York City parks.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I've been working
7 closely with the 50th and, you know, in Van Cortland
8 Park, it all falls into the jurisdiction of the 50th,
9 but some of it is very far from any other place in
10 the 50th. So, working with the 52nd precinct and the
11 50th to deal with when we have partying and
12 barbequing that goes well, you know, past midnight
13 and I see on social media people who can't sleep and
14 can't enjoy their home because of disturbances in the
15 park. You know, we talked a little bit about mowing.
16 And, you know, I've got to give credit where credit
17 is due. This summer that was just past was better,
18 but the summer before, we really had challenges all
19 over the Bronx, is my understanding. And this summer
20 was much better. So, but it appears to me that the
21 equipment levels-- there's not a lot of margin in
22 the Parks Department with equipment. If a piece
23 breaks, you really feel it. And I think that we need
24 to have a commitment to try to like-- the there be
25 maybe like a couple of backup mowers so that, in

2 addition to getting them repaired, that you also have
3 another mower that operation doesn't-- yes. Please.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Yes. Thank
5 you, Councilman, first of all, for recognizing the
6 improvement in the Bronx. And it's interesting,
7 specifically, that improvement occurred because we
8 replaced a lot of equipment in the Bronx between 2018
9 and 2019, both combining Bronx resources that
10 Commissioner Rodriguez, Rosa made available and
11 central resources that we had. So, we are in the
12 process, now, as we are wrapping down our moving
13 season-- by the time we end-- finish moving by the
14 middle of October, we will do a full diagnostic and
15 debrief on all five boroughs and then we've also--
16 we have already identified some resources to purchase
17 additional equipment. We are trying to build
18 redundancy into the system. We recently had a
19 success in building redundancy into our forestry
20 equipment, which is very important and responding to
21 forestry issues. Now, we are looking building
22 redundancy in the turf maintenance.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: And I wonder, is
24 the Parks Department given any thought to more
25 creative uses of groundcover? I mean, grass is a

2 pain to maintain and I don't know why we are so eager
3 to cover everything in grass. If we could use IV use
4 or other kinds of plantings, maybe we can reduce some
5 of-- you know? Because I get a lot of complaints.
6 You know? I know you get a lot of complaints--

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: when the grass is
9 not trimmed.

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'm sure we could
11 all comment. There is some plant material that does
12 attract rodents, so we have to be careful. It
13 depends on user experience. I mean, we have 30,000
14 acres. A lot of it, 10,000, is natural area. It
15 does impact the type of use. We explore synthetic
16 turf. There is only so much we can do there. We do
17 natural turf. There are options for groundcovers,
18 but even with that, maintaining it, and how do you
19 allow the public to enjoy those areas varies. So,
20 I'm sure all of us can weigh in and have a comment,
21 but, clearly, having natural grass or natural turf
22 provides the most options for the public to use and
23 mowing in edging seems to be the way you maintain, as
24 well as your seeding and aeration during some parts
25 of the season.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: We also do
3 regularly look at areas that we can take out of
4 regular mowing regime and put into meadow grasses and
5 other things that are only required to be mowed twice
6 a year. They are more environmentally sustainable
7 and appropriate and, in many ways, they support lots
8 of species. You know, there can be challenges with
9 the fact that, generally, our park users expect this
10 kind of appearance of a mown lawn when they come to a
11 park. So we also have to balance use patterns,
12 perception of what maintenance looks like to our park
13 users, environmental, and then, of course, budget and
14 resources.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Along those lines
16 also a few years ago, we did a hearing on the use of
17 herbicides in the parks. I've been getting a lot of
18 emails from people and it does seem to be, you know--
19 I'm not a scientist, but there does seem to be a sort
20 of more growing consensus about the dangers
21 associated with the round. I was convinced,
22 actually, the last time we had this conversation
23 about, you know, the dangers imposed by basic species
24 versus the benefits of using herbicides, but I am
25 wondering if it is worth revisiting some point, that

2 discussion, as there does seem to be, again, more of
3 a consensus growing around-- I know Roundup is the
4 commercial name, but you know what I am talking
5 about.

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH:

7 Councilmember, we are very aware of all the
8 concerns and debate around use of herbicides in
9 general and glyphosate, in particular. We have
10 significantly reduced our use of glyphosate in parks
11 where there is the likelihood of any kind of public
12 contact. And we have limited it to places where
13 public contact is unlikely. You know, for example,
14 are Green Street where we growth can interfere with
15 visibility for drivers and pedestrians and we don't
16 want our employees to be repeatedly out in traffic
17 maintaining those places. And in natural areas where
18 we are closing places for restoration purpose says
19 and where we could not control invasive spy any other
20 means. We simply couldn't do it mechanically. As a
21 result, I mean, we didn't see more weeds captured in
22 our park inspection program inspections, of course,
23 for this year. We are looking at other alternatives
24 that, you know, may help us prevent weed growth in
25 those places and other, you know, methods of removing

2 them when it does occur. But we have significantly
3 reduced use of, specifically, glyphosate and we are
4 looking for alternatives.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Okay. I appreciate
6 that. You know, I don't know if this is anything to
7 do with the parks or this is OMB or, but up until
8 this year, because we talked about friends groups, we
9 were able to, through the city Parks foundation, is
10 very sort of like micro grants that were able to go
11 to the friends of groups to help them support the
12 programming and we were not able to do that this
13 year. I don't know what-- if you know. All right.
14 Matt is ready to--

15 MATT DRURY: Yeah. Matt Drury. Director
16 of government relations for parks department. It's my
17 understanding that central Council, I believe--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: An internal
19 decision.

20 MATT DRURY: An internal decision was made
21 to discourage what is determined as fiscal conduits
22 to third-party organizations that can't be formally
23 incorporated. You know, they don't have a 501(c)(3)
24 number. That sort of thing.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: We should try to
3 figure out a way to support those groups because they
4 were-- the small amounts of money that were, I
5 think, really well used and very appreciated on the
6 ground. So, we did lawn. We did that. Do you know
7 if the Van Cortland pedestrian bridge is back on
8 track? I'm not getting more money for the bridge, so
9 hopefully that will-- and, you know, there was a
10 discussion about pools and I would like to maybe have
11 a discussion with you at some point about I think
12 there is an opportunity for greater utilization of
13 the Van Cortland Park pool. It's a hidden gem. It
14 shouldn't be a hidden gem. It instead should be out
15 there kind of bling gem. So, I would like to work on
16 something that we could do maybe to try to increase
17 the visibility of the pool. Thank you, Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, Commissioners, New
19 York City is a big problem. It's always talked about
20 in the press. It's the rat problem, no? So, what is
21 the parks department doing about the route problems
22 in the parks? Are you training some special people
23 to address this or you're hiring outside
24 exterminators to do the job?

