

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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HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING

B E F O R E: PETER A. KOO, CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS: ADRIENNE E. ADAMS
JOSEPH C. BORELLI
JUSTIN L. BRANNAN
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MARK GJONAJ
ROBERT F. HOLDEN
MARK LEVINE
FRANCISCO P. MOYA
CARLINA RIVERA
ERIC A. ULRICH
JAMES G. VAN BRAMER

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

CHRIS SARTORI, Committee Counsel

MITCHELL SILVER, Parks and Recreation
Commissioner

ALYSSA COBB-KONON, Deputy Commissioner
for Planning and Development

MATT DRURY, Director of Government
Relations

BRUCE THOMAS, Deputy Director of
Government Relations

LINDSEY CAMPBELL, Research Scientist with
USA Forest Service

ADAM GANZER, Executive Director New
Yorkers for Parks

LYNN KELLY, New York Restoration Project

JOE PALLEO, DC 37

MARLENA GEEKA, DC 37

DANIEL CLAY, DC 37

CARTER STRICKLAND, New York State
Division Trust for Public Land

EMILY MAXWELL, Director of Nature
Conservancy

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

SARAH CHARLOTTE POWERS, Natural Area
Conservancy

CARLOS CASTIL CROAK, New York League of
Conservation Voters

GREG TODD, Community Gardens

TARA KELLY, Municipal Art Society

KAY WEBSTER, President Sara Roosevelt
Park Community Coalition

CHRISTINE TAYLOR, Director of Programs
and Operations for Van Cortlandt Park
Alliance

SARA DAUGHERTY, Senior Program Manager
Waterfront Alliance

ANN WILSON, Senior Director of Planning
Randall's Island Park Alliance

HEATHER LUBOV, City Parks Foundation

OWEN FOOTUM, Gowanus Dredgers Canoe Club

TOMMY LOBE, Resident Lower Eastside

CARSON GLAZER, Urban tree expert and
horticulturist

KALAY ENKARIANI (SP?), Williams Avenue
Community Garden

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

SUSAN DONAHUE, President Parkway Alliance

2 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Recording good.

3 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Okay, Sargeant
4 Martinez you may begin.

5 SARGEANT MARTINEZ: Good afternoon, and
6 welcome to today's remote New York City Council
7 Hearing with the Committee on Parks. At this time,
8 would all panelists please turn on their video. To
9 minimize disruption, please place electronic devices
10 on vibrate or silent mode. If you wish to submit
11 testimony, you may do so at
12 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again that's
13 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your
14 cooperation, we are ready to begin.

15 SPEAKER: At this time, Chair Koo would
16 you please begin your opening statement.

17 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Hi. Yeah. Hi, I
18 am Councilman Peter Koo. I want to welcome everyone
19 to these Committee Meeting, public hearing. Good
20 afternoon, I am Peter Koo Chair of the City Council's
21 Committee on Parks and Recreation. I would like to
22 welcome you to our virtual hearing on the issue of
23 how the COVID-19 pandemic highlights inequity in New
24 York City's Park system. To understand this issue,
25 we have to begin with a little history. For most of

2 the 20th Century, the City properly funded Green
3 Spaces helping to making it the nation's premiere
4 park system. In the 1960s, the City devoted a health
5 1.5% of its budget to the Parks Department but the
6 financial crisis of the 1970s forced large cutbacks.
7 But in late 1980s, the parks budget has fallen to
8 just 0.86% of the budget with the resultant being
9 that many City Parks turned into places which many
10 New Yorkers tried to avoid due to poor Budgets and
11 maintenance. This resulted in conservancies being
12 formed to supplement public funds with private money
13 for parks. The results have been that many large or
14 well-known parks saw a big turnaround in their status
15 and once again, became attractive recreational sites
16 for City resident's and visitors to the City;
17 however, while the reliance on private funding and
18 conservancies increased, public funding remained
19 stalled for many years. Public funding consistently
20 averages much less than 1% of the whole City budget.
21 Even with last year's Fiscal 2020 Budget which was
22 the largest even in terms of the dollar amount, about
23 \$580 million. It still only represented 0.6% of the
24 entire expense budget. Of course, we all know that
25 this Fiscal year the upward trend has reversed due to

2 economic hardship resulting from the pandemic. In
3 fact, not only is the budget at risk but even private
4 funding is threatened with conservancies and other
5 similar organizations having reported revenue which
6 relies on donations, may decrease to 60% this year.
7 The situation is dire and now is the time to re-think
8 how we can use this opportunity to re-envision how
9 our park systems can operate. The long-term result
10 of this is that we have seen a disparity in our
11 larger parks that have access to private funding and
12 other resources do much better than small
13 neighborhood parks in lower-income neighborhoods that
14 have to rely only on public funding. While the
15 Council and Administration in recent years have
16 recognized and sought to correct this disparity with
17 the implementation of the Community Park Initiative
18 and pass initiative and the desire to increase the
19 Park's Budget. COVID has highlighted how access to
20 parks and open space is still not equitable across
21 the City. We all know how critical parks are to
22 well-being of our City. Parks are critical for
23 health and wellness because they improve physical
24 health and help to reduce anxiety, stress and
25 depression. Back in March when the various lockdown

2 protocols started to close off New Yorkers to so many
3 aspects of City life, our parks were one of the only
4 resources that people were able to use to obtain some
5 sort of recreation. As the weather warmed in the
6 spring and summer, New Yorkers who were isolated
7 indoors for so many months craved to use their parks,
8 athletic fields, courts, pools and beaches once
9 again. In fact, it is well known that park use has
10 increased tremendously during the pandemic. Despite
11 the obvious desire and need for quality open space,
12 recently parks have shown that in many lower income
13 neighborhoods and communities of colors where cases
14 in death rates from COVID-19 were disproportionately
15 high, residents lacked access to quality open space.
16 In fact, more than 1.1 million New Yorkers did not
17 have access to a park within a 10-minute walk of
18 home. Where, when paid ones, fields and courts were
19 closed. To highlight this, the average size
20 apartment in the City is only about 6.4 acres, in low
21 income neighborhoods, compared with 14 acres in
22 wealthier neighborhoods. Therefore, the average park
23 size is 7.9 acres in predominantly black
24 neighborhoods, compared with 29.8 acres in
25 predominantly white neighborhoods. Parks that serve

2 low income areas serve more people per acre than
3 those in higher income areas. I think we can and
4 should do better than this. Let me repeat that, I
5 think we can and should do better than this. There
6 are many good ideas out there that seek to improve
7 equity, all of which I hope to expose today. Some of
8 this includes vastly increasing the park's budget,
9 increasing public private partnerships, building new
10 parks in areas that are in need, expanding the open
11 streets program, expanding Community Parks Initiative
12 and ensuring that money raised through Parks
13 Concessions goes back directly to parks, encouraging
14 the target of philanthropy donations to benefit a
15 broad range of parks. COVID has made it more
16 apparent than ever, high quality parks and open space
17 in the surrounding communities require creative and
18 wide-ranging proposals to unlock different types of
19 government and private funding sources. We need ways
20 to increase the access and the amount of open space
21 available in all neighborhoods across the City. I
22 hope we can use this hearing to have a better,
23 equitable park system, a reality ... **BLANK AUDIO**...
24 items. **BLANK AUDIO**.

2 SPEAKER: Everyone hold on for one
3 second, we are having a few technical issues that we
4 are just trying to correct, thank you. Thank you.
5 (long silence).

6 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Hello. Can you
7 hear me now?

8 SPEAKER: Yes, you are a loud and clear
9 Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Okay, I am going
11 to turn over to Committee, I am going to turn it over
12 to our Committee Counsel Chris Sartori to go over
13 some procedure items.

14 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you Chair Koo, I am
15 Chris Sartori, Senior Counsel to the Committee on
16 Parks and Recreation and I will be moderating this
17 hearing. Before we begin, I would like to remind
18 everyone that you will be on mute until you are
19 called on to testify at which point you will be
20 unmuted by the host. During the hearing, I will be
21 calling, during the hearing I will be calling on
22 panels to testify, please listen for your name to be
23 called as I will periodically be announcing who the
24 next panelist will be. We will be first hearing
25 testimony from the administration followed by

2 testimony from members of the public. During the
3 hearing, if Council Members would like to ask a
4 question of the Administration or of a specific
5 panelist. Please use the Zoom Raise Hand Function.
6 I will call on you in order. We will be limiting
7 Council Member questions to five minutes, which
8 includes the time that it takes to answer your
9 questions. Also, please note that all panelists
10 aside from those from the Parks Department will be
11 limited to a three-minute time limit so that we may
12 more easily accommodate all who are registered to
13 speak. When called to testify, please state your name
14 and the organization you represent if any. We will
15 now begin hearing testimony from the Department of
16 Parks and Recreation. We will hear from Commissioner
17 Mitchell Silver, Deputy Commissioner for Planning and
18 Development Alyssa Cobb Konon, Matt Drury Director of
19 Government Relations, and Bruce Thomas Deputy
20 Director of Government Relations will also be present
21 to ask questions as well. At this time, I would just
22 like to acknowledge a few of the Council Members who
23 are members of the Parks Committee who have joined.
24 Council Member, Levine, Gjonaj, Borelli, Cohen,
25 Rivera and Council Members Adams, Brannan, Holden and

2 Ulrich. At this time, I will administer the
3 affirmation of each representative of the Parks
4 Department. I have asked each of you to please raise
5 your hands. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
6 whole truth and nothing but the truth before this
7 committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
8 questions?

9 MITCHELL SILVER: I do.

10 ALYSSA COBB KONON: I do.

11 MATT DRURY: I do.

12 BRUCE THOMAS: I do.

13 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. And at this
14 time, I will invite Council, Commissioner Silver
15 excuse me to present his testimony.

16 MITCHELL SILVER: Thank you and good
17 afternoon Chair Koo and members of the Parks
18 Committee. I hope your family and you are well
19 during these difficult times and considering the
20 circumstances. I am Mitchell Silver Commissioner of
21 the Parks and Recreation and I am joined by Deputy
22 Commissioner Alyssa Cobb Konon and members of our
23 Government Relations Team. We are very pleased to be
24 here today to discuss equity as it relates to our
25 City, Parks and open spaces. As you will hear,

2 equity is an essentially vital principal that informs
3 all of our strategic and operational decisions and we
4 thank the Council for convening this important
5 hearing to provide a quick overview New York City
6 Parks is a steward of over 30,000 acres of parkland,
7 14% of the City's landmass including 10,000 acres of
8 natural area. We oversee nearly 4,500 individual
9 properties including Parks, playgrounds and community
10 gardens. We operate more than 800 athletic fields
11 and nearly 1000 playgrounds, 67 pools, 48 recreation
12 facilities, 17 nature centers and 14 miles of public
13 beaches. Equity to me means one work, fairness. Is
14 every New Yorker being treated fairly when it comes
15 to the resources being allocated to our parks? The
16 Mayor entrusted me to make sure that all New Yorkers
17 across the City are being provided with access to
18 first rate amenities in their neighborhood and in
19 their borough. One of our first actions under this
20 Administration was to develop a strategic framework
21 which we called Framework for an Equitable Future.
22 Investing over half a billion dollars in several
23 major capital expense initiatives. We also
24 incorporated a data driven approach to resource
25 allocation and have developed creative strategies to

2 increase park access to parks and playground
3 amenities across the City. With regard to Capital
4 Investments, I would like to briefly discuss three
5 landmark programs launched during this
6 administration. The Community Parks Initiative,
7 Anchor Parks and Parks without Borders. Launched in
8 2014, the Community Parks Initiative is New York
9 City's first equity driven Parks Initiative and is
10 based on a community and data driven process.
11 Through a term analysis, we identified several parks
12 and neighborhood playgrounds that have not received a
13 dime of investment in over two decades, an entire
14 generation's younger years, and that simply was not
15 fair. Through CPI, over \$300 million has been
16 invested to reimagine and rebuild 67 previously
17 overlooked parks in neighborhoods demonstrating the
18 highest need with high poverty, density and
19 population growth effectively improving the quality
20 of life for nearly half a million people who live
21 within a walk of these parks. To date, we have
22 completed 50 of these incredible reconstructions with
23 the remaining 17 either in active construction or
24 procurement. The parks which have suffered
25 uninvesting for decades were re-designed and truly

transformed with an eye for longevity and sustainability offering amenities that appear to park goers of all ages with features that can adapt to a change in climate. With our Grass Roots Engagement, staff on our Parks we are working with existing and new stakeholders around CPI capital sites with the goal of cultivating community partners at every Capital Project Site to sustain the reconstructed parks. Today, we have supported 71 community partners at our CPI capital sites and have supported over 1900 park beautification process. Of course, these efforts are ongoing and during COVID we have offered volunteer training online and aligned in person volunteer events with high party areas for maintenance. The positive response of the Community Parks Initiative has been overwhelming especially as more and more of the projects come back online and these communities are fully conjoined these public spaces once again. We are especially honored when the American Planning Association awarded its 2020 National Planning Excellence Award for advancing diversity and social change to the Community Parks Initiative recognizing its transformative impact. Our Anchor Parks and Park Without Borders Program are

2 additional tools in our equity and access toolbox
3 that we have utilizing delivering very positive
4 results through Anchor Park the City has invested a
5 further \$200 million in investments in large
6 community anchoring parks in each borough. Through
7 Parks Without Borders we are creating new design
8 approaches focusing on improving the areas where
9 parks and neighborhoods meet, maximizing public
10 access to the property that is already within the
11 public realm so that all New Yorkers can fully enjoy
12 the spaces. The signature projects embodying this
13 approach were chosen with inclusivity and fairness in
14 mind and we took input online and in dozens of
15 listening sessions across the City to best identify
16 where this design approach would be most beneficial.
17 Turning to operational and programming approaches,
18 New York City Parks has invested the Help Sustain
19 Healthy Active and Safe Communities. We made
20 recreation center membership free for our youth. We
21 lowered the cost of membership for younger adults,
22 people with disabilities, seniors and veterans
23 providing vulnerable demographics with greater access
24 to amenities. We diversified our programming with
25 activities like Kids in Motion sites, National

2 Classroom Programs, Shape Up Classes and Mobile
3 Movies to provide much needed activities and
4 entertainment for children and their families. We
5 partnered with the New York City Council to expand
6 programming in a variety of different neighborhoods.
7 One of our more popular recent accomplishments has
8 been the Cool Pools Program which made its first
9 splash in 2018 amongst our pool goers. Over the past
10 two years, we were able to dramatically overhaul 11
11 pools across the City with updated deck furniture,
12 vibrant décor and fun activities making them more
13 than just public facilities but resort style
14 destinations in the communities. Many are dependent
15 on these pools as their primary recreational outlet
16 during warmer months so it was only fair that we
17 could fully enjoy these opportunities to escape the
18 City heat which can be considerable due to the Urban
19 Heat Island Effect. Indeed, early in this
20 Administration we found out that some of our
21 vulnerable population lives in neighborhoods that
22 have suffered disproportionately from climate driven
23 increases in urban heat and many of these
24 neighborhoods do not enjoy their share of the
25 benefits from the City's tree canopy. Our City trees

2 are vital infrastructure that provide countless
3 benefits, shade and heat reduction, storm water
4 capture, car reduction and property value increase to
5 name a few and New Yorkers were not benefiting
6 equally, simply it wasn't fair. To rectify that, the
7 Administration lost its Cool Neighborhoods Initiative
8 and New York City Parks has specifically been
9 provided over \$82 million in additional street tree
10 planting, equitably targeting neighborhoods with a
11 high heat motor ability index scores where the
12 benefits of these trees are sorely needed. The best
13 way to maintain an equitable system is through common
14 sense data driven approaches. It is important to make
15 sure that people have access to open space so we use
16 open space ratios and walk to the park metrics to
17 guide our planning efforts in identifying
18 neighborhoods that are greatest in need of green
19 space. We are partnering with other agencies like
20 the Department of Education, the New York City
21 Housing Authority to improve and increase access to
22 some of their recreational spaces for the public
23 through the Schoolyards to Playgrounds Program and
24 our NYCHA Campus Improvements. It is almost important
25 to make sure that Parks and open spaces are well-

