

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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November 18, 2020
Start: 1:04 p.m.
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HELD AT: Remote Hearing

B E F O R E: Peter A. Koo
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Peter A. Koo
Adrienne E. Adams
Joseph C. Borelli
Justin L. Brannan
Andrew Cohen
Mark Gjonaj
Robert F. Holden
Mark Levine
Francisco P. Moya
Carlina Rivera
Eric A. Ulrich
Jimmy Van Bramer

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

Sam Biederman
Assistant Commissioner for Community
Outreach and Partnership Development
Department of Parks and Recreation

John Krawchuk
Director
Historic House Trust

Matt Drury
Director of Government Relations
Department of Parks and Recreation

Ran Yan

Elizabeth Branfman

Kelsey Brow

Jennifer Walden Webrin

Victoria Monroe

Shilo Folly

Kim Maier

Elizabeth ____

Maria Becce

Maria Carasco

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: PC recording started.

SERGEANT AT ARMS SADOWSKY: Thank you.

SERGEANT AT ARMS POLITE: PC recording to the cloud is all set.

SERGEANT AT ARMS SADOWSKY: Thank you.

And good afternoon and welcome to today's remote New York City Council hearing of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. At this time would all council members and council staff please turn on their video. To minimize disruption please place electronic devices on vibrate or silent mode. If you wish to submit testimony you may do so at testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that's testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you, and we are ready to begin. Chair Koo, we're ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK, I'm ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS SADOWSKY: You may begin with your opening, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Good afternoon. I'm Peter Koo, chair of the City Council's Committee on Parks and Recreation. I would like to welcome you to our virtual hearing that will examine the state of historic houses in the Parks Department's jurisdiction. Historic houses are

1 hidden cultural treasures of our city. There are 23
2 of them located in each of the five boroughs. They
3 include a variety of structures, ranging from
4 farmers' cottages to former homes of prominent New
5 Yorkers to grand mansions, including Gracey Mansion.
6 According to recent data they attract over 750,000
7 visitors each year, including 480,000 of the city's
8 students. The majority of the historic houses are
9 New York City landmarks and a few are on the National
10 Register of Historic Places. The Parks Department
11 and Historic Houses will go into a little more detail
12 on the operation issues, but to put it briefly each
13 house is owned by the city and operated by separate
14 nonprofit entities with help from the Historic House
15 Trust. The trust was created in 1989 to help the
16 Parks Department maintain and preserve the various
17 housing, the various historic houses. The trust
18 oversees the care and operation of the houses and
19 coordinates activities between DPR and the staffs of
20 each house. While DPR provides some funding for the
21 trust, including office space, the trust and each
22 historic house mostly rely on private donations for
23 their basic operations. It has been a while since
24 the committee conducted oversight into how historic
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1 houses are failing. So I thought this was a good
2 time to hold this hearing, especially in light of how
3 COVID-19 has affected the operations. Specifically,
4 I'm curious about the role played by the Parks
5 Department and Historic House Trust and how they work
6 and interact with the individual historic houses when
7 it comes to maintenance, security, and event
8 planning, whether they provide enough and substantive
9 assistance to each historic house, and whether there
10 is a need to reform any part of the procedures that
11 govern how historic houses are funded, maintained,
12 and operated. I'm concerned with reports that have
13 indicated some houses have had major issues with
14 performing basic and necessary maintenance and repair
15 work and have had issues with receiving assistance
16 for cleanup related to damage caused by severe
17 weather, such as Tropical Storm Isaias. In addition,
18 I hope this hearing will examine how DPR's recent
19 budget and staff cuts for fiscal 2021 will impact the
20 future of historic houses and how COVID-19, which has
21 forced the temporary closing of the houses, will
22 impact the ability of these museums to safely operate
23 and continue to serve the cultural and historic needs
24 of the city. Thank you all and welcome. I'm very
25

1 happy this committee is joined by Council Member
2 Adams, Cohen, and Holden. I will now turn it over to
3 the moderator, committee counsel Chris Sartori, to go
4 over some procedure items.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair Koo.

7 I am Chris Sartori, senior counsel to the Committee

8 on Parks and Recreation, and I will be moderating

9 this hearing. Before we begin, I'd like to remind

10 everyone that you will be on mute until you are

11 called on to testify, at which point you will be

12 unmuted by the host. During the hearing I'll be

13 calling on various panelists to testify. Please

14 listen for your name to be called, as I will be

15 periodically announcing who will be testifying next.