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: First Deputy

3 Commissioner Kavanaugh respond, but we are taking the
4 matter very seriously. It varies from place to
5 place. The mayor also made this a top priority. And
6 so, we, dealing with a Department of Mental Health
7 and Hygiene to identify the locations of these rat
8 reservoirs where they are a problem and then there
9 are different strategies we use to address them. My,
10 I will let Commissioner Kavanaugh go into more
11 detail.

12 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: As

13 Commissioner Silver noted, the Parks Department is
14 part of the neighborhood rat reduction program led by
15 Deputy Mayor England. The health department using
16 311 data in their own inspections have identified
17 areas in the city that have higher than acceptable
18 levels of rodent activity. We identify the parks
19 within those zones and, through the mayor's
20 initiative, we have received additional staff for
21 both cleaning, for exterminators-- we have our own
22 exterminators who work for us full-time-- supplies
23 and equipment such as a rodent resistant trash
24 receptacles, and other equipment and material to help
25 us address the rodent problems. In the zones that

2 have been targeted by the Department of Health, we
3 have reduce the signs of rat activity by 50 percent
4 so far. Our goal is to reduce it by 70 percent, so
5 we still have a way to go, but we still have made
6 significant progress in those areas by focusing on
7 cleaning, reducing food sources, illuminating
8 harborage. What they call harborage. The ability
9 for rats to find shelter, and to treat for rats on an
10 aggressive schedule. So we are doing a lot. There
11 is a lot of rats in the city. We are continuing to
12 be committed to it, but we made some really
13 significant progress.

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Do you have the special
15 garbage cans in the parks and so the rats cannot go
16 into the food? Leftovers? Or it's just open cans?

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: No.
18 In the parks, we have quite a range of trash
19 receptacles in the park system, unfortunately. But,
20 in the zones that we have targeted to reduce the rat
21 population, we have two principal types of
22 receptacles. One is called a big belly. It is a
23 solar powered compactor that is completely wrap
24 proof. A rat cannot get into it. They are very
25 effective, but they are expensive. And then the

2 sanitation department has developed a new design. We
3 call it the steel can. It's a tall steel receptacle
4 that is also very effective at preventing rats from
5 getting into food sources. They are much less
6 expensive than the big bellies and we are using a lot
7 of them in the parks that we have targeted for the
8 rat reduction program.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Do you use poisons to
10 kill rats?

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: We
12 use a range of products. We have been especially
13 using dry eyes which is, technically, not a poison,
14 but it is a registered pesticide. It is effective
15 and it does have the benefit of not creating what is
16 known as a secondary kill. We still do use some
17 rodenticide's the have a poison as part of their
18 ingredients. We use them on a limited basis and we
19 don't use them in places where there are nesting
20 hawks or other wildlife that might feed on the
21 rodents--

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Uh-huh.

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: and
24 thus be poisoned in turn.

2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Council
3 member Brannan, do you have questions?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Thank you,
5 Chair. I was walking my dogs last night in a park
6 and I got caught in sprinkler, but I want take that
7 out on you personally, even though we--

8 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: Was
9 it irrigation or a [inaudible 01:38:26] sprinkler?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: It was
11 actually 97th street ramp, so I can't complain about
12 it. Something that Councilman Gjonaj said-- I sort
13 of share his frustration. And I have a fantastic
14 relationship with Marty Mar, the Brooklyn Parks
15 Commissioner, but there is definite frustration on
16 the maintenance stuff in that so much of our jobs as
17 Council member and dealing with city agencies has to
18 be, unfortunately, reactive. You know, and I think
19 before 9 o'clock every morning, I send Marty like 10
20 emails of stuff I've seen that needs to be addressed.
21 And I was looking at an old report about back in the
22 70s during the height of the fiscal crises that Parks
23 had a staff of a little over 11,500 to do exclusively
24 maintenance operations. Once the account today?

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It varies. The
3 numbers 3000 to 5500.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: What is it?

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: 3000 to 5500,
6 depending on the time of year.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Okay. So that
8 means that we had more than double the amount of
9 staffers working on maintenance and operations back
10 during the worst times in city history?

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Let me, since I was
12 not here at the time in Commissioner Kavanaugh was,
13 maybe he could add some--

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: I
15 was not.

16 [laughter]

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: For
18 the record.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: All right.
20 Well--

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: I
22 know it's white hair.

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: You have more
24 insight and I--

2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH:

3 Council member, I will say that it is very
4 difficult to compare, you know, numbers from today
5 and numbers in the seven days. It is [inaudible
6 01:40:11].

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Why? I mean,
8 but--

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH:

10 But--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Why? Why is
12 it hard?

13 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: Only
14 because the way the city accounted for things is
15 different between the two eras.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Okay.

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: Let
18 me give you--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Yeah.

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: some
21 examples. So, the 11,500, I believe, refers to what
22 is known, in budget jargon, as full-time equivalents.
23 And that is all of both the seasonal staff and, at
24 the time, the Parks Department and benefited from--
25 not sure what the years were, but a federal program

2 called SETA which provided a lot of staffers for the
3 Parks department.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Okay.

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: Now,
6 our full time equivalent-- Yes. Commissioner Silver
7 is absolutely right. We have approximately 4700
8 full-time employees in the Parks Department, but, in
9 addition to that, we have, roughly, on average, 1700
10 POP workers. The use of the transitional workers
11 through the HRA program that work for the parks
12 department. We have our seasonal staff that comes on
13 in the summer and, you know, about 1500 or so are
14 dedicated. Actually, more than that. I don't
15 remember the number. [Inaudible 01:41:14] are
16 dedicated to maintenance. So, full-time equivalent
17 is actually about 7500 per year. So, that gap is a
18 lot different. And what makes up the gap between now
19 and the 1970s-- I'm not quite sure. I can't answer
20 that. My suspicion is it has to do with the SETA
21 employees that were assigned to the Parks Department
22 at the time.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Okay.

24 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER KAVANAUGH: So,
25 there were lots of differences. And then, you know,

2 the fact of the matter is that, compared to the 60s
3 and 70s, you know, all-- not all, but there's market
4 efficiencies that have occurred since then in terms
5 of equipment and tools and things like that that are
6 extremely different. And I can give you a couple of
7 examples, but I don't want to pour everybody on that.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: I mean, I
9 understand even getting into the semantics. It still
10 just seems like a huge difference. I understand that
11 the titles have changed in that kind of stuff, but
12 how does parks currently do maintenance inspections?
13 I mean, is a sort of, you know, the guy who collects
14 the garbage he goes out there and collects the
15 garbage. There is no one though call him up and say,
16 hey, go check out this park today. It looks really
17 bad.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: As was stated, we
19 have a separate unit. Somewhat of an audit division
20 that independently goes out and will inspect a park
21 at least each one twice a year. So, we do 6000
22 inspections. But, in addition--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: I'm talking
24 about like daily. Daily stuff.