2 maintained which is why we rely on our Parks
3 Inspection Program to identify the most high-
4 priorities and make sure that resources are allocated
5 to them. We must be creative, discussing and
6 expanding our open spaces because many of the
7 challenges come when we look to acquire new land.
8 Vacant and unutilized land is extremely scarce and
9 the complexity and duration of the City's Land Use
10 Review Process for each parcel often discourages
11 property owners who might otherwise be willing to
12 sell it to the City; however, we remain dedicated to
13 exploring every opportunity to add new sites to our
14 portfolio and have successfully done so during this
15 administration including Brookville Park in Staten
16 Island, Chelsea Green in Manhattan, and other
17 additional portions of the Bushwick Inlet Park in
18 Brooklyn. Equity serves as a guiding principal for
19 our internal practices of the agency as well. I was
20 proud to elevate our Equal Opportunity Officer
21 Position to an Assistant Commissioner level in 2015,
22 the first New York City Agency to do so. To ensure
23 that our dedication to equity and fairness includes
24 our internal hiring and promotion practices. We also
25 envisioned our Parks Opportunity Program, the

2 partnership with the Human Resource Administration,
3 upgrading training and uniforms to make sure that our
4 job trained participants are recognized as part of
5 the parks family while they gain skills and seek
6 permanent employment opportunities. In light of the
7 COVID-19 pandemic, we have been forced to make some
8 adjustments to our protocols and practices due to the
9 safety and practical concerns. But our commitment to
10 fairness for all of this has remained the same. We
11 first and foremost provided a safe environment for
12 our workers, we recognized early that New Yorkers
13 were going to need recreational outlets while
14 sheltering in place, so we worked tirelessly to
15 provide outlets for those who could safely travel to
16 a park as well as those who felt more comfortable at
17 home. For our staff, who I thank again for their
18 efforts throughout COVID crisis, we provided them
19 with a variety of resources so that they could tend
20 to their work in a safe manner. In addition,
21 following the City and State Health Directives, we
22 offered the necessary personal protective equipment
23 implemented flexible and staggered scheduling for
24 essential workers, adapted our vehicle policy to
25 promote social distancing and introduced robust

2 cleaning protocol for our facilities. For those
3 traveling to parks, we worked with the Department of
4 Health to provide nearly 8,000 face covering in
5 multiple sites around the City. Following State and
6 local guidance, we kept as many properties open as we
7 could closing only those necessary to keep people
8 safe during the peak of the virus earlier this year.
9 Our Parks enforce patrol in our park's ambassadors
10 from our public programs and recreation have also
11 worked with our fellow City Agencies to manage
12 overcrowding and educate our park guests on proper
13 social distancing to people could be safe and feel
14 safe when going out to their local park. The size of
15 the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic resulted
16 in very severe cuts for agency in the FY-21 adopted
17 budget. The cascading effects of those cuts led to
18 the cancellation of hiring 1700 seasonal maintenance
19 and operation workers that are normally brought on
20 each summer to work on borough crews, cleaning parks
21 and attending other horticultural and maintenance
22 duties. The absence of these seasonal workers has
23 been deeply felt this summer. By New York City Parks
24 we remain committed to marshalling this resource in
25 the most effective manner as possible to deliver core

2 services to keep our City Parks clean and safe. To
3 be proactive, our agency is initiating a
4 comprehensive review of our litter and trash
5 measuring practices in anticipation of continued
6 staffing challenges in next year's peak season. We
7 have also launched a robust public education campaign
8 reminding all park goers to do their part so we can
9 all continue to enjoy our shared public space. I
10 have engaged with many elected officials in
11 organizing clean up events with our partnership of
12 park staff and our borough operation teams. As you
13 heard today, the commitment to equity is socially
14 important to all of us at New York City Parks and we
15 recognize how we work that impacts every single
16 resident and visitor to New York City. Our Parks are
17 for everyone so we will do as much as our resources
18 will provide in order to make sure that everyone gets
19 the opportunity to enjoy the best possible park
20 system that we can offer to them. Thank you Chair
21 for the opportunity to testify today and we will be
22 happy to answer any questions that you may have.

23 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you Commission and
24 before we continue, I just want to re-administer the
25 oath to Deputy Commission Konon and Bruce Thomas

2 because we did not get their replies earlier. So, I
3 will just go ahead with that once again. Do you
4 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing
5 but the truth before this committee and to respond to
6 Council Member questions honestly, Deputy
7 Commissioner?

8 ALYSSA COBB KONON: I do.

9 CHRIS SARTORI: Uhm, Mr. Thomas?

10 BRUCE THOMAS: Yes, I do, thank you.

11 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. And at this
12 point we would proceed with questions from Chair Koo.
13 Chair Koo, uhm you may begin your questions.

14 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Hi Commissioner,
15 thank you for coming to give testimony about equity
16 of Parks. Can you hear me?

17 MITCHELL SILVER: I can hear you.

18 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Is it okay?

19 CHRIS SARTORI: Yes, Council Member I can
20 hear you.

21 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Because I have,
22 at the last minute my home WIFI died so I had to
23 borrow some WIFI in the basement of other business
24 people, yeah. Anyway, thank you. So, my first
25 question is, many reports have indicated the park use

2 has increased tremendously during the pandemic, does
3 DPR have any data to indicate by house much utilizing
4 has increased?

5 MITCHELL SILVER: Uhm, thank you for the
6 question for Chair Koo, we do report numbers for
7 pools and beaches and from other parks. We do not
8 have a mechanism of recording usage but what we have
9 noticed from our social distance ambassadors with
10 everything else closed we have seen increased uses of
11 our parks across the entire system. We all know with
12 all the shelter in place and not all the things that
13 we are used to being open from movie theatres to
14 malls, parks became the destination for basically all
15 New Yorkers. Whether it was a birthday party,
16 fitness classes, uhm a shower, baby showers, parks
17 became the destination and we did see a lot more
18 usership in our parks but in terms of the actual
19 numbers we do have those numbers for our pools and
20 beaches but not for our overall park system but I
21 think any observer driving throughout the City or
22 walking throughout the City or biking can see clearly
23 parks were heavily used throughout the summer.

24 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Thank you. Yeah,
25 so you also mentioned that the number of visitors

2 going to parks has been increasing in recent years.

3 What is the process for actually measuring the number
4 of people listed in each park?

5 MITCHELL SILVER: Uhm, I may defer to
6 Deputy Commission Cobb Konon, we started an effort to
7 determine different techniques of how do you count
8 people within parks. I think we called it Park 4 and
9 it was a pilot program that we started a couple of
10 years ago that we are looking at various techniques
11 of how do you count people in Parks? Uhm so I will
12 defer to Deputy Commissioner to add a bit more of an
13 effort. I think we did kind of hold it during COVID
14 but we were looking at ways of looking at cellphone
15 data of determining how many people are in public
16 space. But we do have accurate numbers for beaches
17 and pools but for the parks we were looking at some
18 technology that would be able to track how many
19 people are in a park, of course, if you can hold on.
20 Deputy Commissioner?

21 ALYSSA COBB KONON: Yes, thank you, uhm as
22 the Commissioner mentioned, we have limited data on a
23 system wide basis of usership. We also have some
24 usership based from conservancy efforts within those
25 parks. The wonderful thing about City Parks is that

2 they are porous and have multiple entrances and exits
3 which makes it challenging to measure usership on a
4 systemwide basis. Unlike say, an institution like a
5 museum where there is one door in and out. We have
6 been looking at methodologies which does require
7 technology. It is something that you need to make
8 sure that you are balancing costs and privacy with
9 how you do that and we, as the Commissioner
10 mentioned, we did get a community development block
11 grant funding to look at Prospect Park to pilot
12 methodologies for implementation, again I am looking
13 at a systemwide or perhaps a selective sample of
14 parks across the system and that's in process.

15 MITCHEL SILVER: And that was for, and we
16 do an attempt years ago of relying heavily on our
17 conservative park partners, we estimated that New
18 York Parks gets over 130 million visits. Not visitors
19 but visits to our park system every year. Central
20 Park is 42 million alone so that gives you a sense of
21 how often New Yorkers and that includes visitors,
22 that's the number of visits we get in our parks and
23 it exceeds over 130 million.

24 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Thank you. I
25 think it is important for us to have a system to

2 measure how many visitors to each park, especially
3 the major ones in the times of this technology it
4 shouldn't be such a big problem, you know. So, uhm
5 Commissioner, prior to the pandemic, what was the
6 percentage of New Yorkers who had access to a park
7 within a 10-minute walk to their homes?

8 MITCHELL SILVER: The number right now is
9 81.7%. Our goal is to get to 85% by 2030, so it is
10 81.7% as of today.

11 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: So, does that
12 mean more than 1 million people do not have access to
13 any public park within a 10-minute walk?

14 MITCHELL SILVER: That is correct. They
15 didn't have a walk to a park, now 10-minutes, it
16 depends on how quickly someone walks so we just say
17 walk to a park because someone who walks fast and
18 someone that walks slow. So, walk to a park,
19 correct, that is correct. And that is something that
20 we constantly work on as I mentioned in my testimony.
21 We do have those walk ats, we know where they are
22 located and we do a number of things to make sure we
23 can reduce that gap. They are responding to convert
24 schoolyards to playgrounds, that is our partnership
25 with the Department of Education and now we have a

2 couple of projects with NYCHA to re-envision their
3 public spaces to make it more accessible,
4 particularly where we are seeing that walking gap.
5 So, this is something that we have increased over
6 time. This administration has been focused on both of
7 those programs and reducing the gap and so that's
8 something that we are pleased to be able to answer
9 yes, is 81.7% and we would like to get to 85% by
10 2030.

11 ALYSSA COBB KONON: Commissioner, perhaps
12 I could add that New York City looks at what we call
13 the walk to the park in a way that is perhaps more
14 conservative or stricter than other cities. If you
15 look at our walk score in terms of how far people are
16 away from a park, if it is a 10-minute walk we
17 actually do quite well. I'm not sure I have the
18 number in front of me but I think it's at 97 or 99%
19 within a walk to the park but we look at it with a
20 finer grain perspective, we look at whether or not
21 people are outside of a walk to the park based on the
22 following criteria. Is are they outside of a walk to
23 the park if it is 10-minutes away from a large park?
24 Or a half mile? And if it is a small park then we
25 use a more conservative metric which is 1/4 mile and

2 so that's why we are at 81.7% of New Yorkers within a
3 walk to the park.

4 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Thank you so uhm
5 what measures does DPR have in place to clean and
6 sterilize recreation centers? Well, as part of our
7 COVID protocol, any of our rec centers are closed;
8 however, we did use them for a number of functions.
9 We did have cleaning protocol for our facilities. We
10 use some of our facilities for food distribution. We
11 use some of our facilities for test and trace and now
12 we are using it for daycare and learning bridges. In
13 all cases, we have very strict cleaning protocols
14 which we started at the beginning of COVID but it
15 turns out the rest of our recreational facilities
16 open to the public that are not based upon the
17 exceptions that I just shared with you but as I said
18 in all those cases we had very, very clear and strict
19 cleaning protocols for all of our indoor facilities.

20 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: So, many
21 recreation centers are being used for the Learning
22 Bridges Program and it has been mentioned that only
23 one person is assigned to clean several facilities
24 and the facilities are only cleaned once a day. Is
25 this correct?

2 MITCHELL SILVER: I would have to get
3 back to you, that does not sound correct but I want
4 to get back to you to confirm. As stated, we know if
5 there is a population of people in a facility, we
6 take our cleaning protocol very, very seriously and
7 so that is something that I would have to get back to
8 you, it doesn't sound correct but I want to be able
9 to confirm.

10 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Thank you, yes.
11 Do you have a breakdown of the number of locations of
12 recreation centers that are used for the Learning
13 Bridges Program?

14 MITCHELL SILVER: We can get you
15 location. I will see if I have that here. Uhm, we
16 have if you want me to go through each one in
17 Manhattan, we have Alfred E. Smith, Jackie Robinson
18 Rec Centers in Brooklyn Sunset Park, in Queens we
19 have LDH, the ones that are in progress, we are now
20 looking at Tony Dapolito, Tom Jeff, J. Hood, East
21 54th Street, Hansborough, Gertrude Ederle in Queens,
22 Al Oerter, A.R.R.O.W. and Detective Williams in
23 Brooklyn, Fort Hamilton, St. Johns, McCarren, in
24 Bronx St. Mary's, Hunt's Point, West Bronx,

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2 Williamsbridge Oval, in Staten Island, Greenbelt and
3 Water Park.

4 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: There's a lot,
5 yeah.

6 MITCHELL SILVER: There is a lot. There
7 are 23 recreation sites being offered.

8 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Yeah. How many
9 in Queens? I forgot?

10 MITCHELL SILVER: We have 23. There are
11 some licenses in progress but in total we are looking
12 at 23 sites.

13 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: So, I missed
14 some.

15 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, there were 23, we
16 can certainly send you the specific lists. Those are
17 licensed sites and those licenses are in progress so
18 we can certainly send you the list.

19 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: I'm sorry, yeah,
20 my WiFi is not stable.

21 MITCHELL SILVER: I'm sorry Chair, you are
22 breaking up a bit. My last response was, we can send...

23 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: No, I understand.

24 MITCHELL SILVER: Yes, we will send you
25 the list of the 23 sites.

2 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Okay, yeah, now I
3 understand, we not only have inequity of parks but we
4 have an inequity of WiFi in New York City. So, when
5 you have unstable WiFi the school kids cannot do
6 their homework or they cannot learn properly.

7 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, the good news is
8 we have an amazing technology team and they made sure
9 all of our WiFi at all of the schools for our
10 Learning Bridges was up to date so they did that
11 relatively quickly. So, we do have a good team
12 making sure that does not come a barrier for those
13 children learning.

14 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Okay, now let's
15 see, another process that has been manually capital
16 orders that have been stopped during the pandemic and
17 have yet to restart. In what neighborhoods are these
18 halted projects located? How many stopped projects
19 and in what neighborhoods?

20 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, that is something
21 that is very specific, I will have to get back to
22 you. Uhm but you I'm sure Chair you understand that
23 under the policy that was initiated by the Governor
24 that many parks projects did come to a halt. We have
25 resumed many and we are working constructively with

2 OMB and other relevant agencies in order to get those
3 projects back on track. I do not have before me the
4 final numbers since we are working with OMB on a
5 daily basis or the locations but that is certainly
6 that we can certainly work with our capital team and
7 get back to you. But the good news is, a number of
8 projects have proceeded and we are now having these
9 virtual ribbon cuttings to let the public know that
10 now those projects moving forward and we continue to
11 cut ribbons on those projects but we will certainly
12 get you those specific numbers on both the number and
13 the location.

14 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Okay. Does, does
15 DPR perform inspections as per its past, as per its
16 past inspection program, PIP?

17 MITCHELL SILVER: Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: And all parks run
19 by the conservancies?

20 MITCHELL SILVER: Uhm, the answer is yes,
21 so our parks inspection program continues. Our
22 inspectors are out there, still conducting those
23 inspections that is ongoing and clearly as we have
24 saw increased usage to our parks, those inspections
25 and those ratings are so critically important. So,

2 the program continues, inspectors are still out there
3 and we are still monitoring those numbers on a
4 monthly basis, so the answer is yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Which
6 conservancy, when parks or such parks if any have
7 performed poorly under the PIP program?

8 MITCHELL SILVER: Uhm, I don't think any
9 of the parks perform poorly. We have Mayor's targets
10 and on a regular basis we meet or exceed those
11 targets. Now, within that range, there are some at
12 100% and some maybe at 85%. There is no question
13 over the summer with the reduction of not having as
14 many seasonal, we did see a reduction number across
15 the board, but in general, all of the parks, whether
16 you are a conservancy park or a not conservancy park
17 still performed well, however, we did see different
18 rating this summer which was directly correlated to
19 not having 1700 seasonals in our plus. So,
20 considering, staff did a great job, public and
21 volunteers stepped in, we initiated that campaign
22 Carry In, Carry Out and reached out to all of our
23 partners to help us make sure that our parks were
24 well-maintained and I see a number of partners on
25 this call. I cannot tell you how invaluable their

2 help has been. This past Saturday over 60 groups
3 came out, or approximated. So, between our
4 conservative partners, park staff and all of our
5 volunteers they are really working hard to make sure
6 these green spaces stay safe and clean.