16 We will first be hearing testimony from the

17 administration, followed by testimony from members of

18 the public. During the hearing if council members

19 would like to ask a question of the administration or

20 a specific panelist please use the Zoom raise hand

21 function and I will call on you in order. We will be

22 limiting council member questions to five minutes,

23 which includes the time it takes to answer those

24 questions. For members of the public who will

25 testify, please state your name and the organization

1 you represent, if any, once it's your time to speak.

2 We will now be calling representatives of the

3 administration to testify. We will be hearing

4 testimony from Sam Biederman, assistant commissioner

5 of the Department of Parks and Recreation, and John

6 Krawchuk. Matt Drury, director of government

7 relations at the Parks Department, will also be

8 present to answer any questions as well. At this

9 time I will administer the affirmation to each

10 representative of the administration. I will call on

11 you individually for a response, so please at this

12 point raise your right hands. Do you affirm to tell

13 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth

14 in your testimony before these committees and to

15 respond to council member questions honestly?

16 Commissioner Biederman?

17
18 COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: I do.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Director Krawchuk?

20 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: I do.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Mr. Drury?

22 DIRECTOR DRURY: I do.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. At this
24 time I will invite Assistant Commissioner Biederman

1 and Director Krawchuk to present their testimony.

2 Thank you.

3
4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: Thank
5 you, ah, and good afternoon, Chair Koo and member of
6 the City Council Parks Committee. Ah, my name is Sam
7 Biederman. I'm assistant commissioner for community
8 outreach and partnership development at the Parks
9 Department. I'm excited today to discuss one of our
10 most cherished partners, the Historic House Trust.
11 Founded over 30 years ago in 1989 with roughly 15
12 properties with the purpose of providing specialty
13 resources for the cultural artifacts that exist on
14 parkland, the HHT advocates for, promotes, and
15 provides expertise to preserve now 23 publicly owned
16 historic sites located throughout the city's five
17 boroughs. These are houses that have seen difficult
18 times - wars, economic depressions, and, yes,
19 pandemics, and they tell the story of this city's
20 unique telling for renewal and reinvention. The HHT
21 and its partner houses provide an extraordinary
22 opportunity for visitors to experience history in a
23 fun and tangible way. And now in light of COVID they
24 provide an opportunity to discover over 360 years of
25 New York City history from home. So, without further

1
2 ado, I'd like to introduce the executive director of
3 the Historic House Trust, John Krawchuk.

4 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Thank you,
5 Commissioner Biederman, ah, for the wonderful
6 introduction to our houses, um, and good afternoon,
7 Chair Koo and members of the City Council Parks
8 Committee. Ah, my name is John Krawchuk and I have
9 served as the executive director of the Historic
10 House Trust in New York City for the past four-and-a-
11 half years. In my comments today I plan to touch on
12 several topics - first, an introduction to HHT, then
13 the role of NYC Parks with our houses, and then that
14 of our nonprofit house partners who operate the
15 sites, and lastly I would like to share with you
16 updates on how the pandemic is affecting our house
17 museums. By way of introduction, the Historic House
18 Trust is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization presently
19 consisting of seven staff members. Three of them are
20 Parks employees, including myself, and four are
21 privately paid. We have 27 volunteer board members
22 and an advocacy group called The Director's Council
23 that support our mission. We work in partnership
24 with NYC Parks to preserve, promote, and provide
25 expertise to 23 publicly owned historic sites in all