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There is da-- Yes.
3 Well, I'll let Commissioner Focht-- but the answer
4 is, yes. There is daily. And I do want to emphasize
5 I know I often hear the numbers. The bottom line is
6 we now become a lot smarter, through technology and
7 having the proper routes and crew size that our
8 numbers are 90 percent and so we've learned, over
9 time, Commissioner Kavanaugh is saying is that
10 approaching part maintenance is very different and in
11 the past. When you had 11,000, you just a ploy them.
12 And now there are smarter ways way to our work. But
13 now coming up with this routing software, we have now
14 optimized our routes. We have optimized our crew
15 size at what makes the most sense. For us, it's
16 about a crew chief with a crew of four. I'm sure
17 before they probably had 15 going out to clean a
18 park. So, we have learned a lot over time and so we
19 are very efficient. And so, if you look at them
20 numbers of the mayor's report on keeping our parks
21 clean. I will refer now to Commissioner Focht to go
22 into more detail on how those daily inspections take
23 place.

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: So, on a daily
25 basis, our staff is deployed based upon predetermined

2 rounds. They are managed by his supervisor. The
3 supervisor independently follows the cruise and make
4 sure the work is done and then the supervisor-- That
5 is on a daily basis. On a monthly basis, the
6 supervisors independently visit every site in their
7 geographic areas of responsibility and to an
8 independent audit or assessment of those sites. That
9 will look more toward structural issues like gap
10 playgrounds and drinking fountains and stuff like
11 that. And then, on top of that, we have the semi-
12 independent system that Commissioner Silver spoke
13 about. The Parks Inspection Program that does 6000
14 audits a year. But on a daily basis, every site that
15 our staff is followed up by a crew chief or
16 supervisor to make sure that the work that they were
17 assigned to do is done.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Okay. I think
19 there's a lack of efficient, at least, on our end
20 just because we have to work so closely with the
21 local staff. And they are very responsive. You
22 know, they're fantastic, but the fact that there is
23 an overflowing garbage can on the Lord, you know,
24 there was a mess left at a park over a weekend, the
25 fact that we have to notify the Parks folks who will

2 then run away go and address it, there is a
3 disconnect there. So, we may have found some, you
4 know, ways to increase efficiency as far as staffing
5 numbers and stuff, but as far as being proactive
6 versus being reactive, there seems to be still a
7 considerable Delta. And, honestly, it's outrageous
8 how little this administration gives money to the
9 parks department. I think it is insane. I mean, I
10 think if you ask any of my colleagues, this is a huge
11 issue. You know? And we understand the constraints.
12 I mean, obviously, you can't admit it, but we
13 understand the constraints that you are under which
14 is why we fought so hard to get that additional 43
15 million this year, but I know it is just a drop in
16 the bucket. And, but with the amount of complaints
17 and concerns I hear from my colleagues and how much
18 of it, you know, revolves around parks and parks
19 maintenance, I wish the administration would
20 prioritize giving the Parks the money that they
21 deserve to get this done the right way. So, I
22 appreciate the work that you guys do with the meager
23 tools that you have been given and we want to be
24 partners. You know, we don't want to be adversaries.

2 We want to be at partners to try to close this gap
3 because it, ultimately, benefits everybody. So--

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, certainly, we
5 encourage more conversations. I'll speak with
6 Commissioner Mar about some of the concerns you
7 raised since we do have these monthly meetings. Just
8 by way of example, you probably know I went out to
9 Als Head and I was there when a worker actually was,
10 with a car, loading up some of the trash. And I
11 didn't find not one piece of garbage in the park, but
12 she said, if you were here this morning, she said,
13 the day before it is a place where she said where
14 there are quincenieras, whatever there is, there are
15 lots of lots of parties. They don't just bring
16 regular trash, but whatever gifts and boxes, they're
17 just overflowing. But when I got there, that was
18 Sunday morning, the park was spotless and she was
19 lifting some of the bags. So, it could be timing,
20 but I am certainly open to figure out exactly what is
21 happening in your district. That is something we can
22 go back to address. But our expectation is the staff
23 likes to have those parks clean. It is something
24 they are committed to doing, but if there is a

2 problem somewhere, we certainly want to figure out
3 what it is so we can make that adjustment.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Thank you.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: And,
6 Councilman, I just would like to address that
7 certainly some element of our work will always be
8 reactive and we certainly appreciate your kind words
9 about Brooklyn's staff being reactive, but the basis
10 of our operations is a proactive basis. We
11 preplanned routes. We determine the right level of
12 staffing and I suspect that the conditions that you
13 see and you may notify Commissioner Mar about it at 8
14 o'clock in the morning at a certain overflowing
15 trashcan on a playground, a mobile crew is about to
16 hit that site at 10:30 in the morning and take care
17 of the situation. The situation is not going to last
18 for more than a few hours because, again, the vast
19 majority of sites are covered on mobile crews.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Obviously. No
21 one ever calls Councilperson this say I wanted to
22 send you a photo of a perfectly clean garbage can.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Us, too. They
24 don't do that to us, either.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: So, no. I get
3 it. It's just, you know, people's heads explode when
4 they see the garments can overflowing. Then, after
5 it's fixed, they're on to the next thing. So, but I
6 appreciate it.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Yeah. So
8 that concludes the administration testimony. We will
9 now go into a public participation. We will call
10 four persons at a time. The first panel will be Lynn
11 Kelly, New Yorkers for Parks, Adriana Espinoza, New
12 York League for Conservation Voters, Hunter
13 Armstrong, Natural Area Conservancies, and Corey
14 Povos, Prospect Park Alliance. But before we start,
15 I want to take a five-minute break so people can go
16 to the bathroom at a stretch. It's not good to sell
17 for too long. Five minutes. Can Sergeant-at-arms
18 get a pause for five minutes? So, Sergeant-at-
19 arms, are you ready? So, we will start our public
20 participation. The first panel is already here. You
21 can identify yourself and you may begin. Identify
22 yourself first.