7 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Uhm.

8 MITCHELL SILVER: Yes, yes, Chair Koo I'm
9 here.

10 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: So, how has COVID
11 impacted the inspections and data related to the
12 inspections?

13 MITCHELL SILVER: COVID has not impacted
14 our inspections. Our inspectors, we did initiate
15 protocol for how people travel but inspectors
16 generally travel alone so in terms of the inspections
17 it hasn't been affected, in terms of their ability to
18 do their work. Clearly, in certain part of the year
19 some of our facilities were closed but still they
20 were able to go out there and do their work is
21 critical and vital to this agency because that guides
22 us onto where we have to make adjustments should we
23 see a drop in ratings or something that we need to
24 pay attention to. Part of this work is to identify
25 what we call immediate action. If we see something

2 wrong out there in the field, they have, the staff
3 has a certain amount of time to fix it so the parks
4 and inspection program is vital to the safety of the
5 parks so we did not suspend it through COVID, they
6 continued to inspect the parks.

7 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: So, all parks
8 have been flat through the PID program as not having,
9 as not meeting the standards set by the department?

10 MITCHELL SILVER: We did see as a result
11 of, because of budget reasons of having less 1700
12 seasonal workers, we were not able to, we made 40%
13 less visits to our parks than we had in previous
14 years. That did have an impact. We all recognized as
15 you stated, the very devastating loss of revenue in
16 budget cuts did affect our operations so we did see a
17 40% reduction in cost in our system and so that
18 became very challenging. That did in fact affect our
19 ratings and so we have always exceeded to maintained
20 all of our park ratings as long as I have been here
21 but the loss of not having 1700 seasonal workers did
22 have an impact at a time when park usage was
23 increasing and more people were coming in for social
24 events, for food, and so I have to really applaud
25 staff and the volunteers for really stepping up so at

2 a time we saw less in our parks, we saw an increase
3 in park usage and so many of our park partners, in
4 Prospect Park, Riverside and I can name so many
5 started to initiate area, and really started to pay
6 attention because they saw what was happening to our
7 parks. So, yes, we did see a change in reduction in
8 our park cleaning but at the same time we saw an
9 increase in park usage. It has stabilized now that we
10 are in the fall season but as I stated in my
11 testimony, we are looking very carefully at the
12 spring season when we are moving in to our other peak
13 where now we are thinking of very comprehensive and
14 creative ways of approaching both our litter and
15 trash maintenance to anticipate what they have come
16 March when the weather starts to change here.

17 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Thank you. We
18 are also joined by Council Members Moya and
19 (INAUDIBLE).

20 CHRIS SARTORI: Please hold for one
21 second everybody as we correct some technical issues.

22 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Uhm, Commissioner
23 did you hear my last (INAUDIBLE)?

24 MITCHELL SILVER: No, I did not Chair Koo.

2 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: (INAUDIBLE). More
3 like (INAUDIBLE).

4 MITCHELL SILVER: Chair Koo, the audio is
5 going in and out I did not hear the question.

6 CHRIS SARTORI: You have tot unmute
7 yourself Mr. Chair.

8 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: I'm going to
9 start by letting other Council Members ask question.
10 I am going to switch to a telephone.

11 CHRIS SARTORI: Okay. Thank you, Chair
12 Koo. As the Chair was stating before, we were joined
13 by two additional Council Members, Council Member Moy
14 and Van Bramer. At this point, we will move on to
15 additional Council Members who may have questions and
16 we will ask them to raise their questions in the
17 order that they have used the Zoom Raise Hand
18 Functions. If you would like to ask question Council
19 Members, and you have not yet used the Zoom Raise
20 Hand Function, please do so now. Council Members
21 please keep your questions to five minutes. The
22 Sargeant at Arms will keep a timer and will let you
23 know when your time is up. You should begin once I
24 have called on you and the Sargeant has announced
25 that you may begin delivering your testimony. We

2 will first hear from Council Member Levine followed
3 by Council Member Gjonaj.

4 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

5 MARK LEVINE: Thank you Chris, and thank
6 you to Chair Koo for holding this hearing and for
7 applying inequity lens to these critical questions.
8 We might not have comprehensive data but there is no
9 doubt, park use is surging maybe at record levels. We
10 see it all over the City but this is happening even
11 more in low-income communities, in black and brown
12 neighborhoods where most residents don't have the
13 resources to retreat to a cabin in the woods to ride
14 out the pandemic or to go to the Hamptons and parks
15 really have just been critical deliverability in
16 these neighborhoods all over the City during these
17 difficult time. And so that makes the resource
18 squeeze particularly difficult in low resource
19 neighborhoods from around the City, both from the
20 expense side and the capital side and I do want to
21 uhm, commend you and your team, Commissioner Silver
22 for finding ways to do more with less in this
23 difficult time. At a certain point, eventually you
24 are going to have to do less with less, we understand
25 that is how budgets and staffing work. If, I have

2 time in my 5-minutes I will ask you more about the
3 expense side. But on the capital front, I just want
4 to understand the extent to which you have restarted
5 parks capital work, which I know had paused during
6 the early stage of the pandemic and the extent to
7 which you are dispersing funding for nonprofits to do
8 capital work in parks. I believe there is about \$50
9 million pending in that category as well.

10 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, I thank you for
11 the question Council Member, thank you. Uhm, I do
12 report park workers, this has been a very trying
13 time. Uhm, I will get you specific numbers. You are
14 correct. We had quite a number of projects in all
15 phases. We had well over 600 projects in design,
16 procurement and construction and I will get you the
17 numbers of exactly were unphased and continued going
18 forward. We went in to OMB and we continue to do
19 that on a daily basis. I don't have the response on
20 specifically about out non-profit partners, so that
21 is something that I don't have before me, but,
22 Council Member Levine we will certain get that
23 information for you but the good news is that we are
24 getting more and more of those projects unpaused on a
25 weekly basis because we know how important it is to

2 get these phases over to the public as quickly as
3 possible.

4 MARK LEVINE: That's great, the non-
5 profit partners in many cases may be at most really
6 are focusing in low-income neighborhoods and so their
7 parks works is also critical to equity and uhm to get
8 it started as soon as possible I think is really
9 important so would appreciate your update on that.
10 Uhm, speaking of equity and the impending elections,
11 uhm in a week and a half I want to ask you about the
12 concessions that the Trump Organization operates
13 three in Central Park and of course the golf course
14 in the Bronx, am I correct that those are expiring
15 soon, I believe three in Central Park expiring in
16 mid-2021?

17 MITCHELL SILVER: I do believe the
18 concessions in Central Park are expiring soon. The
19 Ferry Point Golf Course is not. I don't have the
20 specific dates but you are correct, those concessions
21 in Central Park are expiring soon.

22 MARK LEVINE: And have you opened
23 solicitations for the next phase of those contracts?
24 The two ice rinks and the carousel in Central Park?

2 MITCHELL SILVER: To my knowledge, we
3 have not.

4 MARK LEVINE: DO you know, so then
5 presumably we don't know whether the Trump
6 Organization intends on reapplying?

7 MITCHELL SILVER: We do not.

8 MARK LEVINE: You know that I have been
9 on the record advocating for the cancellation of
10 those contracts. At this point we are nearing the
11 end of that term so now my fight is going to be to
12 make sure that they are not renewed. Does the City
13 have a commitment to offering those important
14 concessions to an organization that is not uhm, owned
15 and operated by Donald Trump?

16 MITCHELL SILVER: With all of our
17 concession, we put it out there and let people
18 respond and so that is something that we have always
19 done even if there is an operating that we have used,
20 that have been operating concession for a long period
21 of time. So, that is our intention. We are looking
22 very carefully at those concessions. We do know that
23 they are expiring soon, but I want to save that it is
24 a given that if you are a current operator today that

2 it is automatically going to become the concessionary
3 that you will get the concession in the future.

4 MARK LEVINE: Do you know, there is some
5 reports that revenue has been down at these
6 concessions which means that the City's take also
7 drops, because that's the way that the agreement
8 works, do you know if that is the case?

9 MITCHELL SILVER: Let me respond and then
10 I will let Deputy Commissioner respond as well.
11 There is no question that we've been seeing a drop in
12 revenue across the City. They have all been
13 challenged, some took a while to reopen and I think
14 we all know that we rely heavily not just on
15 concessions for revenue but the concession.

16 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

17 MITCHELL SILVER: Park experience. So,
18 now I will just turn it over to Deputy Commissioner
19 since you want to hit on both the concessions in
20 Central Park but I can tell you revenue has been down
21 for our concessions.

22 ALYSSA COBB KONON: That's correct. Can I
23 share, concession revenue has been down across the
24 board. We can certainly followup on any individual
25 concession that you would like more information on.

2 MARK LEVINE: Well, my time is up but
3 there had been reports in the press that specifically
4 that the Trump operated concessions were seeing a
5 drop in revenue well before the pandemic, possibly
6 because of how, of how tarnished of the reputation of
7 the Trump name is and that's of course is bad for the
8 City because we rely on that revenue. Uhm, is it the
9 case that those properties were seeing a drop in
10 revenue prior to the pandemic?

11 ALYSSA COBB KONON: I would have to go
12 back and look at that, I don't want to misspeak.

13 MARK LEVINE: Okay, my time is up, thank
14 you again Commissioner Silver and to all of the women
15 and men of the Parks Department who have been doing
16 such great work during this difficult crisis, and
17 back to you Chair Koo.

18 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you, we will now
19 hear by Council Member Gjonaj followed by Council
20 Member Adams and Council Member Moya.

21 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 MARK GJONAJ: Thank you. I want to thank
23 the Chair and the Commissioner. I hope all is well
24 with you and your family and I can't help but give a
25 shout out to my Commissioner, Iris Rodriguez. She is

2 awesome or as my children would say the bestestest,
3 keep that in mind. With that being said, I am so
4 concerned. Prior to COVID and prior to any economic
5 downturn we still had parks that were not being
6 maintained, the upkeep, capital, basic maintenance
7 and clean up, grass cutting in particular when it
8 comes to small pocket parks. Isolated parks that are
9 seldom seen and not very busy. Uhm, New York, the
10 experts predict a continued downturn in our economy.
11 We have all witnessed a 1700 staff cut in the budget
12 to the Parks Department. I am concerned just like
13 you and most New Yorkers over the future of the parks
14 and the maintenance. We are looking for other sources
15 of revenue. I would only imagine that would be a
16 dedicated source if concession. Does concession
17 money would go directly to the Parks Department
18 Budget? Or is that put into a pool?

19 MITCHELL SILVER: If there is a
20 concession in a park that we have a licensing
21 agreement there is a formula where the revenue is
22 split. If it is a concession in a non-licensed
23 agreement park then it goes to the City General Fund.

24 MARK GJONAJ: Maybe we can revisit that
25 scenario but I can see the capital needs, in

2 particular I am going to mention Orchard Beach,
3 Pelham Bay Park, the largest Park in New York City.
4 We know that there is a big capital project that has
5 been planned. We have already put aside some of the
6 money, that work has begun, but put on hold because
7 of COVID. I can only see that project being
8 fulfilled through a concession where they will take
9 the responsibility of building out the concession as
10 needed, taking advantage of the parking and using
11 that park year-round. There are a very few places
12 that we can having parking for thousands of cars that
13 is underutilized and Orchard Beach would be one of
14 those examples. Please explore this. Uhm.

15 MITCHELL SILVER: Council Member that is
16 already being contemplated uhm as the building is
17 being designed and transformed. There are
18 opportunities but to go with a concession is
19 certainly, there is a process. I hear you; you are
20 correct. The location of the parking does but we do
21 have to go in a series of steps before we go ahead
22 and initiate that out for a concession.

23 MARK GJONAJ: I want to thank you and I
24 will consider your hit on that one question,
25 Commissioner. Have we finished identifying all of

2 the City-owned properties and who is responsible for
3 what property? I bring this up again, Pelham Parkway,
4 the Median, DOT, Sanitation, Parks Department, no one
5 takes responsibility and every year several times a
6 year it becomes an issue and I know there are so many
7 other properties throughout the City that no one
8 claims responsibility for and it always becomes a
9 shouting match over who is going to maintain and
10 clean up. Can we start working on identifying those
11 properties and which agencies would benefit to
12 maintain them, whether it be grass cutting or litter
13 removal? Can we identify which agency is going to be
14 held responsible?

15 MITCHELL SILVER: Council Member, I thank
16 you for that. I remember quite well, it was March
17 13, 2020, I was the last Budget Hearing person to
18 present before COVID hit and so the answer is even
19 during that very challenging time, we did initiate
20 those conversations. Your beloved Commissioner Iris
21 Rodriguez Rosa, we started reaching out to DOT to
22 resolve that. I will get you an update on how that
23 unfolded but I do remember particulate and passionate
24 plea to resolve this problem. That was literally the
25 last day of all hearings and then we moved into COVID

2 and the shelter in place, but I will get you that
3 response Council Member.

4 MARK GJONAJ: Thank you Commissioner. It
5 was my understanding that it was discussed and the
6 responsibility is on DOT and I just don't think DOT
7 is aware of that responsibility because it hasn't
8 been cut since last year. So, we are back to 6-foot
9 high grass, an eye sore and a potential hazard to
10 motorists and pedestrians.

11 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, I will followup.
12 I will followup and get back to you because you are
13 correct, you made your plea loud and clear, we did
14 followup with DOT. I will respond what was that
15 resolution.

16 MARK GJONAJ: Thank you.

17 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you Council Member
18 Gjonaj, we will now hear from Council Member Adams
19 followed by Council Members Holden and Council Member
20 Cohen.

21 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 ADRIENNE ADAMS: Thank you very much.
23 Thank you, Mr. Chair. Commissioner is it always good
24 to see you in any forum. Glad to see you today. I
25 also have to give a shout out to my Commissioner

2 Michael Docket, who has been extraordinary for us in
3 southeast Queens. We recently opened the new Gateway
4 Park which we have been waiting for as all of our DPR
5 friends know for a very long time so we got that
6 done, really happy to get that done. Also within my
7 District in southeast Queens we've also finished
8 Norelli Park, some more work on the Baisley Park
9 Extension and as I said, Commissioner Docket did a
10 walk through with our team, last week through several
11 Rochdale Parks which we are still working so, so I
12 thank him for all of his work in southeast Queens and
13 continuing to be a great partner with us. Uhm, that
14 said, I just have to back up a little bit and deal a
15 little bit more with the equity issue, because it
16 seems as my colleague Council Member Gjonaj just
17 said, it almost seems like we are playing catchup
18 with a lot of things that should have been done, now
19 we are playing catchup with them during the, during
20 the pandemic. It has already been established that
21 there has been an equity issue in New York City in
22 the Park System. Not the least being that larger
23 parks are located in primarily white areas and
24 smaller parks are located in communities of color.
25 Uhm, this spring, in southeast Queens we were part of

2 one of the highest hit communities for COVID-19 and
3 we paid a very large price both in people that we
4 lost and in our park spaces that had to be closed
5 because of the pandemic. Again, we are playing
6 catchup once again in dealing with all of this coming
7 together. So, just to back up a little bit, I
8 remember when I was Chairperson of Community Board 12
9 and you came before us with these great projects that
10 are now uhm, you know coming to fruition, Community
11 Parks Initiative, and uhm Anchor Parks, Parks without
12 Borders. I remember mentioning back then, I believe
13 around 2014ish or so, 2015ish or so mentioning that
14 there was really no representation for southeast
15 Queens at all in any of those initiatives. No Roy
16 Wilkins, no Baisley Pond Park, no Adeslay (SP?) Park,
17 no Phil Rizzuto Park, the largest park in my District
18 in Richmond Hill. So, I just want to hear from you
19 what are your thoughts as far as equity in southeast
20 Queens when it comes to Park? Equity when it comes to
21 new initiatives? You know I mentioned that we have
22 some of that capital stuff, we are shaking those
23 trees loose and getting some more completions on but
24 what else do you see on the horizon for southeast
25 Queens as far as expanding, you know our ideas for

2 parks and beautification efforts? And things like
3 that?