1 five boroughs. We accomplish this work mainly
2 through the oversight of maintenance and operations
3 as well as capital projects and managing license
4 agreements between NYC Parks and the house partners.
5 The houses, as we like to call the sites
6 collectively, mostly consist of individual domestic
7 dwellings representing modest farmhouses to grand
8 mansions and a lighthouse, a working farm, a village,
9 and a schoolhouse that presently operates as a
10 marionette theater. Two of our sites host multiple
11 buildings within larger parks - historic Richmond
12 Town and the Queens County Farm Museum.
13 Collectively, the houses span over 360 years of our
14 city's history. The earliest home, dating to 1652,
15 the Wyckoff Farmhouse, and the most recent to 1993, a
16 restoration and reconstruction of The Old Stone
17 House. Both are located in Brooklyn. And I might
18 add the that Wyckoff Farmhouse happens to be the
19 oldest structure in New York City. Our house museums
20 are important physical reminders of New York City's
21 rich and long history and are architecturally and
22 culturally significant resources. The house sites
23 are owned by the public, open to all, and are
24 operated by committed nonprofit partners who hire
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1 their own staff and raise their own private dollars
2 to provide essential programming and events. They
3 also have volunteer boards who work tirelessly along
4 the side of the house directors to fund their house
5 activities and bring hands-on history to the public.
6 Our house partners work jointly with NYC Parks and
7 HHT to carry out this preservation mission through
8 city license agreements and to serve their
9 neighborhoods and the general public. They are
10 instrumental in creating appealing amenities and
11 engaging programs and a distinct sense of place for
12 their surrounding parks and communities, and they
13 thrive as cultural centers, attracting more than
14 800,000 visitors annually in a normal year, nearly a
15 third of whom are local schoolchildren. Our sites
16 engage the public through place making programming
17 that addresses inclusivity, universal accessibility,
18 ecology, horticulture, history, and the arts and
19 sciences. All of this requires a network of support
20 to maintain aging buildings and sites and to operate
21 time-intensive programming. We accomplish this by
22 way of the license agreements that specify the roles
23 and responsibilities of NYC Parks, HHT, and the house
24 partners. I would now like to introduce you to our
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1 speciality sectors of work, starting with capital
2 projects. We are very grateful to you, our devoted
3 City Council members, the borough presidents, and the
4 mayor for the significant funding that you allocate
5 to restore and improve our historic buildings and our
6 sites. Presently our houses have 26 planned
7 individual capital projects secured with 70 million
8 dollars of allocated city funds. Design and
9 construction restoration projects are managed in
10 three ways - either directly by HHT through a sole
11 source agreement that we have with the city or with
12 the assistance from project managers at either NYC
13 Parks Capital Division or the Department of Design
14 and Construction, also known as DDC. Maintenance and
15 operations is another important aspect of service
16 that HHT oversees at our sites. We have dedicated
17 NYC Parks staff to manage maintenance and operations
18 requests and city contracts for certain services. On
19 average, the city spends about \$400,000 a year on
20 maintenance at our sites, consisting of service
21 contracts, emergency repairs, and utilities. HHT
22 also provides curatorial support to assist the houses
23 and collections that are on display and stored at the
24 houses that are used for public interpretation and
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1 educational programs. Our curator has provided
2 cataloging services, interior environmental
3 monitoring for the well-being of the objects, and the
4 deployment of the team of curatorial HHT volunteers,
5 known as the Roof Raisers, who help with specialty
6 housekeeping for fragile antique objects and interior
7 spaces. The program is quite popular and a great
8 engagement tool that allows for special access and
9 interaction for our volunteers with tangible history
10 and objects while accomplishing important maintenance
11 goals. Presently nine of our 23 houses are open for
12 interior tours with COVID-compliant guidelines in
13 effect. The remaining houses have not been able to
14 open, either related to interior space restrictions
15 or due to the lack of staff members or docents to
16 lead small group tours or monitor self-guided tours.
17 I would now like to share with you some comparison
18 attendance figures pre- and post-pandemic. As part
19 of HHT's role in managing license agreements we
20 gather attendance records from the houses that are
21 incorporated into the Mayoral Management Report twice
22 a year. The houses report attendance in three
23 separate categories - general admission, schools and
24 groups, and events and programs. On average for
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1 calendar year 19 and calendar year 20 general
2 admission accounted for 25% of all visitation,
3 schools and groups another 25%, and events and
4 programs 50% of all visitation. The historic houses
5 have seen a drastic reduction of in-person visitation
6 because of the pandemic. From mid March to late July
7 our museums were not permitted to be open to the
8 general public, resulting in an estimated loss of
9 260,000 visitors compared to the previous calendar
10 year. In total, between March 2019 and October of
11 2019 the historic houses saw attendance of 595,000
12 visitors versus the current figures from March of
13 2020 to October of 2020, when we saw only 3143
14 visitors, less than 1% of the previous calendar
15 year's attendance. To make up for that lack of in-
16 person attendance during this period many of our
17 historic house partners have offered dynamic virtual
18 programming and are using this technology to keep
19 their audiences engaged. In addition to the staff
20 members that are city employees, HHT also has four
21 employees who are funded through our private
22 fundraising efforts. This team manages our office
23 environment, fundraising and grant writing, HHT's
24 programming and social media communications outreach
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1 to promote the houses collectively, sharing news and
2 programs that are offered to the public. One
3 exciting example is a program that HHT is now
4 managing which enhances accessibility for, ah, our
5 houses to people with disabilities through innovative
6 programming and services to our houses. The two-year
7 project will update NYC Parks accessible transition
8 plan at all of our house sites and fund five pilot
9 projects to bring, um, to bring the, um, special
10 innovation to our house sites and improve the museum
11 experience for all people with disabilities and all
12 visitors. While HHT's private fundraising is largely
13 expended on staff salaries and benefits to support
14 the important work that occurs at our sites, we
15 realize the need to assist our house partners with
16 unrestricted grants when possible for critical needs
17 onsite. These funds, while modest compared to their
18 adopted budgets, do help provide relief and
19 supplement their own fundraising efforts,
20 particularly during the current crisis. The budgets
21 for our house partners are largely dependent on
22 visitation from school groups and support from the
23 city in the form of DCLA and NYC Parks grants
24 generously allocated by the City Council and the
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1
2 borough presidents' offices. At several of our sites
3 this funding source is over 50% of their annual
4 revenue. You will recognize some of the programs
5 that are so beneficial to our visitors - Cultural
6 Afterschools Adventure Program, also known as CASA,
7 Su Casa, its companion, the Cultural Immigrant
8 Initiative, and the Coalition of Theaters of Color.
9 We thank you for supporting this important work and
10 ensuring that whenever possible during this
11 particularly challenging time that the city's budget
12 recognizes the critical role of culture and parks
13 that are the lifeblood of our local communities. As
14 we are all aware, the city is facing unprecedented
15 fiscal challenges. Budget impacts have been felt by
16 every corner of our city agency, including Parks and
17 the historic houses in our portfolio. We are
18 dedicated to working with our partners to advance
19 their programs and keep their houses operating and
20 provide key support for capital projects and
21 maintenance. While we are committed to ensuring the
22 success of our houses, HHT's staff resources are
23 finite so our capacity will always be limited to some
24 design. Our houses have stood the test of time,
25 anchoring our most cherished park spaces in