23 LYNN KELLY: Hello. I'm Lynn Kelly and I
24 am the executive director for New Yorkers for Parks.
25 Before we begin, I want to just thank the Council, in

2 particular our speaker for reconstituting this
3 committee. I want to welcome Counsel member Koo, and
4 I want to acknowledge that, finely, the parks
5 committee reflects 50 percent of the users of parks
6 and over 70 percent of the management of parks and I
7 welcome Councilwomen Rivera and Adams in that regard.
8 So, I thank you. New Yorkers for Parks is a founding
9 member of the Play Fair Coalition. You are familiar
10 with us. Many of our coalition members are here
11 today to speak. Thank you for staying and listening
12 to the public testimony. I am going to breeze
13 through some of this. You heard today how this money
14 is being allocated from the Parks Department in terms
15 of the new funding. It is great that Parks as jumped
16 in so quickly to be able to move on this money. I
17 want to know some concerns. One, we didn't hear
18 where these positions are going to be allocated.
19 Distributions five, by parks, one is the process for
20 that? How is that being determined? And, two, that
21 we understand that it is harder to hire certain
22 positions. Certainly gardeners and PEP officers, but
23 the clock is ticking and if we don't fulfill those
24 PEP officer positions quickly, we will lose the
25 opportunity. And I want to point that out. Lastly,

2 on the community gardens, I also want to mention that
3 there is a lot of money on the table, which we are
4 happy is going to be distributed to the community
5 gardens throughout the city. We understand there are
6 open issues with the license agreement as an advocate
7 for community gardens. We do not want the issues
8 with the license agreement to be connected or tied or
9 held up in any way as it relates to the distribution
10 of the funding. We are also working under the clock
11 of Mother Nature. These gardeners need their tools.
12 They need to be able to get into their gardens. We
13 are in support of a transparent process as it relates
14 to the allocation of the 43 million dollars and
15 continued reporting measures. We will certainly be
16 keeping an eye on that and encourage the coalition to
17 do so. And, rather than me continue to give
18 testimony, I think it is really important to say that
19 we feel are beginning to scratch the surface. The
20 Play Fair Coalition is delighted at what the Council
21 did and the administration. And particularly, the
22 baseline mean. But that is what is key. Like phase
23 one shots are great, but if we don't baseline them,
24 we are going to lose the opportunity and many of the
25 coalition members-- where I want to point out our

2 coalition started last year around this time. There
3 was barely 60 members. We are now close to 160
4 members in this coalition citywide and I look forward
5 to hearing from my colleagues today. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Since we have a lot of
7 people participating, so the time limit is three
8 minutes. No more than three minutes, but less is
9 better because we have a lot of people who want to
10 speak.

11 ADRIANA ESPINOZA: No problem.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

13 ADRIANA ESPINOZA: Good afternoon. My name
14 is Adriano Espinoza. I am the New York City program
15 director at the New York League of Conservation
16 Voters. I would like to thank Chair Koo for the
17 opportunity to testify today. Our Sadie is staring
18 down a crisis existential importance and it is
19 incumbent upon our elected leaders to invest our tax
20 dollars in climate action command climate solutions.
21 New York City's Department of Parks and Recreation
22 plays a critical role in the fight and that is why we
23 are proud to join New Yorkers for Parks and DC37 of
24 founding members of the Play Fair for Parks campaign.
25 Earlier this year, our coalition helped to secure a

2 landmark 43 million dollars increase for the New York
3 City Parks and green spaces. The budget will begin
4 to provide New York City Parks with the care that
5 they need to remain healthy and are changing climate.
6 I echo Lynn in thanking the speaker for the support
7 on the campaign, as well as the city Council and
8 Mayor DeBlasio. It's critical that we continue to
9 support the city's environment by finding for green
10 spaces citywide. Well-maintained parks are a vital
11 part of New York's urban environment. New York City
12 Parks, echoing what Councilmember Brannan said
13 earlier, have done a commendable job maintaining our
14 parks for years given matter historically underfunded
15 by two and we look forward to highlighting the
16 improvements that come out of the Play Fair victory
17 in following the implementation process from the
18 budget. Parks and other green spaces are one of the
19 city's most valuable environmental assets. They are
20 a major source of the city's urban canopy with over
21 2.6 million street M Park trees. This canopy
22 mitigates climate change, provides clean and, and
23 habitats for native wildlife and contributes to the
24 well-being of New Yorkers in our economy. They
25 removed 1300 tons of pollutants from the atmosphere,

store 1 million tons of carbon per year. They help to mitigate urban heat island effect and can lower temperatures. They also contribute to resiliency by capturing almost 2 billion gallons of storm water runoff. Based on these benefits, we can all agree that this is critical infrastructure and, however, these green benefits cannot be realized without Parks employees who worked tirelessly to ensure the health of these spaces. Our trees cannot retrieve the fraction of the environmental benefits that I just outlined until they reach maturity and that is why park maintenance workers, gardeners, pruners, horticulturalist, and foresters are all critical cream jobs. And despite the laudable budget increase in fiscal year 20, we know that there are still needs to be met overall for maintenance and operations in city parks. Every staff line is critical and we are concerned about the long-term security of some of the green jobs implemented this fiscal year. In order to make a long-term impact on our parks, those positions should be baselined. Additionally, there were several critical play fair asks that were ultimately not included in this year's budget. Funding for the implementation of zone management strategy and

2 maintenance across some of our largest parks and
3 resources to allow fixed post permanent staff would
4 both go a long way to ensuring well-maintained parks.
5 There is also an ask for implementing a capital ask
6 for implementing the forest management framework that
7 was on met and, in fiscal year 21, it is critical
8 that the city do more to ensure that the 25 year
9 roadmap for maintaining forests is fully funded.
10 Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Yeah. Next.
12 Yeah.

13 HUNTER ARMSTRONG: My name is Hunter
14 Armstrong. I am speaking on behalf of the Natural
15 Areas Conservancy. Thank you, Chair Koo for the
16 opportunity to speak today. Unnatural areas
17 Conservancy is a nonprofit organization that was
18 formed in 2012 with the goal of increasing the
19 capacity of the NYC Parks and its partners to restore
20 and manage the 10,000 acres of forest, grasslands,
21 and wetlands over the agency's jurisdiction. To
22 achieve our goal of bringing all 7300 acres of city
23 forest under active management, we worked in
24 partnership with NYC Parks to develop and release the
25 forest management framework for New York City in

1 spring 2018. This plan includes a comprehensive look
2 at the condition of our city's natural forests, one
3 quarter of the entire NYC Parks system, and it
4 outlines the investment needed to manage them over
5 the next 25 years and to improve public access
6 through a citywide trail system. In fiscal year
7 2020, forest management received one year of an
8 additional 4 million dollars. We are grateful for
9 this one year investment by New York City Council and
10 for the advocacy efforts of the Play Fair Coalition.