4 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, thank you for
5 your question and I am very pleased that we are
6 moving forward and completing some of those parks.
7 Each one that you mentioned, the Community Parks
8 Initiative, Anchor Parks and Parks without Borders
9 each was addressing a specific purpose. The CPI in
10 particular, this was a start of investment so we had
11 criteria to determine where the need was most. Not to
12 say there wasn't need in southeast Queens but we are
13 looking at some spaces that hadn't seen investment in
14 decades, in some cases, close to 30 years so we had
15 to address that first and I would like to continue
16 the Community Parks Initiative, basically because
17 every year you get more parks that see the lack of
18 investment. Same thing with Anchor Parks, we had to
19 pick one per borough but we are always still focusing
20 capital dollars on other parks, as you know
21 Brookville Park got some improvements. We are always
22 looking at ways of working with the Council Member,
23 Borough President and the Mayor to make sure that we
24 go beyond the Community Parks Initiative. There are
25 other ways to fund these parks. So, there are a

2 number of parks that we have focused on. I know our
3 staff meets on a regular basis to see how we can put
4 more funds together. We are focused on equity first,
5 steady good repair. It is my goal to make sure that
6 every park that deserves it gets some level of
7 capital funding. So, we will continue work with you
8 to see what on that list, we can continue to target
9 dollars, because I want every neighborhood, every
10 park to get their fair share to be improved. But, the
11 CPI in particular, with just horrible years of lack
12 of investment and these were the worst of the worst
13 that have neglected virtually for 23 years and we
14 wanted to make sure they are addressed first. Now,
15 we are looking at the next ones.

16 ADRIENNE ADAMS: I would like my time
17 back, thank you both. Thank you very much for that
18 Commissioner, I just can't stress enough, you know,
19 again I think that we, I feel as though we are
20 playing catchup and I misspoke earlier, you said
21 Brookville Park and you are absolutely right, I said
22 Adesley Park and that is another area in southeast
23 Queens that is on the tip of my mind.

24 MITCHELL SILVER: And I, we are doing
25 some investment at Roy Wilkins now.

2 ADRIENNE ADAMS: Roy Wilkins, yes.

3 MITCHELL SILVER: We are getting you a
4 complete list but I do believe in equity. This is
5 something that I've been doing for 20 years. It is
6 not just something that I just want to put a check
7 box. I truly believe it and so we will sit down but
8 we are investing a lot in southeast Queens but we are
9 looking to do it in all those places that really have
10 been neglected for decades. It just wasn't fair and
11 want to make sure that we rectify that.

12 ADRIENNE ADAMS: Thank you very much and I
13 look forward to working with you and continue our
14 great work with Commissioner Docket as well. Thank
15 you very much Commissioner.

16 MITCHELL SILVER: Thank you.

17 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you to Council
18 Member Adams. We will now here from Council Member
19 Holden, followed by Council Member Cohen.

20 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 ROBERT HOLDEN: Thank you Chair Koo for
22 this hearing and Commissioner Silver for your
23 testimony and Commissioner we are still trying to
24 figure out why parks took a higher percentage budget
25 cut than all the other agencies but it is kind of

2 like that's what happens to parks and it shows over
3 decades that parks have been neglected, even in good
4 times. We don't get the budget and uhm that you know
5 that we deserve for parks and having been a volunteer
6 for parks for 35 to 40 years almost, uhm we saw what
7 we were up against as volunteers and uhm I just want
8 to ask a few questions on the uhm, where we left off
9 at a hearing pre-COVID the Street Tree Planting
10 Program because my District and many Districts around
11 the City took a hit on, on uhm trees as you know. Is
12 there, are we planting trees again in the City of New
13 York?

14 MITCHELL SILVER: We are planting trees
15 again. Uhm, I don't have the particulars. I will see
16 if Matt does, uhm but we struggle with some of our
17 contracts and advice per tree. We weren't satisfied,
18 we felt it was far too high and so we kept rebidding
19 it until we got a number low that would be acceptable
20 to the parks and for the taxpayers and so once we
21 were able to do that, we proceeded but then when
22 COVID hit a lot of our work came to a halt. We are
23 back to planting trees again. I don't have the
24 specific location. Uhm, Matt if you have additional
25 information, I would certainly welcome it.

2 ROBERT HOLDEN: Yeah, I'm not seeing the
3 markings on the curb that I used to see before a tree
4 would be planted and I haven't seen the crews around
5 and you know we are concerned because we've lost so
6 many. So, if you could uhm, by the way how much is
7 each tree costing us now? You mentioned at one point
8 \$1500 it was costing.

9 MITCHELL SILVER: I don't know the
10 number, I know it went as high as \$4000, we felt to
11 high, we had the number down. I don't have that
12 number before me. I, I do apologize. I will get that
13 to you Council Member Holden.

14 ROBERT HOLDEN: Okay, uhm question of
15 uhm, how is parks working with the DOT to identify
16 needed open space in neighborhoods that are relying
17 on small parks?

18 MITCHELL SILVER: That is part of our
19 Parks without Borders Initiative as well as DOT Plaza
20 Program. We just look for those opportunities. We
21 find a park, Seward Park is one example on the lower
22 eastside, Montefiore Square Plaza, another one in
23 northern Manhattan, Traver's Park in Queens, so where
24 we see an opportunity where they can either de-map or
25 temporary use a street to extend it and then we work

2 closely with them on Open Street Place Tree Program
3 over the summer where we identified a lot of miles of
4 street both in parks, adjacent to parks and so we do
5 work very closely on a regular basis, always seeking
6 opportunities where we can extend the park experience
7 but either using a street temporarily or whether de-
8 mapping as is the case with Traver's Park to extend
9 that park experience. That is consistent with our
10 Parks without Borders Program to create a more
11 seamless realm. DOT is a great partner.

12 ROBERT HOLDEN: Yeah, so are you
13 coordinating with DOE, Department of Education on
14 potential schoolyards to playground locations?

15 MITCHELL SILVER: Yes, I am. The answer
16 is yes, that is part of the Schoolyards to
17 Playgrounds Program. I see Carter Strickland here,
18 he knows it quite well, but we've been doing that for
19 a number of years. I will defer over to Deputy
20 Commissioner to tell you how that is working but we
21 do have that active relationship with DOE.

22 ALYSSA COBB KONON: Yes, thank you, uhm
23 we have about 260 Schoolyards to Playgrounds. Right
24 now, we are working on about 22 new ones. It is, as
25 I am sure that you are familiar, but just for the

2 record and for the rest of the Council Members, this
3 is a partnership with DOE where DOE staffing provides
4 the extra time after school and on holidays and
5 weekends so that the public can access that space.
6 Our participation in the Schoolyards to Playgrounds
7 aside from the policy side is often to help provide
8 the capital funding to improve the schoolyards and we
9 work closely with the principal and central DOE to
10 identify those sites.

11 ROBERT HOLDEN: Some of the locations at
12 least one in my District was stalled because of you
13 know we couldn't get the money to pay the custodian
14 to lock up the gates or to stay extra time at the
15 school, has that been resolved?

16 ALYSSA COBB KONON: I can't speak to the
17 specific playground and I'm sure we could followup
18 with you, uhm Council Member.

19 ROBERT HOLDEN: I said there were many
20 locations.

21 ALYSSA COBB KONON: Yes, I was just about
22 to say that, it is an issue that the original
23 allocation, that Department of Education got for
24 Schoolyards to Playgrounds has been maxed out and to
25 expand the program further they would need additional

2 expense money to pay those custodians for the upkeep
3 of those spaces.

4 ROBERT HOLDEN: Alright, just one last
5 question Commissioner, we understand that many non-
6 profits and community groups are leading service
7 projects to help clean parks. What challenges has the
8 agency faced in helping to support these volunteer
9 groups and what resources are necessary to better
10 supports parks stewardship groups uhm because we are
11 going to have to rely more on the volunteers.

12 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

13 MITCHELL SILVER: We are not really
14 having any challenges. I was to personally say thank
15 you, thank you, thank you to all of our partners and
16 community members for stepping up. I've gone to a few
17 myself and it really warms my heart that New Yorkers
18 care that much that they will take time out of their
19 weekends to go out and help clean up parks. So, we
20 are not experiencing any challenges. We have launched
21 it with our campaign, we are going to continue to do
22 so and then double down coming into the spring, but I
23 personally want to thank those New Yorkers for coming
24 out. It has been a huge boost, also to our staff
25 around because they are all very prideful about how

2 they keep their parks clean and to see how some of
3 them look after a weekend during the hot of summer
4 was demoralizing so the volunteers that come out and
5 say we will help you, we got your back, was
6 heartening so we are not having any challenges. We
7 have the resources through Partnership with Parks and
8 our park staff and so thank you for the offer and
9 thank all of you Council Members who also participate
10 in some of those cleanups.

11 ROBERT HOLDEN: I agree wholeheartedly.
12 Thank you, Commissioner for your help and support.
13 Thank you. Thanks Chair Koo.

14 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you Council Member
15 Holden. Council Member Cohen.

16 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 ANDREW COHEN: Uhm, thank you, thank you
18 Chair Koo. It's very good to see you Commissioner. I
19 think I want to echo some of the comments made by my
20 colleagues. I do think if we had medals to give out,
21 I think that the Parks Department really did an
22 amazing job this summer under extremely difficult
23 circumstances and you and your team and everybody,
24 everybody who keeps these parks clean. It was a
25 monumental effort. I don't know, I know we talked

2 about uhm that you had data on pools and beaches.
3 That would be said what the increase was but I could
4 just tell with my own eyes that the use of beaches
5 and pools was a multiple of what it normally is and
6 you did do amazing work keeping everything clean and
7 my office received complaints. Really, you know
8 people call on Monday morning and I'm like I know its
9 Monday morning but by Monday afternoon things are
10 going to be okay. But people really enjoyed
11 complaining about Monday morning. Uhm, I will also
12 say thank you that you and I, that you came up to the
13 District recently and we got to review a number of
14 capital projects that have come to completion that I
15 funded during my time in the Council and some of
16 these were hard fought but I am so grateful and they
17 look amazing. Van Cortlandt Park is really. I
18 consider some of that stuff real legacy stuff but it
19 looks amazing and I know that the people are going to
20 enjoy for many, many years, so thank you for that.
21 Uhm, I am a little concerned about in terms of the
22 subject matter that we are dealing with. I don't
23 want to demonize conservancies or groups that raise
24 money for parks. I think it is vitally important
25 that they do that. I've been trying to encourage the

2 creation of Friends of Groups. You know I've been a
3 tremendous supporter in Van Cortlandt Park of trying
4 to get that group up to the point where they could
5 have a license agreement. I think that would be an
6 important next step and then taking greater
7 responsibility for Van Cortlandt Park and I think we
8 have a very good team there that the alliance now.
9 And lastly, I'm concerned about concessions, being a
10 problem in terms of equity that we are getting in
11 groups that have license agreements, a portion of
12 concession fees, when those are all wealthier parks.
13 It is kind of ironic that if you have a poor park and
14 you have a concession you are not going to get that
15 money put back into the park, but a wealthier park is
16 getting that money so that's, I don't know what the
17 logic is of that. I don't know if that policy makes
18 sense to you, if you think it does if you can tell me
19 why I would appreciate it?

20 MITCHELL SILVER: Well, first let me say
21 that a lot of our park partners even the
22 conservancies are struggling too. Uhm, many of them
23 had to take out PPP loans, they knew revenue was
24 down, especially when revenue was down and I will
25 defer to Deputy Commissioner because she oversees the

2 Concession Division but it is a balancing our
3 contributions to those parks which now little public
4 dollars go in to, they raise it and so each one, the
5 agreement varies so I can't say there is one approach
6 but it is a balance and a formula of how a portion of
7 the concession fee in exchange for basically managing
8 an entire park. And that is basically over 800 acres
9 and the amounts, the base amount of what the City
10 puts in is quite minimal and so we look at a scale of
11 how do we help support these individuals taking care
12 of our parks on our behalf but as I speak to all of
13 our park partners, they've all struggled. I know
14 Kevin Lupov and I know Ann Wilson and others really
15 focus a lot on how to help some of those
16 conservancies and was successful in getting funds and
17 PPP to keep them going but they are all struggling.
18 From modified scheduled to furloughs, it is tough out
19 there for our partners so we want to make sure all of
20 our parks look good, those managed by partners and
21 conservancies and those by New York City Parks but I
22 welcome the conservation. Deputy Commission, is
23 there anything you want to add? There is no one
24 approach, one size fits all, we are not concessions.

2 ALYSSA COBB KONON: I'm sorry, there is
3 no one size fits all as the Commissioner mentioned.
4 Where there is a concession revenue share those are
5 instances where we hold an overall agreement with
6 that conservancy, so it is really a limited number
7 where that is set up that way where there is some
8 revenue share on the concessions and I can attest
9 that both here at parks and at OMB and the Law
10 Department those agreements are based on the concept
11 that the conservancy is bringing something to the
12 table that the City resources aren't otherwise
13 providing. So, to your point, Council Member, the
14 concept is that we shouldn't be taking public
15 resources uhm and, and uhm to support those
16 conservancies but instead that the conservancy is
17 bringing something to the table and that that revenue
18 from the concessions is helping to support what they
19 are bringing to help maintain and care for those
20 parks.

21 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

22 ANDREW COHEN: I know my time is expired.
23 I was wondering, at some point I'm going to reach
24 out. I would like to schedule a call just so maybe I
25 could get an update on the.. I think in Van Cortlandt

2 Park there is at least two concession and I just, I
3 would like to know the status of those. I think this
4 table was done relative recently. I am not as clear
5 on the golf course. But I will reach out. Thank you
6 Chair, thank you Commissioner. It is good to see
7 you.

8 MITCHELL SILVER: Thank you Council
9 Member.

10 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you Council Member
11 Cohen, at this time we will return to Council Member,
12 Chair Koo to ask his remaining questions.

13 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Hello?

14 CHRIS SARTORI: I can hear you Chair Koo.

15 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Okay good, so,
16 Commissioner thank you for your patience. What is
17 established of the paid ones that fail to be filled
18 or vendor vacant under the expansion of the
19 Schoolyards to Playground Initiative that was
20 launched in 2017? Has the administration considered
21 expanding the program at some point in the future?

22 MITCHELL SILVER: Uhm, I will defer to
23 Deputy Commissioner, I do not believe the program is
24 suspended, we still have the money in our budget but

2 I don't know the specifics about the ones that you
3 mentioned from 2017.

4 ALYSSA COBB KONON: Uhm, thanks Council
5 Member, I also would need to go and find the list of
6 which ones were announced in 2017. Uhm, the program
7 is still ongoing, perhaps referencing to the pause
8 that some construction and design projects had during
9 COVID and as the Commissioner mentioned, we are happy
10 to answer questions on any particular one, although
11 we would need to followup on that specific project.
12 Perhaps when you offline, we talked a little bit
13 about the Schoolyards to Playgrounds Program. The
14 sites that we announced we are still moving forward
15 with, expansion of the program beyond the sites that
16 are already in the public would require additional
17 expense funding for the Department of Education to
18 pay for the folks that help maintain those sites
19 after school hours.

20 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Thank you.
21 According to the Center for Urban Futures, report on
22 past infrastructure, DPR has a staff of over 11,642
23 in the 1970s. At the height of the Fiscal Crisis,
24 what is current full and part-time maintenance
25 workforce now?

2 MITCHELL SILVER: Uhm, that number, uhm,
3 I would have to get back to you, fluctuate around
4 7,000 but I would have to exactly see what happened
5 in some of our seasonal reductions but we are roughly
6 between 6,000 and 7,000 but I will make sure staff
7 gets back to you what exact number is. It does not
8 include our POP workers, but I will get you the
9 numbers so you see how we compare to what was in the
10 70s, versus what is today.

11 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Yeah, so the
12 reason I raised the question is because of the Fiscal
13 Crisis in the 70s, we have 11,000 workers, 30 years
14 later, or how many years later, 50 years later we
15 have 7,000 workers, so we have a loss of 4,000
16 people, can you hear me?

17 MITCHELL SILVER: I can hear you.

18 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Okay.

19 MITCHELL SILVER: So, Council Member Koo.

20 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: So, that, I think
21 the question to tell the administration that staff is
22 not enough, we have less staff than 50 years ago.