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2 neighborhoods throughout the city. I feel confident
3 that together we will see them through this rough
4 patch and beyond. Visitors will be welcomed back and
5 hands-on history will rebound to serve current and
6 future generations of New Yorkers. Thank you for all
7 of your continued support of historic houses and for
8 starting such an important dialogue with this hearing
9 today. Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. At this
11 time I will turn it over to Council Member Koo, who
12 will ask his questions.

13 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Before I
14 ask questions, ah, I want to say we are joined by
15 Council Member Levine and Council Member Gjonaj. So,
16 Director John Krawchuk and, ah, Commissioner
17 Biederman, thank you for coming to testify. My first
18 question is how many historic houses are landmarks?
19 Of those that are not, why is it the case that they
20 have not yet been landmark?

21 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So I, I can, I think
22 I'm un-muted, yes. Um, again, John Krawchuk, director
23 of Historic House Trust. Um, I'm happy to answer
24 that, that question, Chair Koo. Um, all of our
25 houses actually have, um, landmark, local landmark

1 designation with the exception of The Old Stone
2 House. Ah, but that has a National Register listing
3 and so, um, at the state and the national level it
4 does have, um, it is identified as a landmark
5 property.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Ah. So are there any
8 houses currently going through the landmarking
9 process? There is one, right? No?

10 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Ah, not presently,
11 no.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: No, OK, thank you. So
13 what financial assistance is provided for historic
14 houses by Parks Department and Historic House Trust?
15 Ah, what are the dollar amounts for fiscal 20 and 21?

16 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So, um, I can answer
17 that, those questions, again, John Krawchuk. Um, so
18 the, there isn't direct assistance provided to the
19 nonprofits that have the license agreements by the
20 city with the exception of discretionary funds that
21 are provided by council members or the borough
22 president. Um, the Parks Department and HHT advocate
23 on behalf of the house sites for, ah, capital
24 projects, along with our house partners, and so that
25 is one aspect of funding, um, the, ah, repair and

1 restoration of both the structures on the sites as
2 well as the house. Um, expense dollars, which are,
3 um, typically spent on maintenance and operations,
4 um, we have a small budget each year that is assigned
5 specifically to the Historic House Trust for service
6 contracts. But then we also receive, um, incredible
7 support and background from each of the borough
8 shops, ah, and the way that that is structured is
9 that each borough has its own maintenance and
10 operations shop which services that borough, um, and
11 they service everything from park sites to recreation
12 centers, um, ah, as well as any park structure or
13 site, ah, in addition to our historic houses. And so
14 when I quoted the figure of \$400,000 a year that is
15 expended for the maintenance of the houses, um, that
16 includes the labor and materials that the borough
17 shops spend each year, um, at each site throughout
18 the five boroughs.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Um, we are
21 also joined by Council Member Van Bramer. So, ah,
22 are the funds raised by the HHT, they are typically
23 donated to the houses each year, ah, around \$2500,
24 required to be used for specific purpose or are they
25 just for general use?