11 I am here today to provide an update on this
12 investment and to ask New York City Council to
13 include increased funding for forest management in
14 the FY 2021 budget and in future years. While New
15 York City Parks is making progress this here, you
16 cannot change the condition of our publicly owned
17 natural forest in one year and we need additional
18 funding in future years to the see success. As we
19 all know, nature works on a different time frame.
20 Over the past decade, tens of millions of capital
21 dollars have been invested in our forests. In order
22 to ensure that this investment and future investments
23 live up to their potential to provide our city with
24 high-quality access to nature, call our city, clean
25

2 our water, and support wildlife, they must be
3 maintained. Sustained investment for ongoing
4 management is important for the following reasons:
5 first, NYC's natural area forests are at a tipping
6 point. There's surprisingly healthy right now, but
7 they mean sustained investment or they risk losing
8 biodiversity. In the next 25 years, we will be
9 living in a hotter and drier city with higher sea
10 levels. New York City's forests are critical to
11 mitigating the effects of climate change, including
12 extreme heat, capturing storm water to reduce flooding,
13 and absorbing greenhouse gases. Extreme heat kills
14 more people in the United States than hurricanes,
15 flooding, and storms combined. I cities for should
16 be part of the city's climate solution. Third,
17 developing the citywide trail system will allow
18 people, many in low and moderate income
19 neighborhoods, new forms of recreation and
20 opportunities for well-being. The 4 million dollar
21 one-shot expense funding for NYC Parks this year by
22 New York City Council is addressing these challenges.
23 This is one of NYC Parks and partners are working--
24 this is why NYC Parks and partners are working to
25 achieve by June 2020. 2000 and acres of forests

2 improved, 16,000 trees and shrubs planted, 40 miles
3 of trail improvements, 3500 volunteers engaged.
4 There is more detail in my written testimony. We
5 earns the parks committee to support long-term
6 inappropriate funding for New York City forests, an
7 invaluable part of our city's infrastructure. Thank
8 you.

9 COREY PROVOST: Greetings, Chair Koo,
10 and other members of this committee. My name is
11 Corey Provost and I serve as the director of
12 government and community affairs for Prospect Park
13 Alliance. It's my honor today to provide this
14 testimony on behalf of our president, Sue Donahue.
15 Over the past 30 years, the Prospect Park alliance
16 has played a pivotal role in restoring the park to
17 its original glory. During this time, we have worked
18 closely with local elected officials, the parks
19 department, and their surrounding communities to
20 identify, prioritize, design, and complete
21 approximately 50 restoration projects. Over close to
22 120 acres of park-- of the park and 5100 linear feet
23 of our watercourse, totaling over 200 million dollars
24 of investment into the park. In particular, Majority
25 Leader Laurie Cumbo and Council member Lander,

2 Eugene, and Levin have been instrumental in helping
3 secure broad support for all of our projects.
4 Brooklyn is booming. In almost every corner of our
5 borough we are seeing new housing and the
6 neighborhood surrounding the park are bustling now
7 more than ever. We now estimate that a park received
8 some 10 million visits each year and weekly we see
9 thousands of people engaging in our many public
10 programs, participating in a number of recreational
11 activities, or simply gathering with family and
12 friends to enjoy a picnic. All these activities have
13 an impact on our park. From increased wear and tear
14 on our lawns and our ball fields to the trash and
15 litter that must be removed from the park. Keeping
16 up with maintenance is paramount for Prospect Park
17 Alliance and we know that the feeling is the same on
18 any other park in the city. Parks are not only
19 vital, green infrastructure, but critical to the
20 quality of life for all New Yorkers. This is why we
21 added our voice and we thank the city councils are
22 adding the 43 million dollars for this past fiscal
23 year. However, we know we New York City and its
24 millions of park users would be best served with a
25 fully funded Parks department that could secure a

2 stable, green jobs, provide funding for New York
3 City's forest in natural areas, key components in the
4 battle we face from a changing climate. Ensure that
5 parks across the city have full-time dedicated staff,
6 create a comprehensive zone management system, and
7 address the aging infrastructure conditions that add
8 to the maintenance concerns and inhibit park use.
9 Prospect Park Alliance and the city of New York had a
10 tremendously beneficial-- mutually beneficial
11 relationship and we look forward for years in advance
12 for years to come. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you all for your
14 participation. The next panel will be Rosanne
15 Delgado, Friends of Pelham Parkway, Aziz Dekhan from
16 the NYL Community Gardens, Roland [inaudible
17 02:07:52] from Kissena Corridor Park Conservancy, and
18 Dorothy Woo from Kissena Corridor Park Conservancy.
19 [inaudible 02:08:13].

20 [background comments]

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Still three minutes,
22 right?

23 [background comments]

24 CHAIRPERSON KOO: All right.

25 [background comments]

2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Rosanne, are you ready?

3 [background comments]

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So you want to start
5 from the other ones? From the right side. Dorothy.
6 Chuck, you want to start first? Okay.

7 CHUCK WADE: All right. Parks Committee.
8 Councilman Koo and all the members of the Parks
9 Committee, thank you for sharing your time with us.
10 I'm Chuck Wade. I'm the President of the Kissena
11 Corridor Park Conservancy. This conservancy was made
12 for the 101 acre tract of land that lies between Main
13 Street Flushing and Kissena Boulevard. It is an
14 undeveloped area and is perhaps the newest park being
15 developed in the whole city of New York. We have
16 been working since 2006 to develop the Kissena core
17 door park and so far have accomplished-- we had
18 the-- we had the Evergreen community garden, which
19 is the largest community garden and New York City
20 with over 300 plots. We have planted from 7 to
21 10,000 trees in the core door park and that was done
22 during the administration of Mayor Bloomberg and we
23 have now and need for having those trees pruned and
24 we trees such as mulberry and invasive species like
25 cottonwood to be thinned out so that those hardwood

2 trees can develop in the park. We work with
3 Councilman Koo and with Melinda Katz, our borough
4 president, to incorporate and develop a meditation
5 garden for the borough of Queens. This is a chase
6 that to New York Hospital Presbyterian Queens and we
7 saw a need for the patients there in the oncology
8 center and also for the employees of the hospital to
9 have a place where they could calm interest. Also,
10 people who are visiting, patients and people of the
11 area would find that this meditation garden is a
12 place for solace and comfort during times of stress
13 in need that they may have. We are happy to say,
14 Councilman Koo, that the garden is now under
15 construction. We have been told that and that we
16 hope to have the dedication in 2020.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Chuck. Yeah.

18 CHUCK WADE: Okay.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Now it will go to Aziz
20 or-- Oh, good. Dorothy? Okay.