23 MITCHELL SILVER: And let me just be
24 clear, because we have a seasonal workforce, we stay
25 around 6,000 or 7,000 throughout the year and then we

2 add on seasonals over the summer that bring us close
3 to 10,000. We look at our lifeguards, all the
4 seasonals, in this case, it is well known now there
5 were 1700 for this summer season but we add more
6 people and then they go away. So, around March we
7 start hiring our seasonals so that we can handle our
8 peak season and then September and October the season
9 ends and then we go back to about 6,000 or 7,000.
10 So, we have gone as high as 10,000 when we bring in
11 all seasonals but again, it fluctuates all throughout
12 the year. So, I don't know when you say 11,000 back
13 in the 1970s, was that just the non-peak or the peak
14 seasonal number of staff? But of course I would
15 never say no to more staff, but at the same time I
16 know that we are in a severe budget crisis so I think
17 it is well known that I would not have any more staff
18 at the same time we all have to help contribute to
19 the severe budget crisis that is going on right now.

20 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: I am going to
21 stop because we have a lot of public participations.
22 So, I am going to turn it over to the moderator,
23 Chris.

24 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you Commissioner
25 Silver and everyone else from the Parks Department.

2 We will now turn to public testimony. I would like
3 to remind everyone that unlike our typical Council
4 Hearings we will be calling on individuals one by one
5 to testify. Each panelist will be given three
6 minutes to speak. Please begin once the Sargeant has
7 started the timer. Uhm, for panelists once your name
8 is call, a member of our staff will unmute you and
9 the Sargeant at Ars will give you the go ahead to
10 begin upon setting the timer. So, please wait or the
11 Sargeant to announce that you may begin before
12 delivering your testimony. We will begin with
13 Lindsey Campbell of the USDA Forest Service followed
14 by Adam Ganzer for New Yorkers for Parks, followed by
15 Lynn Kelly of the New York Restoration Project.

16 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 LINDSEY CAMPBELL: Thank you for the
18 opportunity to provide testimony on this important
19 topic. I am a Research Social Scientist with the USDA
20 Forest Service and our team at the New York City
21 Urban Field Station works in close collaboration with
22 New York City Parks and the Natural Area on
23 Conservancy and we have spent 18 years researching
24 the use, value, and meaning and stewardship of green
25 space. So, my testimony draws entirely on peer

2 review research. It is well documented in the
3 literature that public open space is critical
4 resource to support public health and well-being
5 including physical, mental, emotional, social and
6 spiritual well-being and our research here in New
7 York has found that for many New Yorkers their
8 neighborhood park is their only outdoor resource and
9 we know that during COVID-19 this trend toward
10 increased and localized park use has continued. We
11 also know from patterns of economic decline across
12 the country that it doesn't take much for these
13 crucial green space resources to decline in
14 maintenance, view less welcoming or to become unsafe
15 and this was experienced firsthand during the 1970s
16 Fiscal Crisis that led to budget cuts and
17 disinvestment in parkland out of which emerged the
18 Public Private Partnership Model of the Central Parks
19 Conservancy and later dozens of conservancies
20 Citywide. Community organizations play a pivotal but
21 often unseen role in supporting public open space and
22 activating them as social infrastructure, leveraging
23 significant person power, time and resources. Over
24 800 community organizations including both formal and
25 geos and friends of groups responded to our STU Map

1 Survey in 2017 representing an estimated 540,000
2 members and staff and with budgets totally over \$800
3 million dollars. During times of disturbance, these
4 stewardship groups can act as green responders. After
5 a crisis, we all know that first responders help to
6 stabilize life and property but it is longer term
7 recovery and preparedness cycles stewards can also
8 help to rebuild communities and landscapes through
9 environmental action. This pattern has been repeated
10 in New York City with stewardship groups forming and
11 adapting their work and response to the Fiscal
12 Crisis, September 11, Hurricane Sandy and now COVID-
13 19. Civic engagement is crucial to public space in
14 addition to providing labor and increasing capacity
15 it strengthens democracy by fostering social trust.
16 So, our current COVID-19 research on environmental
17 stewardship highlights that along with the increase
18 in park use we have seen a decrease in staffing and
19 funding levels of civic stewardship groups. They are
20 working with limited capacity to care for green
21 spaces that are vitally needed. So, we have an over
22 reliance but an under resourcing of civic stewardship
23 groups in frontline communities. So, in some, while
24 it is important to focus on the care for the physical
25

2 resource for parks and open space it is not enough.

3 We need to support the people and organizations that

4 care for these green spaces. They can truly function

5 as equitable and include...

6 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

7 LINDSEY CAMPBELL: Thank you.

8 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you Ms. Campbell,
9 we will now hear from Ann Ganzer of New Yorkers for
10 Parks.

11 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins now.

12 ADAM GANZER: The Executive Director of
13 New Yorkers for Parks, we are New York City's only
14 independent parks and open space advocacy and
15 research organization and we co-founded the Play Fair
16 Coalition and I appreciate being able to talk today.
17 As we have heard, this administration has prioritized
18 park equity with many lasting accomplishments. The
19 COVID Crisis however has revealed significant
20 structural inequities in our park system both in
21 access and in funding that require a new emphasis
22 both in the immediate and the long-term. Our park
23 system relies on hundreds of small parks to provide
24 open spaces to the majority of New Yorkers. As a
25 result, parks that serve the majority of low-income

2 households are less than half as big as the parks
3 that are serving high-income households and these
4 parks are wholly reliant on public funding. These
5 small parks have been more susceptible to closers
6 during the pandemic with catastrophic results.
7 According to data from the Trust for Public Land,
8 more than 1 million New Yorkers in Central Brooklyn
9 Queens and the east Bronx lost access to their park
10 or playground this year. The COVID related economic
11 crisis also had an equitable impact on New Yorkers
12 and their parks. Despite record use during the
13 pandemic, the Parks Department Budget was cut by 14%,
14 the second highest among all agencies. Those cuts
15 have had drastic reductions in staff and maintenance
16 and not surprisingly the areas most impacted by the
17 closures and the staff reductions are the same areas
18 where the largest numbers of New Yorkers have died or
19 become seriously ill from COVID, also not
20 surprisingly, unfortunately these are primarily
21 communities of color. As we look to an increase in
22 COVID this fall, unfortunately, the City must
23 aggressively plan to ensure all New Yorkers have
24 access to open space. Some immediate priorities
25 include getting funding to ensure full-seasonal park

2 staff, unfreezing capital funds for critical parks
3 improvement projects and eliminating the owner's
4 legal requirement that make it nearly impossible for
5 many private, not-for-profit partners of the parks
6 organization to do their jobs, raise money and take
7 care of our spaces. Uhm, further, we do not want to
8 lose sight of the opportunity to adopt system change
9 ideas that address historic challenges for our park
10 system. First, we need to identify a more resilient
11 and equitable public funding model for our parks
12 system and second, we need to prioritize creative new
13 park development in the outer boroughs as part of an
14 equitable economic recovery. For both, I would
15 respectfully point the Council to report New Yorkers
16 for Parks co-author with the New York Building
17 Congress and a role with Carter Strickland from the
18 Trust for Public Land. This is a critical moment for
19 our parks system with significant opportunities to
20 make lasting change for a better New York. I thank
21 you for your time.

22 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you and at this
23 point I would just like to remind Council Members who
24 may have a question for any particular panelist to
25 please use the Zoom Raise Hand Function what that

2 panelist is speaking and you will be able to ask your
3 questions once they are done. Uhm, the next panelist
4 Lynn Kelley of the New York Restoration Project
5 followed by Joe Palleo of DC37 and Marlana Geeka of
6 DC37.

7 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 LYNN KELLEY: Good afternoon City Council
9 Members, it is great to see you and my colleagues in
10 the park's world and at the Parks Department. Thank
11 you for the opportunity to testify today. So, I will
12 start by stating the obvious, COVID has turned our
13 beloved City upside down and we are still reeling
14 from the impacts, physical, mental and financial,
15 recovery has not been easy. It has not been swift and
16 as you know there is conflicting information almost
17 daily. But the one thing that has remained constant
18 is that we, New Yorkers have flocked to our parks and
19 open spaces in record numbers. And we need those
20 green spaces now more than ever. That's why it is
21 shocking to all of us in the open space community
22 that the City's drastic cuts to the funding for the
23 New York City's Parks Department in Fiscal Year 2021
24 occurred, while at the same time administration was
25 pointing to parks and open space as a part of the

2 recovery of New York City. To me, that makes no
3 sense and is amphitheatrical to parks equity. Many
4 of these cuts will directly impact access,
5 maintenance in our green spaces, especially in low-
6 income communities as you have heard, the same
7 communities which were hit hardest by COVID and so I
8 want to ask this Council and the Administration how
9 is that equitable? Just how is that fair? Uhm, New
10 York Restoration Project like many of our colleagues
11 here today, we rely on Parks Equity Initiative Funds
12 to steward gardens, to build new open spaces in some
13 of the least green neighborhoods in New York. We
14 work in communities that don't have the support of
15 resourced conservancies, volunteer stewardship groups
16 or publically funded programs, so cuts to PEI and a
17 greater New York City hit doubly hard.

18 Additionally, it makes no sense to us whatsoever that
19 currently the Office of Management and Budget, OMB
20 has paused approximately \$50 million in funding for
21 capital projects to qualified and experienced park
22 nonprofits like many of the folks that you see on
23 this call who could be delivering critical services
24 during the pandemic and its wake. How is that
25 equitable? How is that fair? How does that even

2 make sense? Listen, we know the City is broke but
3 the projects on pause by OMB were funded to responded
4 to respond to long-standing need and the steep
5 increase in open space usage during COVID has only
6 underscored the importance of executing on these
7 projects. To be clear, delaying that, means delaying
8 our ability to properly address food and security,
9 access to open and green space, critical maintenance,
10 all items which speak directly to parks equity in our
11 City. And so, we ask that the Council and the
12 Administration please work with us to get these
13 critical projects unstuck at OMB so that we can truly
14 be a part of New York City's COVID-19 recovery. Thank
15 you.

16 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you, next up is Joe
17 Palleo of DC 37 followed by Marlana Geeka of DC 37.

18 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

19 JOE PALLEO: Thank you City Council,
20 thank you Chairman Koo. My name is Joe Palleo, I
21 represent local 93. We represent the Urban Park
22 Rangers, the PEP officers, we represent the
23 Associated Park Service Workers, the City's Seasonal
24 Aids throughout parks. We were hit exceptionally
25 hard this year, especially with our CSAs, we lost 50

2 rangers, we lost 130 lines that we previously had
3 during the summer budget. And the parks are probably
4 in worst shape that they have ever been. Garbage is
5 being piled up high. We need these workers back. We
6 are also facing additional layoffs. You know we are
7 facing 22,000 citywide layoffs which would include
8 these park workers as well. Uhm, parks should be
9 prioritized. This is the only green space most
10 people have in the City of New York and we talk about
11 people of color you know being deprived. You know,
12 this is only going to get worse. We have to find
13 funding for our parks. This is unsustainable. We
14 cannot continue. I realize the difficulties that the
15 Parks Department has you know in trying to do more
16 with less but it comes to a point where you just
17 cannot make it happen anymore. We need to have
18 funding restored and we need to do it now. You know,
19 things are only going to go downhill. We can talk
20 about this you know day and night but the only
21 solution is funding unfortunately. Uhm, I won't take
22 up more space but more time I should say but when you
23 reduce it by \$85 million and we already face 1700 lay
24 offs and there is probably more to come, we are going
25 to hit you know rock bottom and we are going to hit

2 it soon and it is going to be a detriment to everyone
3 in the City of New York. Thank you.

4 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. We will now
5 hear from Marlana Geeka, followed by Daniel Clay of
6 DC 37.

7 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 MARLENA GEEKA: Hi, good afternoon, my
9 name is Marlana Geeka, I am one of the union reps for
10 local 983 who represents a number of titles. Right
11 now, our PEP and rangers are spread very thin and
12 currently the crime is up in parks tremendously. PEP
13 is the primary entity in parks that does the
14 enforcement, not the NYPD. Uhm PEP and rangers, uhm
15 they continue to patrol but they have limited
16 vehicles and many times, over the summer and just
17 recently our officers have not been able to respond
18 to emergencies due to lack of vehicles. We ask that
19 you please restore the funding for the PEP and the
20 rangers along with the maintenance. The maintenance
21 people at times, they are being brought from one
22 location to another and they have limited staff. They
23 have lots of complaints that the garbage is piling up
24 at several locations, so, please restore the funding

2 so that our parks can go back to looking beautiful
3 again. Thank you.

4 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. We will now hear
5 from Daniel Clay of DC37 and he will be followed by
6 Carter Strickland of the Trust for Public Land.

7 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 DANIEL CLAY: Hi there everybody, thank
9 you Chairman Koo and other Council Members and
10 everybody that helped organize this and everybody
11 else voicing your support too. This is really
12 something special. I am Daniel Clay. I am a gardener
13 in Prospect Park and President of our local. I am
14 one of the few pairs of boots on the ground and I
15 could tell you it's, it's busy out there. The stress
16 to the parks is, is growing and the other thing about
17 that is it is going to get worse in the next few
18 years too. I will tell you about that. It's in the
19 form of invasive plants and insects that are headed
20 our way. Guys, if you get the heebie-jeebies do not
21 google video of the spotted lantern fly which is
22 headed our way and there are others one too, like a
23 giant hogweed is another bad plant we don't want
24 around here. We, green workers you know are the last
25 line of defense against these kinds of things, and

2 not to mention the storms which are getting worse
3 too, okay. Uhm, so with the parks just being busier,
4 yeah, we green workers are just doing a lot more
5 cleaning which is tough on, on you know what we
6 should be doing and uhm, the thing I just want to
7 remind everybody is that all of us that work in the
8 parks we are here for you and your children's safety
9 and uhm I really hope we can maintain, especially
10 because there are so many new young parkies with such
11 passion, with such great passion. Thanks everybody
12 that all the time that I need.

13 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you, at this point
14 we have questions from Council Member Holden followed
15 by Council Member Cohen and Council Members if you
16 could announce who you are directing your question to
17 when you ask your question that would be great, thank
18 you.

19 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 ROBERT HOLDEN: Yes uhm, thank you, I
21 just have a, it could be for either DC 37 Joe or
22 Daniel or anybody, uhm, did the administration ever
23 reach out to you guys, talk about the budget, like,
24 rather than, were there any creative methods used
25 that they approached you with to try to save as many

2 seasonals as they could, or was it just uhm, they
3 were dictating to you guys that or this is how it was
4 going to be? Because uhm back you know in 1976 I was
5 working for CUNY and we went through a similar budget
6 cut and they offered the unions a furlough, that
7 means we didn't get paid for two weeks out of a
8 particular month let's say, or it might have been out
9 of two months and then they held on to the money, we
10 got it with interest a few years later but they were
11 able to avoid layoffs. Was that ever offered?

12 Anything offered to, to the unions? Uhm during the?

13 JOE PALLEO: Uhm no, none was offered. We
14 just got the notices of the layoffs and that was it.
15 There were no types of concessions brought to us.

16 ROBERT HOLDEN: Okay, that's good to
17 know. Thanks Joe, I appreciate it.

18 JOE PALLEO: Thank you.

19 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. Council
20 Member Cohen.

21 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 ANDREW COHEN: Thank you. I think DC 37
23 is in the best position to answer for me, my question
24 too. Chair Koo and I wrote a letter to the
25 administration preadoption trying to talk about maybe

2 readmitting the mission of PEP. I watched you know
3 PEP this summer in a single person patrol which is
4 not, not a safe or an effective way to do the work
5 but trying to envision a role for parks, to reduce
6 our reliance on NYPD in parks and increase the role
7 of PEP. Has there been any discussion with the
8 administration about sort of re-envisioning PEP and
9 how that could work?

10 JOE PALLEO: No, no, absolutely none and
11 we are open to discussions on that. As you said, it
12 is a dangerous job and it becomes even more dangerous
13 when you do solo patrol. We are all for hearing from
14 all of you with new ideas and I think that is what we
15 have to do. I think we have to think outside the
16 box, because we are in a pandemic, we are in
17 unprecedented times and we can't function like we
18 normally function. You know, so there are struggles
19 to contend with. You know, there are resources used
20 but I'm sure there are solutions there too in the
21 process if we try to work these things out and
22 unfortunately, we have had a lot of knee jerk
23 reactions. You know, we did not have any in depth
24 solutions, you know on how these things could be uhm
25 worked out.