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2 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Those are
3 unrestricted grants that the Historic House Trust has
4 provided to our houses for a period of years now.
5 So, ah, to answer your question, unrestricted means
6 that there's absolutely no requirement for the funds
7 to be spent for any specific purpose. Um, our houses
8 are free to use them as they see fit, um, and, ah,
9 and we don't require, um, ah, any sort of, ah,
10 reporting back on how the funds are spent, either.
11 Ah, the funds are provided to them on a yearly basis
12 in general, ah, and, ah, and are always contingent
13 upon our own ability to fund raise each year, um,
14 through our own, um, fundraising events that we do
15 throughout the year and through the fundraising
16 activities of our volunteer board.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. So how much
18 does HHT provide to the license, ah, through the
19 license each year without labor and materials?

20 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Ah, Chair Koo, are
21 you referring to, um, to funding?

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, how much does, do
23 you provide funding for each individual license and
24 house?

1
2 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So for the, for the,
3 um, the unrestricted grants that are provided it's
4 the \$2500 per site that you, ah, you just referenced.
5 And then for maintenance and operations there's not a
6 set figure, um, for the houses with the exception of
7 service contracts. Ah, service contracts are set
8 contracts that the city has with vendors and those
9 are typically provided for extermination services
10 and, ah, fire suppression and detection systems. And
11 those are typically allocated per site, depending on
12 how big the house is, um, and that is a set figure as
13 part of the contract service, um, that is provided to
14 each individual house.

15 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. So the \$400,000,
16 ah, you mentioned is inclusive of materials and
17 labor, right?

18 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Correct. So about,
19 um, a hundred, a little over, um, around \$120,000 a
20 year is what is spent throughout the five boroughs
21 collectively for labor and materials, um, for work
22 that happens at our house sites.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So all of the \$400,000
24 in our budget, um, the houses only get \$2500
25 directly?

1
2 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So if I could just
3 clarify. Um, the, the difference between those
4 funding sources, um, the \$2500 is not city, city-
5 raised month. That is month that is privately raised
6 by, um, by the Historic House Trust through our
7 volunteer board, um, as well as through our own, ah,
8 fundraising efforts in house with our director of
9 external affairs, who provides, ah, our support for
10 funding. So I guess it would be similar to maybe the
11 Central Park Conservancy. Um, you know, they have
12 their own development and fundraising arm where they
13 raise private dollars for the park and then those
14 private dollars would then be allocated as a, as a
15 \$2500 grant. So that's kind of similar to what we do
16 for all 23 of our house sites. Um, ah, the expense
17 funds, those are not available to pass directly
18 through to the houses. Those are city dollars that
19 are assigned for maintenance of, of city parks and
20 Parks resources. And so those have to be direct
21 charges, either for services, for labor, or
22 materials.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So how many of the
24 houses use the contracts?

1 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Um, almost all of,
2
3 um, um, I believe almost all of them use the
4 contracts for extermination services, ah, with the
5 exception of the Little Red Lighthouse, which doesn't
6 require extermination.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Ah, I see.

8 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Um, and, um, ah,
9 unless they choose to, ah, to pay for it privately,
10 which sometimes the houses make the decision that
11 they would rather go in that direction. But in
12 general we do service most of the house for
13 extermination and we service a portion of them for
14 fire detection and fire suppression.

15 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Um, we're also joined
16 by Council Member Ulrich and Council Member Rivera
17 and Council Member Brannan. So the next question is,
18 ah, Director, of the funding provided by DPR each
19 year, about \$107,000, is this set aside for specific
20 purposes and is it divided up equally? Ah, is it
21 divided equally for each house, or is it approved
22 funding helped by the city that each house can make
23 use when needed?