21 DOROTHY WOO: My name is Dorothy Woo from
22 the Kissena Corridor Park Conservancy in
23 Flushing Queens. Just to continue what president has
24 being stated, I would like to thank our Councilman
25 [inaudible 02:12:44] surveying the Kissena Park and

2 Corridor Park in 2018 and the mayor DeBlasio for
3 fully funding the lights he installed throughout the
4 park and the news state of the art [inaudible
5 02:13:04] spring playing around which was opened in
6 April. In spite of those construction improvements,
7 they are still long overdue undeveloped area that
8 needs to be cleared for and maintained. A list of
9 [inaudible 02:13:24] is as following: first, it's
10 pruning trees trees. Those young trees planted
11 during the million tree initiated of that survived
12 now need pruning and to grow into words. Second,
13 building a park aboard her and paving the missing
14 sidewalks. The area of concern is along the corridor
15 Park between 146 playground and the future meditation
16 garden. [Inaudible 02:13:58] describe this place as
17 poor quality landfill covering a depth of tender 20
18 feet. [Inaudible 02:14:07] -separated the park land
19 from the street for more than 40 years. Third is
20 making casino way accessible first safe passage.
21 There is a paved path connecting Kissena Boulevard
22 and the Main Street will provide a safer mobility
23 option for children, elderly, and cyclists. Four,
24 adding lights for pathway and the proposed paths that
25 would next Colden [sp?] Street and 56 Road would

2 encourage a great frequency and participation in
3 parks activities. Fifth, providing maps for paths at
4 the nearest point of interest. Thank you,
5 Councilman.

6 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

7 CHUCK WADE: Here you go.

8 ROXANNE DELGADO: Hello, Chair Koo. Thank
9 you for your patience. Unfortunately, due to
10 technical difficulties, I don't think the photos are
11 available for you to view, but I'll go through the
12 list of photos that was planned to show to you. .
13 One set of photo-- all these photos were taken this
14 month in less than 26 days. The first photo was
15 taken on September 2nd. We forgot. You have to say
16 her name first.

17 ROXANNE DELGADO: Oh, I'm so sorry.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Then you start. Yeah.

19 ROXANNE DELGADO: My name is Roxanne
20 Delgado on behalf of Friends of Pelham Parkway.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

22 ROXANNE DELGADO: It doesn't show. See?
23 Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Mr. Aziz, why don't you
25 start first?

2 ROXANNE DELGADO: Sorry about that. Thank
3 you.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Just say your name and
5 start.

6 AZIZ DEKHAN: My name is Aziz Dekhan. I'm
7 the executive director of the New York City Community
8 Garden Coalition. I thank you, Councilman Koo, for
9 your support for community gardens and all the
10 members of this committee whose support community
11 gardens. As you have heard from Commissioner Solar,
12 there are 550 community gardens in New York City.
13 There is probably more than that because there are
14 some land trusts and privately owned spaces.
15 Commissioner Silver talks about climate change
16 affecting some of the work that they do in the parks
17 department. On a make clear that we believe that
18 parks, open spaces, community gardens are all climate
19 mitigate errors and make the city more resilient,
20 more sustainable and the air is cleaner and we
21 support any efforts that they make to continue those
22 policies that make this happen. I also want to talk
23 about something that Committeewoman Rivera brought up
24 about funding for community gardens. As many of you
25 know, there is a license issue that we are still

2 trying to resolve then we have some concerns about
3 maybe the 100+ gardens that have not signed the
4 license and how they are going to be treated and
5 whether they are going to be getting resources as we
6 continue to negotiate with the city and with the
7 Parks Department to resolve some of the outstanding
8 issues. One of those outstanding issues actually has
9 to do with maintenance. And I find it kind of--- I
10 want to say bizarre, but it's not really bizarre. I
11 find it a little disturbing community gardeners who
12 are volunteers and who are stewards of the land of
13 New York City are required to shovel sidewalks during
14 snowstorms and if they don't complete that task, they
15 get violations that could lead to termination of
16 their license. It would seem to me that the city
17 should be responsible for shoveling their own
18 sidewalks and not put it onto the community gardeners
19 who, especially in the winter, are not always around.
20 My wife, who is about my age, was just diagnosed with
21 coronary artery disease. It's a ticking time bomb
22 that she and no idea that she had. If she were to go
23 out in the winter and start shoveling sidewalks and
24 has a heart attack and falls at times, who is
25 responsible for that? So we've offered a solution to

2 that by asking the city, with the 43 million extra
3 dollars that parks has, to purchase liability
4 insurance policy that comes out to just under 200
5 dollars per garden and that will give every gardener
6 the ability to continue to be volunteers without
7 having this liability issue hanging over them. And
8 so, I strongly urge this committee to continue to
9 help us pursue that liability issue as one of the
10 resolutions that can happen with this license. The
11 last thing I want to say is that there is been a lot
12 of talk also about who is responsible for keeping
13 these gardens and how we get resources. I want to
14 make it really clear. Community gardens don't get
15 one single dollar from green thumb to continue to
16 operate these gardens. The money comes out of our
17 pockets. We buy equipment. We buy soil. There is a
18 lot of materials that we get and were being asked by
19 the parks department under this license to be
20 audited. Which means personal checking accounts can
21 be audited to find where the money goes. This is our
22 personal money. If it were green thumb money, we
23 would say find. So, that's another issue that we
24 would like to bring up. I know my time is up. I
25 think this committee for your continuing support.

2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

3 ROXANNE DELGADO: Thank you, Chair.

4 Roxanne Delgado on behalf of Friends of Pelham
5 Parkway. All these photos, chair, was taken on the
6 month of September. His first one was taken on the
7 second show a big group of families barbecuing right
8 next to a tree. Illegal barbecuing. Let me see if I
9 can go to the next photo. Sorry. [Inaudible
10 02:20:17]. Sorry. It just has to go back. Sorry.
11 It just froze when I clicked on it, but I will do it
12 again. Otherwise I'll just go to the testimony. All
13 right. This is people on September 9. They dump
14 trash near the tree, as you can see. That's awful.
15 That's the problem that the people tend to be the
16 problem. Over a quarter of a time of illegal dumping
17 on the parkway on September 9th, Chair. A quarter of
18 a ton. That's almost 500 pounds. Then it took two
19 crews to clean up that mess. On September 19 there
20 is another mess left behind by park goers. Again,
21 September 18th and 22nd, we had people don't
22 household trash. One person dumped seven bags of
23 household trash onto the trashcan and she even loved
24 her telephone bill. This was the second day. She
25 left two additional bags of household trash including

2 medication that pain patches, which is dangerous for
3 pets and children. Then she left her phone number
4 bill. This is why we have so much trash in the
5 parkway. Even when they do daily pickups, with the
6 household trash and with the illegal dumping and with
7 a large gathering, we can accumulate almost seven or
8 eight bags of trash in just one area in less than two
9 days, chair. Again, in this other corner on
10 Brownsville and Pelham Parkway North, again, almost 9
11 full bags of trash because of the illegal dumping,
12 household trash, and also large gatherings. We just
13 recently had two days ago someone drove through the
14 parkway and the debris. Glass, metal parts, as well
15 as destroyed a park bench. Again, this is why a lot
16 of park and maintenance is more than just picking up
17 trash. This is just happened in less than 26 days,
18 Chair. Can you imagine all year long with the things
19 we have to deal with in the parkway? They left
20 treadmill marks on the grass. So, even though the
21 parks can do more with less, they cannot do the
22 maintenance of the park that is required. It's not
23 even adequate. And they do work hard and they do
24 their best, but it's not enough manpower to address
25 the way the parks are being used today. Not only do

2 we have more park people, but they use parks
3 differently, plus, some people don't respect the
4 parks. As you can see, all the trash in the illegal
5 dumping them people driving through the parkway. And
6 I would just like to say that also regarding grass,
7 it's one issue we don't have in the parkway. They
8 cut grass constantly which is my main complaint
9 because, when they cut the grass, we have less and
10 six for the birds and, actually, the parkway is not a
11 park. It's a parkway. We need grass because were
12 surrounded with concrete. We need the grass not only
13 for the birds, but for kids to walk on grass. Thank
14 you for your time, Chair. I appreciate it.