2 ANDREW COHEN: That's really, that's
3 really unfortunate. I do think that there is a new
4 role for PEP in our parks in the current environment
5 that we are in that could keep us safer and keep our
6 parks you know better managed and reduce our reliance
7 on NYPD. Thank you Chair, thank you for your time.

8 JOE PALLEO: Thank you.

9 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. We will now
10 hear from Carter Strickland of the Trust for Public
11 Land followed by Emily Maxwell of the Nature
12 Conservancy.

13 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

14 CARTER STRICKLAND: Thank you. And thank
15 you everyone. Chairperson Koo and members of the
16 Committee for the opportunity to testify on this
17 really critical issue of equity in parks. My name is
18 Carter Strickland I am the New York State Director of
19 the Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit
20 organization that creates parks and protects lands.
21 We work with many of you and with the City on our
22 signature Green Schoolyards Program a public/private
23 partnership that works with community members, local
24 and state elected officials, New York City Schools
25 and others to transform barren lots at schools into

2 open community spaces and I think that is critical.

3 I do at the onset want to commend Commissioner Silver

4 and his team for putting equity at the forefront of

5 parks construction operations and planning, really

6 from the get go and they have done a lot and as I

7 will testify there is a lot left to do and it really

8 requires resources. As several people as mentioned,

9 a national indicator that the Trust for Public Land

10 Use is to access park equity is the number of

11 residents within 10-minute walk of the park. It is

12 not the same metric as Deputy Commissioner Konon

13 pointed out as New York City uses holds itself to a

14 higher standard which isn't great, incredible, on our

15 metric which is slightly more forgiving, New York

16 City has incredible numbers. 99% of its residents

17 live near a park in a normal year and I think that is

18 critical because normally high park access index in

19 New York City we know now is highly vulnerable to

20 disruption, just as Hurricane Sandy revealed the

21 vulnerability of transportation, electrical, and

22 other infrastructure, COVID-19 has revealed the

23 vulnerabilities in our park infrastructure and I use

24 that term advisably because I think parks really

25 should be treated as infrastructure. In that vein, we

2 need to make our park system more resilient by
3 building more parks with overlapping service areas as
4 we would do with other infrastructure systems in
5 order to ensure continuity of operations. It is
6 critical in New York City and I will say that Con Ed
7 has a resiliency plus two metric that it uses unlike
8 every other utility in the whole country, so we do
9 hold ourselves to a higher standard. Uhm, COVID-19
10 did force the closure of a lot of schoolyards and
11 playgrounds from April to June 23 of this year and
12 again by our analysis and my written testimony
13 provides the length of that, we assessed that over 1
14 million lost park access during this critical period.
15 Second park size not equitably distributed. It is
16 smallest in low-income and minority neighborhoods.
17 Again, we have some links to that analysis and so
18 what does that mean? That means to improve park
19 equity we can start by acknowledging the legacy park
20 system is not enough, we need to build new parks. We
21 can do that in green school yards. Every community
22 has a school yard and we can do it with open streets
23 because every community has streets. Uhm, within
24 that, my time is up and I thank you very much for the
25 opportunity to testify.

2 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you and I believe
3 Council Member Holden does have a question.

4 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

5 ROBERT HOLDEN: Uhm, yes uhm thank you
6 Carter for your testimony but, but more importantly
7 your tremendous work throughout my District and in
8 the Districts throughout the City of New York. Very
9 creative layouts in my District. We love the designs
10 and the kids are really having a great time with that
11 park and I just hope the COVID doesn't curtail the
12 construction projects. Have that? Have the projects
13 been delayed that you are working on?

14 CARTER STRICKLAND: I want to make sure
15 that I am unmuted. They have been delayed. We have
16 picked them up slowly. We've been working. SCA is a
17 great partner, they like other agencies have been
18 held up by OMB uhm, due to the City's Fiscal Crisis.
19 We are starting to get projects unlocked over time.
20 So, it is happening, slowly. It is not universal and
21 I don't think that's, I think that's the same case
22 for capital projects across the City, so we haven't
23 had all of our projects that are pending released uhm
24 but they are starting to be released.

2 ROBERT HOLDEN: Okay if you could let the
3 Council know if there are projects that are extremely
4 important in underserved areas please let us know
5 that maybe we can advance that, help advance it.
6 Thank you.

7 CARTER STRICKLAND: Thank you. Happy to
8 do that Council Member Holden and I do want to say
9 also as Deputy Commissioner Konon remarked
10 operational funding through custodial is not resolved
11 and does need to be resolved as well to keep School
12 Heros and other school playgrounds open.

13 ROBERT HOLDEN: Thanks so much for that
14 one, that is good to know.

15 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you, next we will
16 move on to Emily Maxwell of the Nature Conservancy
17 followed by Sarah Powers of the Natural Areas
18 Conservancy.

19 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 EMILY MAXWELL: Hi, my name is Emily
21 Nivell Maxwell and I am the Director of the Nature
22 Conservancy City Program in New York. I have more to
23 share than I can share in three minutes so I am going
24 to forgo a long introduction about us but suffice to
25 say that we work to conserve the lands and waters on

2 which all life depends globally. The title of this
3 hearing itself, improving the equity of green space
4 throughout the City in light of the COVID epidemic
5 marks a tremendous step forward. I want to commend
6 and to thank Chairman Koo and this Committee for
7 considering this broad and forward-looking approach,
8 green space and the potential for more of it exists
9 both within and beyond the boundaries of New York
10 City Parkland and its wise to approach it as such.
11 Green space is crucial for the health and safety and
12 New Yorkers and for the live ability and economic
13 recovery of New York City. The COVID-19 pandemic has
14 put a spotlight on crucial societal issues that
15 compel us to think about Green Space Equity. Simply
16 put, our lives depend on nature and City residents
17 who have access to more nature and green space in
18 their neighborhood will suffer less in our climate
19 changing world but before talking about the broad
20 diversity of green spaces in New York City and
21 opportunities to increase equity and I must
22 underscore that we are starting off with inequitable
23 resources for parks and green spaces despite the
24 lottable efforts of this Committee and hundreds of
25 advocacy groups across the City New York City Parks

2 and Rec is chronically underfunded as many of my
3 colleagues have underscored. The extreme cuts DPR
4 experienced under the COVID-19 constrained budget are
5 shocking considering both the crucial role parks play
6 in providing safe and healthy respites and the tiny
7 percentage of the New York City Budget for which DPRs
8 budget already accounts. Disinvesting from parks
9 makes no sense right now in the short term or the
10 long-term given the role that they play in New York
11 City's Recovery from recreational spaces to economic
12 engines. Recent research led by the new school with
13 us as a partner underscores the need for parks and
14 open spaces. There is overwhelming and consistent
15 public recognition for the many benefits of parks and
16 specifically for the benefits to health, physical and
17 mental. The majority of our respondents said that
18 while they might have some access to a partner open
19 space, they don't necessarily feel at ease in those
20 parks that those parks are meeting their needs. We
21 are particularly concerned about Queens in Brooklyn
22 where we saw a lot of that data and those are
23 neighborhoods particularly hard hit by COVID. Our
24 Urban Forest is also a crucial asset and I'll just
25 note because we have a lot to say about this that we

2 know that it is inequitably distributed from 18%
3 cover in Brooklyn to 31% in Staten Island. Some of
4 our City Council Districts have as low as 10%, some
5 have up to over 40. We need to take a hard look at
6 that. I see that my time is coming to a close. I also
7 have to note that our Rooftops, NYCHA properties,
8 Community Gardens and Stewardship Groups must also be
9 strongly considered and that all of these assets will
10 be crucial to New York City's recovery so thank you
11 very much.

12 CHRIS SARTORI: We will now here from
13 Sarah Charlotte Powers of the Natural Area
14 Conservancy and she will be followed by Carlos Castil
15 Croak of the New York League of Conservation Voters.

16 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17 SARAH CHARLOTTE POWERS: Thank you so
18 much to Council Member Koo and the members of the
19 Parks Committee. Like others, I've done a little bit
20 of real time editing so I can hit some key points,
21 uhm, as I introduced the Natural Area Conservancy, we
22 are a nonprofit organization and we work as a partner
23 to the Parks Department to restore and manage the
24 10,000 acres of forest and wetlands that are under
25 the agency's jurisdiction. I wish to highlight that

2 the FY21 budget which included 14% cut to the park's
3 budget that passed during a period of unprecedented
4 visitation to parks and I wish to specifically
5 highlight the importance of forest and wetlands in
6 providing equitable access to parks and to nature for
7 New Yorkers with but especially during the pandemic.
8 This summer our field staff conducted interviews in
9 parks across the 5 boroughs of visitors to Natural
10 Areas. 65% of the people that we interviewed said
11 that they were spending significantly more time in
12 natural areas than they had prior to COVID-19. In
13 our interviews, people highlighted how important
14 natural areas are because they are uniquely suited to
15 the needs of this moment, offering ample space for
16 social distancing and providing a respite from the
17 stresses of life both during the pandemic and a
18 recession. As we look to the future, investing in the
19 care of 1/3 of our City's park system should be high
20 on the list of priorities for addressing issues of
21 both equity and access. Investing in consistent
22 access to natural areas in the form of clearly marked
23 trails would allow New Yorkers to more effectively
24 access thousands of acres of existing parkland that
25 are currently poorly accessible across every borough

2 and investing in the care of forest and wetlands but
3 also provide countless other benefits to our City
4 including combatting extreme heat, capturing carbon
5 and strengthening the connection of New Yorkers to
6 the natural world. To achieve these goals, we would
7 need both new multi-year capital funding as well as
8 expense funding to bring back the staff needed to
9 support stewardship, to conduct ranger programming to
10 maintain trails, to plant trees and to provide the
11 basic level of care that are to our parks that New
12 Yorkers deserve. Thanks again for your leadership
13 during this challenging time and for the opportunity
14 to testify about this important topic today.

15 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. We will now
16 hear from Carlos Castil Croak of the New York City
17 League of Conservation Voters followed by Greg Todd.

18 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

19 CARLOS CASTIL CROAK: Good afternoon my
20 name is Carlos Castil Croak and I am the Associate
21 for the New York City Programs at the New York League
22 of Conservation Voters. NYLCV represents over 30,000
23 members in New York City and we are committed to
24 advancing a sustainability agenda that will make our
25 people, our neighborhoods and our economy healthier

2 and more resilient. I would like to thank Chair Koo
3 for holding this important hearing and for the
4 opportunity to testify today. The past seven months
5 have been hard on us all. New Yorkers have had to
6 bear immeasurable hardships including the mental and
7 emotional toll of responsibly practicing social
8 distancing which for many of us means more time in
9 tiny apartments and yearning to feel some grass under
10 our toes. Uhm, we all look forward to the day when
11 we can safely return to our offices, frequent our
12 local bars and restaurants without worrying about
13 capacity and embrace our friends and loved ones
14 without masks and without anxiety but until then we
15 need our parks and open spaces now more than ever as
16 they provide a crucial outlet for New Yorkers to take
17 care of their physical, mental and emotional health.
18 Parks and other green spaces are also one of the
19 City's most valuable and environmental assets and our
20 major source of the City's Urban Canopy which
21 mitigates climate change and provides a clean air and
22 habitats for native wildlife. The 2.6 million street
23 and park trees that the Park's Department is
24 responsible for remove 1,300 tons of pollutants from
25 the atmosphere and store 1 million tons of carbon

2 each year. Trees are vital for mitigating urban heat
3 island effect and can lower temperatures by up to 9
4 degrees, cut air conditioning use by 30% and reduce
5 heating energy use by a further 20%-50%. NYCs parks
6 contribute to our resiliency by capturing almost 2
7 billion gallons of stormwater runoff. Unfortunately,
8 funding for parks was gutted in this year's budget.
9 We understand the difficult financial decisions that
10 had to be made due to the City's dire economic
11 situation but we oppose the cuts to the Parks
12 Department because parks are so important at this
13 moment. That's why along with other members of the
14 Play Fair for Park Coalition we are asking the
15 Council to reallocate funds back to the parks budget
16 to ensure that we obtain ample support to keep these
17 spaces safe for public use now. First and foremost,
18 we need our parks employees back. We all agree that
19 parks are critical infrastructure, that these green
20 benefits could not be realized without the park's
21 employees particularly gardeners, horticulturist,
22 maintenance workers who work tirelessly to ensure the
23 health of these spaces. Secondly, we need to restore
24 funding for critical operations such as repairs,
25 maintenance, pruning and cleaning, keep our parks in

2 adequate condition for our residents and last, we
3 need to improve park access. In particular, in low
4 income neighborhoods and communities burdened by
5 pollution. 70% of New Yorkers still live further
6 than walking distance from a park, meaning that we
7 need more parks and venues that historically lack
8 open spaces and the local environmental benefits of a
9 nearby park. While the COVID-19 crisis has caused
10 the City to cut agency budgets across the board, it
11 has also exposed the desperate need the City has for
12 parks maintenance and improvements and access. NYLCV
13 is a founding member of the Play Fair Coalition asks
14 for the Councils help to reallocate funds back to the
15 Parks Department Budget in this time when it is so
16 desperately needed. Thank you.

17 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

18 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. Next, we will
19 hear from Greg Todd followed by Tara Kelly.

20 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 GREG TODD: Okay, can you hear me now?

22 CHRIS SARTORI: Yes, we hear you now.

23 GREG TODD: Yeah, I would like to just
24 direct the attention of the Council Members and the
25 rest of the attendees to the valuable contribution

2 made by Community Gardens. Though a tiny, tiny
3 fraction of the budget, I would be surprised if there
4 are 30 people on the Green Thumb Staff that supervise
5 Community Gardens, the predominant number of
6 Community Gardens are in low mod neighborhoods. In
7 Brooklyn that would be Bedford-Stuyvesant,
8 Brownsville, East New York. So, if your concern is
9 having equity and providing access to gardens in low-
10 income neighborhoods there is an incredible value in
11 the community gardens. These gardens provide
12 something very unique. They are not passive in
13 retainment as many parks are but they are actually
14 very actively involved. We have the Amani Garden
15 where I am a facilitator. Over 30 members involved
16 in raising vegetables. We have chickens in the
17 garden. We have a greenhouse. We even had an
18 educational area, all in just about 300 square feet.
19 So, it is actual incredible return for the amount of
20 investment and I would really encourage more funding
21 for the Green Thumbs Program. I think it is really a
22 tremendous way to provide access to folks who don't
23 have access to parks. They will have access to
24 Community Gardens but we really need to be considered
25 in the funding. Thank you very much.

2 CHRIS SARTORI: We will now hear from
3 Tara Kelly of the Municipal Arts Society and she will
4 be followed by Kay Webster and Christina Taylor.

5 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

6 TARA KELLY: Good afternoon Chair Koo and
7 members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. The
8 Municipal Art Society of New York has been providing
9 input on the City's Park and public realm since our
10 founding in 1893. With this unique historical
11 perspective, we have observed the evolution of how
12 our open spaces have functioned to meet the needs in
13 the growing City and provide the space for
14 recreation, celebration, respite and connection with
15 nature. We continue the value the role of parks and
16 helping communities reduce stress, maintaining mental
17 and physical wellness and anchoring livable
18 neighborhoods. Parks makes communities happier,
19 healthier, safer, greener and more resilient.
20 Investment in parks have been a key strategy for
21 community revitalization and economic development.
22 Despite this relationship, new Park space has not
23 always been adequate to meet the need of growing
24 neighborhoods. For example, in the proposed special
25 Bushing Waterfront District new open space is limited

2 to a new 2,000 square foot plaza. While there would
3 be a new short public walkway required as a result of
4 the rezoning no additional public green space would
5 be provided despite welcoming over 1700 new
6 residential units and nearly 1.5 million square feet
7 of commercial space. New development has a key role
8 to play in expanding park equity by not only
9 providing the minimum required open space but further
10 improving conditions for both new and current
11 residents. When we look at existing park
12 infrastructure, playgrounds are indispensable for
13 equitable access. Early in the pandemic, many of
14 these spaces were closed eliminating vital open space
15 for communities whose closest park is a playground.
16 As part of this network jointly operated playgrounds
17 are crucial to the provision of quality and
18 accessible parks and open space in the City,
19 particularly in underserved neighborhoods. JOPs have
20 figured prominently in the City's Open Space Policy
21 and have been continuously identified as key
22 infrastructure necessary to accomplish citywide and
23 long-term open space goals. The City needs to
24 protect and enhance these spaces, especially as
25 schools and the surrounding communities continue to

2 struggle with in person attendance, promote learning
3 and community use after hours. On the planning and
4 investment side, CPIs, the City's most important park
5 equity program, parks selected under CPI are in low-
6 income, densely populated and growing neighborhoods.
7 They are the communities that need parks the most and
8 the very same ones most impacted by COVID. I am
9 going to skip ahead a little bit just to say that New
10 York needs, has an opportunity to foster proactive
11 planning, integration and management of its public
12 realm. Unlike many of the City's New York slots,
13 essential position within its government, responsible
14 for planning and maintaining the public realm.
15 Instead, the City segments oversight of these
16 essential pieces of infrastructure to different
17 agencies. What we need is a director of the public
18 realm to guide the leadership and to take
19 responsibility for all of the spaces in between
20 buildings where so much of Civic life takes place.
21 Thank you.

22 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you very much, next
23 we will hear from Kay Webster.

24 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.
25

2 KAY WEBSTER: Hi, my name is Kay Webster,
3 I am the President of the Sara Roosevelt Park
4 Community Coalition and thanks for this chance to
5 speak on Park Equity and COVID-19 and to have who
6 have spoken on behalf of parks. Our park is a block
7 wide and expands 8 blocks from the lower eastside to
8 Chinatown. De Bower (SIC) is one block away. Yet
9 CLO high school is mostly students of color from low-
10 income backgrounds, that have NYCHA complexes and
11 housing for the deaf, low-income tenements, there are
12 several homeless shelters and homeless service
13 providers close by. University Settlement, Chinatown
14 Employment Council, Chinatown Y, the Tenement Museum
15 rely on the park. BRCs low-income senior nutrition
16 center occupies more than four park houses in the
17 park. Our coalition stewards about 11 areas of the
18 park including the Green Thumb Garden, Audubon New
19 York and the Horticultural Society along with many,
20 many organizations and individuals. Uhm, we have
21 been active in this park for four decades. For most
22 of those decades we have worked to create and
23 maintain positive use. In the 70s, park dealers and
24 pimps owned this park until the neighborhood took it
25 back. In the early months of COVID we had people

2 sleeping in pathways in all areas of the park where
3 it was safer than crowded shelters. Garbage mounted
4 and still does. I have never seen it this bad and
5 that is saying something. The Parkhouse bathrooms
6 are not open 24/7, you can't without supervision
7 which leaves the homeless population to use
8 flowerbeds. The early days of COVID, our coalition
9 went around and posted information for the street
10 homeless and how to prevent its spread but there was
11 nowhere for them to wash their hands or get any kind
12 of help. The northern end is dangerous and unuseful
13 to the public. No parent would bring their child to
14 two of the three playgrounds here, nor do the
15 abutting high schools use it. Drugs are sold, sex
16 acts occur in playgrounds, the spray shower is a bath
17 for the homeless who lost their shower facilities to
18 gentrification. People defecate and urinate in the
19 plots, there is even an actual toilet in one of them.
20 Homeless people are struggling with mental health as
21 both victims and victimizers. We are constantly
22 trying to keep housed neighbors from being pitted
23 against the unhoused. Our intrepid park workers who
24 remain after budget cuts and are volunteers'
25 gardeners continue to try to maintain this park and

2 keep it afloat daily. It still has not a small bit
3 of magic and human kindness. We have asked the have
4 the northern building returned to the neighborhood
5 for decades anchoring the park with its level of
6 misuse is the only way to do that. The public and
7 the parks departments are stewards of the park. The
8 Parks Mission is to care for them give them the tools
9 they need to do so they are the last democratic
10 meeting spaces in the City and in COVID they have
11 been the only places where a family of four living in
12 a tenement apartment could come here to breathe, make
13 friends and feel alive. They serve as a life raft
14 for the homeless who were trapped in congregate
15 living spaces.

16 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

17 KAY WEBSTER: Those of us who live her,
18 who work here, who despite the dangers from unstable
19 human beings living on the edge of inhumane
20 conditions who clean up human feces and plant and
21 tend gardens here are asking the city to put its
22 money where its mouth is in terms of equity. Thank
23 you. Sorry I went over.

24

25

2 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. Before we
3 continue Council Member Koo, I believe does have a
4 question for Greg Todd if you are available?

5 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Yeah, is he is
6 available?

7 CHRIS SARTORI: Mr. Todd, can you hear
8 us? He might not be able to hear us at this point.
9 He is in gray. Uhm, Chair if you are okay with, we
10 can proceed to the next panel and return back to him.

11 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Yeah, thank you.

12 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. We will now
13 hear from Christina Taylor and followed by Sara
14 Daugherty.

15 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now. We
16 can't hear you Ms. Taylor.

17 CHRISTINA TAYLOR: Sorry about that.

18 Uhm, Good afternoon, I'm Christina Taylor the
19 Director of Programs and Operations for the Van
20 Cortlandt Park Alliance. Thank you for allowing me
21 to testify in support of improving the equity of
22 Green Space throughout the City. This is something
23 that has been needed for many years now but is needed
24 more in light of the COVID pandemic. This is the time
25 for people to experience as a way of maintaining a

2 sense of normalcy in connection to the world. This
3 is the time for the City to support its parks so that
4 everyone regardless of economic status, cultural
5 background or ability can enjoy the clean, green
6 space that they deserve. The reality that we face is
7 that the City is drastically cutting the funds to New
8 York City Park and the parks are suffering.
9 Bathrooms are going uncleaned or locked entirely.
10 Lawns have gone uncut. Areas where large groups of
11 people gather are uncontrolled, it is not pretty and
12 it will only get worse. New York City Parks does not
13 have enough maintenance operations and horticultural
14 staff to keep parks looking good. Seasonal
15 employment which is a huge part of our park's
16 workforce was cut by at least 90%. Whatever work we
17 have done so far to improve our parks is falling by
18 the wayside and while all the parks are seeing the
19 alarming results of the cuts, no where is it marked
20 out than in the Bronx where we already receive a much
21 smaller piece of the pie. Low-income Bronx residents
22 do not have country homes to escape too. They do not
23 have back yards. They have parks. Parks are
24 essential infrastructure in a healthy City and
25 critical spaces in a Democracy. The Mayor talks

2 about equity and inclusion with no cost of the
3 mission and locations. Throughout the City parks are
4 the most equitable and inclusive assets of them all.
5 Ever since the start of the COVID pandemic Van
6 Cortlandt Park has seen twice the number of people
7 with half of the staff. The Alliance has tried to
8 stop up and do our part and support the parks by
9 having seasonal staff for the District and hosting
10 weekly cleanup volunteer events but we still cannot
11 keep up with the demand. The Van Cortlandt Park
12 Alliance slowly supports the New York City Department
13 of Parks and Recreations and its efforts to maintain
14 and improve all of the parks in the City and it is
15 important to the future of New York City that we fund
16 our parks. Thank you.

17 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. Before we
18 proceed with Sara Daughtery, Mr. Todd, Greg Todd if
19 you are still there, I believe Council Member Koo or
20 Chair does have a question for you.

21 GREG TODD: Okay, I'm back.

22 CHRIS SARTORI: Council Member Koo you
23 can go ahead.

24 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Hello? Can you
25 hear me?

2 CHRIS SARTORI: Yes, we hear you.

3 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Okay. You can
4 hear me.

5 CHRIS SARTORI: Yes, we hear you.

6 GREG TODD: Is there a question?

7 CHRIS SARTORI: Yeah, we are just
8 checking in with Council Member Koo because there
9 might be a problem. Sit tight for one second. Thank
10 you.

11 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Can you hear me?

12 CHRIS SARTORI: Yes, please, go ahead
13 Chair Koo.

14 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Yeah? Okay. So,
15 my, my question to you is that uhm I have many
16 community gardens, they grow the food and then they
17 give it to the local food pantries during the
18 pandemic, especially during the peek pandemics. So,
19 are you guys still doing it? Or any other groups
20 still doing it?

21 GREG TODD: Yeah, we, we actually gave
22 away every week for two hours at a local church food
23 pantry for about three months. We had to stop because
24 we simply, you know it is fall, our plants are all
25 dead. (laughing). We gave away a lot of tomatoes

2 and peppers and cucumbers and broccoli and kale and
3 all kinds of stuff for free, yeah, absolutely.

4 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: So, so thank you
5 very much for your efforts. So, that's why I say
6 community gardens are really important. It only takes
7 up a little budget from the City but you give senior
8 citizen residents time to span the garden, rather
9 than stay at home watching TV, right? So, you guys
10 keep active and produce a lot of food for the
11 community. So, thank you for your efforts. Thank
12 you.

13 GREG TODD: You are welcome. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Thank you very
15 much.

16 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you and we will now
17 here from Sara Daughtry of Waterfront Alliance and
18 she will be followed by Ann Wilson, followed by
19 Heather Lubov.

20 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 SARA DAUGHTRY: Hi, and thank you
22 Chairman Koo and the Parks Committee. My name is
23 Sara Daughtry and I am the Senior Program Manager at
24 the Waterfront Alliance. I want to start by echoing
25 the sentiment that the title of this hearing as well

2 as the progress the Parks Department has made during
3 this administration are positive forces in the fight
4 for equitable park access. I know that a lot of the
5 things that I was going to say have already been said
6 so I will try to tailor my comments to offer
7 Waterfront Access. This is a big perspective. My
8 organization, the Waterfront Alliance is a nonprofit
9 working to revitalize and inspire resilient,
10 revitalized inaccessible waterfront communities
11 through our Ride through Lanes Campaign and through
12 other programs including the one that I manage, the
13 Waterfront Edge Design Wedge program. Earlier this
14 summer, we released a report with many of the folks
15 on this meeting with the task force based on the key
16 funding that waterfront access is improving but not
17 for every New Yorker. The New York/New Jersey Harbor
18 Program has done a study that has shown that the
19 communities lacking waterfront access in our City are
20 also primarily low-income communities of color and
21 these are also the areas which have been hardest hit
22 by the pandemic as has been stated, but the
23 discrepancy between neighborhoods who have quality
24 waterfront access like Brooklyn Bridge Park and those
25 who don't are just one of the many ways that the

2 pandemic has highlighted the staggering economic and
3 social inequities of our region and beyond. And as
4 has already been said, public health and access to
5 waterfront space are closely linked. There are
6 specific studies that show that the presence of clean
7 water on site can boost confidence as well as lower
8 blood pressure and these health benefits shouldn't be
9 limited to whiter wealthier neighborhoods.
10 Additionally, New Yorkers have legal rights to
11 quality waterfronts. Through the Waterfront
12 Alliance's Wedge Pledge Campaign with community
13 boards across the City we raised awareness about the
14 public trust doctrine and the way that is codified
15 through state and local coastal management policy.
16 So, the report has a number of recommendations
17 related to equitable access but I think first and
18 foremost we echo and support New Yorkers for Parks
19 Play Fair Campaign and think the City Council should
20 implement a permanent baseline budget for park staff,
21 especially during the pandemic and the increased
22 needs for waterfront access. Secondly, we commend
23 the Parks Department for the Community Parks
24 Initiative and hope to see that it is codified and it
25 is paramount, the quality waterfronts are not solely

2 paid for through private development like Zoning
3 which could hasten gentrification but also through
4 public investment. And finally, as a community
5 engagement like myself, it is going to look a lot
6 different in the coming months around waterfront land
7 use decisions and it is already hard for working
8 class and immigrant communities to participate in
9 City led community engagement. So, we hope that City
10 Council will have metrics for what good engagement
11 looks like to make sure that particularly communities
12 that are hard hit by the pandemic can participate.

13 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

14 SARA DAUGHERTY: Uhm, and thank you so
15 much. That is all that I have.

16 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. We will now
17 hear from Ann Wilson of the Randall's Island Park
18 Alliance.

19 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins now.

20 ANN WILSON: Thank you, thank you for
21 this opportunity to testify. My name is Ann Wilson,
22 I am the Senior Director of Planning for the
23 Randall's Island Park Alliance. Randall's Island
24 Park is located in the East River between East
25 Harlem, the South Bronx and Astoria Queens. As a

2 nonprofit steward we develop and maintains he park
3 and provides and facilitates extensive public
4 programming. To do so, we work in close partnership
5 with New York City Parks Department. Due to COVID,
6 like many nonprofits, RIPAs operating budget has
7 taken an enormous hit. We have furloughed staff, cut
8 budes and creatively restructured and it has been a
9 tough year. While in the meantime, the park has seen
10 record breaking public use, especially coming from
11 neighboring communities in east Harlem and the south
12 Bronx. Our challenge is made more difficult due to
13 the loss of funding for the Parks Department.

14 Normally during the busy outdoor season, a diverse
15 RIPA staff of 70 works alongside 30 parks workers to
16 maintain the island's 330 acres of public parkland.
17 In 2020, Park staff was reduced to only 10 with
18 threats of further cuts. We have also seen a stop on
19 procurements for even the most basic OTPS needs. We
20 have watched our sister parks struggle with such
21 reduced resources alongside greatly increased usage
22 and it's a losing equation. One key root to greater
23 equity in terms of green space in New York City is to
24 restore funding for its Parks Department. If
25 anything, COVID has made the case for more support

2 than ever. The pandemic has underscored the
3 absolutely crucial need for our public parks. Over
4 the past six months, New Yorkers have come
5 increasingly to depend upon free, safe, clean outdoor
6 spaces for recreation, relaxation and exercise. This
7 is especially true for those without the means to
8 leave the City. With sufficient upkeep, public parks
9 can and should provide a safe space where all New
10 Yorkers can take a break and come together in
11 difficult times, an essential resource serving our
12 most basic well-being. New York City Parks
13 Department funding should not only be restored but in
14 fact expanded during this crisis. It is a pandemic
15 that is sending us all outdoors and that is
16 especially impacting already under resourced areas
17 like those adjacent to Randall's Island Park. Thank
18 you very much.

19 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. We will now
20 hear from Heather Lubov of the City's Park Foundation
21 followed by ON of the Gowanus Dredger's Canoe Club.

22 HEATHER LUBOV: Thank you.

23 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins now.

24 HEATHER LUBOV: Thank you, I am Heather
25 Lubov from City Parks Foundation and we are a

2 nonprofit that leads free sports, arts and
3 environmental education programs in parks and we also
4 co-manage partnerships for parks with a joint program
5 with the Parks Department. Everything we do is meant
6 to encourage New Yorkers to use and care for their
7 neighborhood parks. You have already heard some of
8 the grim budget staff and the maintenance impacts.
9 New York City is relying on a network of community
10 volunteer groups that you also heard Lindsay speak
11 about from STUMAP called Green Responders to help
12 with litter removal, planting and general care of our
13 City's Parks. Just this past Saturday, Partnerships
14 for Parks and the It's My Park Volunteer Program
15 supported cleanup projects in nearly 70 parks. These
16 volunteer efforts can be mobilized quickly because
17 they are part of an existing network for nearly 600
18 volunteer groups and 26,000 individual volunteers
19 from all 51 council districts. The Partnerships for
20 Parks was cultivated and supported for many years.
21 The Council's only parks equity initiative is making
22 that network possible by sending regular coaching and
23 capacity building for those volunteer groups, micro
24 grants and access to staff who can facilitate
25 connections for those volunteers with the Parks

2 Department and with the wider community. This
3 network of 600 groups has more than doubled in size
4 since Parks Equity Initiative Funding started six
5 years ago. The volunteers are not a long-term
6 solution to the park maintenance. This brings City
7 Parks Foundation joined with more than 30
8 conservancies and park stewards to form the Parks in
9 Open Space Partner Coalition to collaborate and share
10 resources. We work together to raise money to create
11 the \$5 million New York City Green Relief and
12 Recovery Fund which is distributing grants to help
13 maintain green spaces but this temporary funding is a
14 drop in the bucket and it is also not a long-term
15 solution. The pandemic and the City's Budget Cuts
16 are simply magnifying long-term disparities which
17 have all been discussed today. In the long-term we
18 have to rethink planning for and maintenance of our
19 City's Parks, Plazas, Gardens, Natural Areas, Green
20 Streets and NYCHA Spaces as a comprehensive network
21 of open spaces that meet the health, safety, economic
22 and environmental needs of communities and we need to
23 think about alternative funding such as meal taxes or
24 park impact fees. The Seattle Park District which
25 collects a dedicated tax to support the City's Parks

2 Department now invests 62% more per capita than New
3 York City does but in the short term, New York City
4 much recognize parks as the essential infrastructure
5 that they are and provide funding, not the 0.6% of
6 the budget that they get now but for the adequate
7 funding to ensure that our parks are safe and well
8 maintained for everyone. Thank you for the
9 opportunity to testify today at this incredibly
10 important hearing and I thank you for supporting City
11 Parks Foundation.