15 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Can you prove and
16 electronic copy to our staff?

17 ROXANNE DELGADO: I'm sorry? What?

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah. You got it?

19 ROXANNE DELGADO: I'll send--

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

21 [background comments]

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: The next panel will be
23 Martha Lopez Gilpin from Astoria Park Alliance, Joe
24 Apulo. Pulio. Local 983 DC 37. And Daniel Clay,

25

2 President of Local 1507 DC 37. Yeah. Please
3 identify yourself and you may start. Yeah.

4 JOE PULIO: Good afternoon. My name is
5 Joe Pulio. I am president of Local 983. I reference
6 to the urban park rangers, the PEP officers, they
7 associate Park service workers, and all the city
8 seasonal aids and parks. In total, I represent
9 approximately 1700 Park employees, so whatever the
10 number is, 1700 of those people belong to our local.
11 I like to be again by thanking you and the new people
12 on the committee. I thank you again for that 80 PEP
13 officers and the 50 rangers. The problem we have is
14 that this is not baselined the money and the
15 requirements are high for these people. They need a
16 two year college degree in order to even be
17 considered. They have to go through a background
18 check. It takes approximately three months of
19 training before they actually set foot in a park and
20 that doesn't include the interview process. So, by
21 the time they're actually hire one of these PEP
22 officers, their time under this budget is very
23 limited. And who wants the job to go through all
24 that just to be told they are only guaranteed a year?
25 You know? It's difficult to get these people. It's

2 difficult to get the qualified people to do the job.
3 And I know the intentions work great for everyone to
4 get these people and we really appreciate it, but I'm
5 afraid that we're not going to, you know, me the
6 task. We are already under numbered. As we all know
7 this, 30,000 acres of parkland. Parks is the biggest
8 landowner, you know, for city land. We need to get
9 more PEP officers, you know, and we need to keep them
10 on a continuous basis. It's unfortunate, the ones
11 that are they are leaving. A lot of them go to NYPD.
12 Why? Because it has salary. They make approximately
13 half of what New York City police officers make. I
14 know they complain all the time, but can you imagine
15 them? They make half of what they make on average.
16 So, you can see the dilemma that we are facing. We
17 need more full-time jobs. Our city seasonal aids to
18 a great job, but they can't do this job, you know,
19 when it is most needed. We need them for the winter.
20 We need them for the fall. We don't just need them
21 for the spring. And these are real people. Real
22 people need to earn real income. You know? These
23 people take on these jobs for one or two months,
24 three months, but they also have families themselves.
25 Again, I think you all. I think you for saying so

2 late and I hope that, you know, we will have this
3 money baselined. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Next. Yeah.

5 DANIEL CLAY: Thanks. Hi, there. I'm
6 Daniel Clay. I've been a New York City gardener for
7 almost 15 years. Really close to 15 years now and I
8 have been president of the local for just about a
9 year now and I would first like to thank you and
10 everybody so much for everything you have done to
11 help take care of my people and baseline the 50
12 gardeners and CPW's as well. I love giving people
13 the great news and they're so appreciative and the
14 next thing I like to say I can't wait to see the
15 results next year after everybody is hired and the
16 new one shots and everything and I am really excited.
17 It's such an exciting time to be a gardener and I can
18 personally promise you that you will see results,
19 especially as we could do the same thing next year
20 and baseline all these one shots do right by them.
21 Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

23 MARTHA LOPEZ GILPIN: My name is Martha
24 Lopez Gilpin. I am from a story of Park Alliance and
25 these two gentlemen sitting on my last have just kind

2 of touched on something that is crucial, as I
3 listened to this testimony today. We need to empower
4 our workers, our park workers. They are at the
5 forefront of the sustainability and environmental
6 issues that we are facing in the city. We should
7 empower them and make this a proud, strong union
8 workplace for these people. When we started
9 volunteering in our parks, we had to put volunteer on
10 the back of our shirts because people would parade us
11 and scream at us that the park workers were doing
12 this and that. And it was very demeaning and we have
13 close contact with a lot of our park workers and as
14 many officers in our gardeners and these people work
15 very hard and take a great deal of pride in what they
16 do. They should be a very viable and prideful source
17 of employment and sustainability in New York City.
18 These green jobs mean more than just jobs. These
19 people are actually bringing their skill and their
20 heart to the parks. So, we need to do a whole other
21 new park initiative in terms of workers and users.
22 Users have to step up and be responsible. Where I
23 come from in Santa Fe, New Mexico, if you are in the
24 park and you bring trash, you bring a garbage bag
25 with you. That should be a requirement of everything

2 that is permitted in parks. We need to pack it out.
3 We are responsible. This is public land. It's free
4 land to use. It's not free land to abuse. And I
5 think back, along with all the great works that New
6 Yorkers for Parks has done, another great initiative
7 that could happen is pride for our workers and pride
8 for our users and responsibility for our users. We
9 need to reimagine how we look at parks and we need to
10 build a sustainable message and outreach for people
11 that use parks. And not really as all of us. So I
12 told myself I wasn't going to say anything today, but
13 I am, and so thank you and bless you to our parks
14 workers who work so hard and all of our volunteers
15 and our park users who get so much out of our parks.
16 We see so many people who want to make it better.
17 Let's help them make it better. Let's empower
18 everyone. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Any
20 questions from anyone? No. Thank you. Okay. The
21 next panel will be Christian? Christin Glass or
22 Grass. Elle Morales [inaudible 02:30:56] and Chantel
23 Pierre from Community Gardens. You may start.
24 Yeah.