12 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you very much. We
13 will now hear from Owen Footum of the Gowanus
14 Dredgers Canoe Club followed by Tommy Lobe.

15 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins now.

16 OWEN FOOTUM: Good afternoon, my name is
17 Owen Footum, a 21-year member of the Gowanus Dredgers
18 Canoe Club and thank you for accepting my testimony.
19 Our Waterfront Programs as many of you might have
20 suspected increased by 400% this season. More
21 popular than we have been in the last two decades due
22 to the response to COVID-19 and we expanded our
23 programs, particularly because our canoe feats are 7
24 foot of separation and we offer contact both with
25 nature next to our contaminated water bodies of New

2 York Harbor. Almost all of our participants have
3 been lower income residents who did not have access
4 to a retreat or summer house outside of New York so I
5 hope the Council will start to think of this as a
6 resource in our City that our waterfront parks need
7 to have access on and off of the water. However,
8 today, we are talking about two separate things.
9 First, we understand that COVID-19 has produced
10 record profits for Amazon and Whole Foods, yet after
11 two years of complaint, our low-income neighborhood
12 of mostly non-white residents has a spinode adjacent
13 to the parking lot here on the Gowanus Waterfront
14 with not one of the multiple drinking fountains in
15 any operation at all. In addition, today and many
16 other days, I was just there earlier, the entrance
17 gate is locked to the public so we can't even get on
18 to the shoreline easily without going over hurdles.
19 However, the main reason why I joined this call is
20 really to ask for New York City Council to require
21 Parks and Recreation to add Life Saving Throw Rings
22 to shorelines and parks. Currently, such devices are
23 exclusive to majority white, mostly upper income
24 neighborhood of Battery Park City. We don't think
25 that represents the recent goals of ensuring equity

2 in City Parks and we ask our City Council to take
3 action before their terms expire next year to ensure
4 that waterfront parks not only have access on and off
5 of the water but they also have these uhm, the
6 essential life-saving devices that we see on
7 waterfronts throughout our country, most notably I
8 would say Baltimore Harbor has the best example of
9 such devices but really multiple waterfronts all over
10 the country have them, why not New York? I am open
11 for any questions.

12 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you very much. At
13 this point, we will just move on to Tommy Lobe
14 followed by Carson Glazer.

15 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins now.

16 TOMMY LOBE: Hey, thank you. I am a
17 resident of the Lower Eastside and as many of you
18 know the City Council approved last year a \$1.5
19 billion plan for costal resiliency. That, after the
20 community had come up after several years for a plan
21 that cost half that amount, a little over \$700
22 million. So, I am here to offer the City Council
23 \$750 million in capital funds that not needed. The
24 community plan would have addressed the single most
25 important issue and that was protection from a Sandy

2 type event. We came up with a plan that would have
3 only destroyed approximately 30% of the existing
4 park. The City, after non-consultation with anybody
5 came up with a plan that not only addressed the Sandy
6 Type event but addressed sea level rise which won't
7 come for many, many years. So, we've been asking,
8 this as you mentioned is a community of color. This
9 is the largest park; East River Park is the largest
10 park south of Central Park and we don't feel that
11 this equitable. During COVID and during there is
12 currently a resiliency plan going on in almost each
13 one of the NYCHA residents. So, during COVID we have
14 no access to open space and the city is basically
15 squandering \$700 million. What we've been asking the
16 City Council and the Mayor and now the Governor to do
17 is to put in to place an independent consultant
18 similar to the L-train project where after review the
19 City found that the existing project could be done
20 faster and cheaper. We think the same should be done
21 here. This project has never been reviewed by
22 outside consultants. The one opportunity there was
23 when the borough president brought in an outside
24 consultant, the City hid critical documents from the
25 consultant which he indicated in his final report. It

2 also had some critical objections to the existing
3 plan including that the City plans to destroy the
4 entire park including more than 900 mature trees and
5 raise it by 8 feet. The independent consultant said
6 the City's Plan is 2 feet short of what will be
7 required possibly in the next 50 years. So, the City
8 is spending \$1.5 billion on a plan that they may have
9 to redo in 50 years and at the same time removing an
10 entire park from the community for a minimum of 5
11 years and providing us with no flood protection
12 during the interim. This is crazy and the Council
13 should investigate this because there is \$750 million
14 available to you if you look in to this. Thank you.

15 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. We will now
16 hear from Carson Blazer followed by Kalay Enkariani
17 (SP?) and I apologize if I didn't pronounce that
18 correctly followed by Susan Donnelly.

19 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

20 CARSON BLAZER: Okay am I unmuted? Very
21 good. Can you hear me Chris?

22 CHRIS SARTORI: We can hear you.

23 CARSON BLAZER: Good afternoon Chairman
24 Koo and others gathered here this morning. Thanks
25 for the invitation to share my thoughts and

2 experiences with you on matters pertaining to the
3 future of parks operation and its impacts to green
4 space expansion and conversation of mid-agency budget
5 cuts. My name is Carson Glazer, I am an urban tree
6 expert and horticulturist and operate a Queens based
7 horticulture consulting firm. I am an ISA certified
8 arborist and a member of the New York State Arborist
9 Association and the American Society of Consulting
10 Arborist, I have a PhD in Plant Science from CUNY
11 Grad, also served a 14-year period between 1980s and
12 1990s with Parks in the area of horticulture and
13 arboriculture maintenance and operations. As already
14 documented today and stated that it is well
15 documented by empirical studies and peer review
16 publications and green spaces populated by large
17 trees and parkland and plazas offer direct
18 quantifiable benefits and services to people and is
19 known to improve their health and psychological well-
20 being and good feelings and improve longevity and
21 increase in work productivity to name a few in the
22 environment that includes daily amelioration of the
23 polluted air that we breathe, the interception of
24 toxic gases, in particular matter as well as the
25 interception and diversion of storm water that

2 ensures slow infiltration back into the local aquatic
3 environment and using green to cool the gray amid
4 climate change concerns. Motion partly to show
5 significant improvement in the cognitive learning
6 ability of school aged children visually exposed to
7 green space with trees in contrast to those schools
8 that lack visually green space and with poor student
9 performance. Amid cuts to the agency, the first
10 group of employees to go is not the mid-level
11 bureaucrats and administrators but to MNO and the
12 skilled personnel that maintain the green spaces, the
13 laborers, gardeners, resource managers and foresters
14 and agency tree arborist. I am witness to the
15 calamity that occurred to the parkland in 1970s
16 through budget cuts. As a parks horticulturist in
17 1980s I saw a period of park and green space
18 transformation from a decade of horribly bad going
19 into well, like budget restoration and private/public
20 partnerships as already stated by others. Also, a
21 renewed interest in urban greening through a rise and
22 attention in urban forestry. Experience first hand is
23 what parkland can and will look like after a few
24 years of even modest budget cuts. We are now
25 beginning to see a very repeat of that time in

2 various parks of course across Queens but increased
3 illegal dumping, vandalism, criminal homicide,
4 robbery and parks maintenance diminishment that we
5 wish not return; however, as both a recipient and an
6 observer of the services delivered by the agency I
7 have reservations about the assumed effective
8 management deliverables required to maintain the
9 parks.

10 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time is expired.

11 CARSON GLAZER: I prompt this committee
12 amid the discussion on agency budgets and approve its
13 vetting and oversight of the agency.

14 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you. And Council
15 Member Holder does have a question. Go ahead.

16 ROBERT HOLDEN: Okay thank you and thank
17 you Carson by the way and I want to thank you for
18 your decades of service to the City of New York on
19 certainly horticulture and especially street trees. I
20 want to ask you a question of the recent tropical
21 storm that we had that knocked out so many trees and
22 power lines in the City of New York and in my
23 District we had people out of power for two weeks
24 thanks to these trees that were essentially diseased
25 and the point that they fell during the tropical

2 storms and so many fell. What would you say is the?
3 What course should the City take going forward with
4 their street trees to prevent this from happening
5 again? So many trees taking out power lines.

6 CARSON GLAZER: Yeah, on the last hearing
7 regarding the storm and trees and power outage, I
8 think Commission Liam Cavanaugh stating that they've
9 got all the inspections covered and what I am seeing
10 even by on a matter that even a novice could partake
11 in is testing trees for their decay uhm and their
12 prone to failure because of that decay as we saw in
13 Sandy right up until uhm the storm this season. I
14 really think if you were going to put any emphasis on
15 or weight on Parks on why trees failed and has to do
16 with tree health and condition and I am actually and
17 you and Councilman Koo and others should be appalled
18 by a level of tree failures, entire tree failures and
19 branch failures that upon examination had decay in it
20 that existed for years. Uhm, that all goes back to
21 inspections and maybe its poor training or lack of
22 oversight on the inspection protocols under section
23 forestry and the borough foresters, maybe there is
24 training that is lacking and the ability to carry
25 that out uhm yeah, it's, you know, little by little

2 we will eventually lose all those decaying trees but
3 there are others up there that are experiencing
4 similar decay. It's a natural process within trees
5 often aided by unit activity, construction damage and
6 wounding during the life of the tree, 10 years can go
7 by and no one knows the difference until the next
8 storm comes. Yeah, so, inspections. Thank you.

9 ROBERT HOLDEN: Thank you.

10 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you both. We will
11 move on to Kalay Enkariani (SP?) and apologies if I
12 did not pronounce that correctly.

13 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

14 KALAY ENKARIANI: Uhm good afternoon
15 Chairman Koo and the Committee on Parks and
16 Recreation Members. Thank you for your leadership and
17 advancing open space in New York City and thank you
18 for the opportunity to testify. My name is Kalay
19 Enkariani (SP?) I am from Williams Avenue Community
20 Garden in East New York. The impact of COVID-19 in
21 our city has been a physical, mental and financial
22 impact. This impact has affected low-income and
23 minority communities the hardest. The City has turned
24 open space as part of New York City COVID-19
25 recovery. New Yorkers are looking for their parks

2 and open spaces as resource and one of the few safe
3 spaces for activities. The 14% cut of parks budget
4 during the most critical time for open space makes no
5 sense and is unethical to parks equity. Many of
6 these cuts will directly impact access to and
7 maintenance of our parks and gardens especially in
8 low income communities that are also hardest hit by
9 COVID-19. New York Restoration Projects like many
10 open space organizations rely on park equity
11 initiative funds to steward guidance and build open
12 space for New Yorkers in the least green
13 neighborhood. We work in communities that do not have
14 support of resource conservation, volunteer
15 stewardship groups, so cuts to publicly funded
16 programs like PEI and Greener New York Initiative hit
17 doubly hard. The City needs to prioritize projects
18 that expand access to open space and deliver critical
19 maintenance to highly used sites. Delaying this
20 project means delaying our ability to properly
21 address food insecurity, access to green spaces and
22 critical maintenance of all which speaks true park
23 equity. We ask that the Council please work with us
24 to fund Open Spaces Initiative and stick necessary
25 projects so that we can truly be part of New York

2 City's COVID-19 recovery. As an activist and
3 somebody that is benefiting from the garden, I hope
4 that City Council will hear our cry because we really
5 need those open spaces. Thank you.

6 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you very much and
7 we will now hear from Susan Donnelly from Prospect
8 Park Alliance who is our last registered panelist.

9 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

10 SUSAN DONAHUE: Great, okay. Thank you,
11 Chair Koo and all committee members. My name is Sue
12 Donahue and I am President of the Parkway Alliance,
13 the nonprofit organization that helps to maintain
14 Prospect Park in partnership with the City. COVID-19
15 has made it resoundingly clear that parks and open
16 spaces are essential to the well-being of our
17 community. Prospect Park is truly Brooklyn's
18 backyard and welcomes more than 10 million visits
19 each year from every zip code in Brooklyn and beyond.
20 As a community park, Prospect Park is a critical
21 gathering space for family reunions, birthday parties
22 and all manners of picnics and barbeques. It's 585
23 acres provides fresh air and respite to Brooklyn
24 residents who have the least amount of green space
25 per capita in all of New York City. Making Prospect

2 Park a welcoming and acceptable space for the diverse
3 communities of Brooklyn is a key part of our mission
4 and without the support of the City and our elected
5 officials our work would not be possible. Visitor-
6 ship to City parks as recurrent through this
7 testimony during the pandemic has increased
8 significantly. In Prospect Park we are seeing a
9 record number of visits at all hours and all days
10 along with numerous events and gatherings and a
11 significant uptick in park patrons exploring every
12 inch of the park including more fragile areas such as
13 the park woodland. At the same time, we are
14 experiencing significant budget cuts and the Prospect
15 Park Alliance relies on the City of the New York City
16 Parks Department for general maintenance and upkeep
17 of the park. Historically, the Parks Department
18 Budget has been a very small percentage of the City
19 Budget despite the fact that parks comprise a large
20 percentage of city land and are used by such a
21 significant portion of the population. Since the
22 pandemic the parks department has experience \$84
23 million in cuts as has been talked about, about 14%
24 of its total annual budget of \$587 million. The
25 department has 45% less staff to handle more work and

2 maintenance hours which have been reduced by 25,000
3 hours a week. In Prospect Park, we have seen a 20%
4 decrease in New York City Park staffing which has
5 been further challenged by fatigue of the remaining
6 staff resulting in an increase in call outs and
7 absences. In addition, the Project Park Alliance also
8 has by necessity seen cuts to our budget due to the
9 pandemic with 11% in staff reduction which has left
10 us unable to fill open positions and required cutting
11 our parade ground maintenance crew and nighttime
12 summer weekend cleaning crew. Prospect Park Alliance
13 has attempted to make up for the decrease in funding
14 by launching new volunteer programs including a
15 series of various accessible It's My Park days and
16 the launch of a green and go kit program which
17 provides patrons with trash grabbers, gloves and
18 bags. The response thankfully has been overwhelming
19 from the community and demonstrates how much New
20 Yorkers love their parks but it is not a sustainable
21 approach to maintain the parks.

22 SARGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

23 SUSAN DONAHUE: We applaud the City
24 Council for taking up this issue and hope to work
25 with you and our parks and open space partners to

2 advocate for increased funding for parks leading to
3 increased equity for all parks. Thanks very much.

4 CHRIS SARTORI: Thank you very much. I
5 ask at this point if we have inadvertently missed
6 anyone who has registered to testify today and has
7 yet to have been called, please use the Zoom Hand
8 Function and you will be called in the order that
9 your hand was raised. Seeing none at this point, I
10 will then ask Chair Koo to offer some closing remarks
11 and adjourn this hearing, thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON PETER KOO: Thank you Chris.
13 Uhm, thank you Commissioner Silver and your staff for
14 coming here to testify and thank you for all the
15 participation and thank you for all you that have
16 come today. As many have stated today, investing in
17 our parks is more important than ever and we must
18 make sure that we are also investing in communities
19 for the long-term. We must work to address historic
20 inequity in our park system and look for creative
21 ways that we can increase access to open spaces
22 moving forward. We must do so to combat COVID. We
23 also for the health of the residents in our City.
24 Thank you for everyone again for coming to testify
25 today. Thank you to my committee staff and my own

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

130

2 staff and with that I adjourn the meeting (gavel
3 pounding).

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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 November 25, 2020