2 CHRISTIN GLASS: Hello? Wonderful. Good
3 afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak
4 today. My name is Christin Glass and I manage
5 environmental leadership programs at the Girl Scouts
6 of Greater New York for the 32,000 girls from across
7 the five boroughs who we serve. Girl Scouts of
8 Greater New York is a proud member of the Play Fair
9 Coalition which we joined because outdoor learning
10 and environmental stewardship are our core 100-year-
11 old tenants of Girl Scouting and because, when we
12 surveyed today's Girl Scouts about the issues they
13 care about most, the environment is their number one
14 priority. That is why we are here today calling for
15 an increase in park maintenance funding. First so
16 many young people and youth serving organizations
17 like ours, New York City parks are central outdoor
18 classrooms. They are unifying elements where young
19 people play and make lasting friendships. They are
20 where young New Yorkers sense of place and sense of
21 pride are developed. Even more than infrastructure,
22 other kinds of improvements, basic, equitable, and
23 consistent day-to-day park maintenance can ensure
24 that these spaces are the incredible places for
25 learning and discovery that they are meant to be.

2 Too often, your ZIP Code determines whether you have
3 access to the incredible benefits of parks and that
4 is unacceptable. Young people in all New York City
5 neighborhoods deserve access to clean and safe green
6 spaces. Increased funding for parks, which are
7 currently under maintained, will help our city
8 realize equity in this area. I want to share a few
9 words from Kayla, a 10-year-old in Girl Scout Troop
10 2054 in Brooklyn. Kayla spends a lot of time with
11 her mom at Canarsie Park which she says is well taken
12 care of, but she sees differences in how parks across
13 the city are cared for and maintained. Often, other
14 parks are not as clean with overfilled garbage cans
15 or no garbage cans at all. She says if the parks
16 were cleaner, it would be so much nicer for me and my
17 mom and all the other people who use city spaces to
18 exercise and enjoy time outside. On behalf of Kayla
19 and all the other young people in New York who want
20 clean and safe places to learn and play, I call on
21 the city to increase funding to our park maintenance
22 in the upcoming budget. Lastly, I want to thank
23 members of the Parks Committee for your advocacy in
24 this area. The Play Fair Coalition is grateful to
25 have your support, as well as the support of the

2 super majority of the city Council. We are excited
3 about continuing to work with you on this historic
4 investment in our city parks. Thank you.

5 You ready?

6 CHANTAL FAIRER: Hi. I'm Chantal Fairer.
7 On behalf of a number of community gardens and, I'm
8 sure, as Aziz Dekhan had mentioned, you're aware of
9 the challenges we are facing with relicensing with
10 the Department of Park and Recreation. There is
11 quite a few things that are still contentious for us
12 and it really hurts the spirit of the people who have
13 invested and volunteered their time and stewarded
14 these spaces for 20, 30 years. Now they are elderly
15 and are told that they have to shovel sidewalks.
16 They may have health challenges. I personally am
17 dealing with PTSD issues. These were therapeutic
18 issues, places of solace and peace. So, it's really
19 disconcerting to see that our relationship with the
20 Parks Department, which used to be congenial, has now
21 turned adversarial. If we are on parks land, how
22 does the shift in responsibility happen? How are now
23 these elderly people who have been soldiers in the
24 field, how are they supposed to take care of the
25 sidewalks, etc., and if they don't follow these rules

2 set by the Parks Department, they are liable to have
3 their license terminated. Some of them feel
4 incredibly bullied, to be honest with you. You know,
5 they feel like it's a thinly disguised, thinly
6 guised, way of taking back the land from the
7 community, but it just isn't right. You know, the
8 Commissioner had talked about there was a 0.2 million
9 dollars giving to Green Thumb Community Gardens. How
10 is that allocated and did they actually survey the
11 community gardeners to see how best those allocations
12 should be distributed? You know, it's beside me to
13 understand that some in an office can determine
14 what's best for the soldiers in the field without
15 asking them. So, you know, we feel that it is
16 incredible erroneous. We respectfully appreciate the
17 concern for safety of the community gardeners, but,
18 you know, when you have a situation where perception
19 of what's needed trumps reality, it needs to be
20 reevaluated and we hope that you will help us
21 continue to fight New York Parks Department and get a
22 more fair license. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

24 ADOLFO AL MORALES: Good afternoon. My
25 name is Adolfo Al Morales and my company, Yorkville

2 Sports, has been organizing community soft ball and
3 corporate leagues in Manhattan parks for over 40
4 years. First, I would like to thank the committee
5 members for securing more funds for our parks. Thank
6 you. My biggest issue is maintenance. And I wanted
7 to thank the parks also for the quick reconstruction
8 of the ball fields in a timely manner. And that's
9 where my concern begins. In the past 40 years, I've
10 help to maintain ball fields when there was no
11 budget. Obviously no workers to maintain the ball
12 fields. So, before we got on the ball fields, we had
13 to move water and maintain the fields. And we've
14 been doing that 40 years up until recently. Now we
15 are getting [inaudible 02:38:45], but what has
16 happened in the last-- I want to say 10 years when
17 the first Astroturf field was placed at D Wood
18 Clinton, within two seasons, not even a full two
19 years, ball field became almost unusable. The turf
20 started ripping and moving in they had to replace
21 sections of it almost immediately. It is taken
22 another-- I don't know. Another five or eight years
23 to replace it. The problem is there are certain ball
24 fields that are dedicated first softball and others
25 first soccer. Rectangular ball fields or fields that

2 are first soccer and actually going to be meeting
3 with the Parks Department to recommend that they
4 follow through on with their rules and regulations
5 state that rectangular fields are for soccer and that
6 these goals should be set like in football like when
7 you set up for ball fields, they are set for this
8 season. They don't get moved. What's been happening
9 is the soccer goals get pushed and shoved on and off
10 the turf, immediately destroying it. It compromises
11 the foundation of the turf. Starts to shift and then
12 it tears. I have got-- I don't know if you all have
13 it, but I gave you all of folder. If you can-- the
14 barcode bring up the barcode, I showed you some
15 videos. You can see it later. Of how the fields and
16 the dragging of the notes in the heavy duties
17 structures have torn the field up and they have had
18 to replace pieces of it. I am very concerned with D
19 Wood Clinton. It just got reconstructed three months
20 ago and there is already movement on fields that
21 there dragging metal sentencing, metal goals on the
22 field. That field is not going to be in any good
23 shape within the next year or two and it's a lot of
24 money of the city and the Council allocated for that
25 field. These fields should last 20 years with the

2 proper maintenance, so I'm really pushing hard for
3 the correct amount of money for ballfield crew to
4 maintain it properly every day because we don't get
5 any of ballfield crew maintenance on the ball fields,
6 so we are advocating heavily for a ballfield crew,
7 dedicated ballfield crew. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Final. This
9 is the last one. Thank you very much.

10 ADOLFO AL MORALES: All right.

11 [background comments]

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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 October 3, 2019