24 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So, um, so the, the
25 \$107,000 is, again, expense funding that is a

1
2 specific line that the Parks Department sets aside
3 for our historic house sites, and of that about
4 \$70,000 of that \$107,000 is expended on contracts for
5 extermination as well as for fire suppression and
6 detection, which is the monitoring that occurs at
7 those sites to ensure that they are safeguarded, um,
8 from fire. And so, again, \$70,000 is automatically
9 spent through city contracts that have set, ah,
10 funding, um, agreements with, with two service
11 providers, um, and then the remaining is there in
12 case there is an emergency at one of the houses, and
13 very often throughout the year we will have
14 situations that come up where, um, ah, it's an
15 unexpected, um, situation that requires us to either
16 seek, um, outside vendors to come in and address the
17 matter or to bring borough shops in to actually
18 assist with, um, with repairing, um, a particular
19 item at the house that might be a specialty item that
20 that they don't have, for instance, on stock, um, in
21 their supply shops at the individual house. So one
22 example of that might be let's say there is, um, ah,
23 ah, a clear, um, plexiglas protection on the window
24 of one of the houses that gets damaged. Um, that
25 would be specialty materials that the shops would

1 typically not have on hand. So in that case the
2 Historic House Trust would purchase that special
3 protective plexiglas, um, and then provide it to the
4 borough shop to then go and install. So we would
5 draw on that \$107,000 to purchase that plexiglas.
6 Um, if there was to be, um, some other sort of
7 critical need, um, let's say, ah, some sort of
8 hazardous materials abatement in order to do work in
9 the house, um, and that occurred actually last year
10 at one of our house sites where we were, um, we were
11 fixing up the caretaker's kitchen and we discovered
12 that there was a pipe that had some hazardous
13 materials that had to be abated. We had to draw on
14 that \$107,000, or the remaining amount, um, in order
15 to perform that work, um, and make sure that it was
16 done correctly because our, our borough shops don't
17 have the ability to do hazardous materials abatement.
18 So those are kind of two examples of how that
19 remaining, how those remaining funds, which is about
20 \$35,000, um, could be at our disposal to use at our
21 house sites when there are things that are unexpected
22 that come up. So they are not generally available to
23 the houses to make decisions on how they're spent.
24 They're reserved for emergencies and unanticipated
25

1 things that come up throughout the year, and with old
2 houses you can imagine that happens quite often.

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4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: We are also joined by
5 Council Member Van Bramer and Council Member Moya.
6 Thank you. So about \$107,000, ah, for 23 sites, ah,
7 it seems not too much month. What happens with the
8 DPR funding runs out and a house needs funding? Is
9 that house required to raise and use private funds?
10 Ah, if so does HHT, your trust, assist them in
11 fundraising?

12 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So the answer to that
13 would be yes. Um, we can assist with fundraising.
14 Um, although, ah, obviously that could be very
15 challenging depending on, on what the need is, ah,
16 and there are times when our houses actually assist
17 with maintenance and operations, on occasion,
18 maintenance and operations or with capital work. Um,
19 but generally we really, um, you know, we really look
20 to the city, um, to help provide that support for the
21 house sites, um, so that we can really, um, free up
22 the, our house partners to do the important
23 fundraising that they need to do in order to support
24 their programming and event activity onsite. So, um,
25 so, ah, should the month run out we would just

1 really, um, really circle back to the Parks
2 Department and just say will there be any ability to
3 get a small increase in what you've allocated to us
4 for this unanticipated emergency that has come up.
5 Um, and it's been very rare, um, that that has
6 occurred, that the, um, that the budget allocated has
7 been expended in any one, one full year. Um,
8 typically, um, the reason they come up with the
9 \$107,000 is they realize that that's about sort of
10 the average, um, that we've spent over the last
11 several years, um, and it typically gets us through,
12 um, which we're very thankful for. Um, but as I had
13 said, our, our total budget is \$400,000 in
14 maintenance and operations a year. So \$107,000 of
15 that is spent, um, ah, is allocated specifically for
16 HHT. About another \$100,000 is, um, what the borough
17 shops actually provides in, in their own supplies and
18 labor, and then the remaining \$200,000 is utilities.
19 And so that also counts for its maintenance and
20 operations. So that brings us to the grand total of
21 \$400,000 total, um, per year in maintenance and
22 operations expenses.
23

24 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So out of \$107,000,
25 \$70,000 is slated for contracts.

2 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Correct.

3 CHAIRPERSON KOO: That means only \$37,000
4 is spent by Parks each year for all 23 houses. So by
5 my calculation there is only \$1600 each year per
6 house. It seems like a very small amount of month.

7 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Well, it's actually,
8 right Chair Koo. Um, the, um, the \$100,000 figure
9 that I quoted, which is the labor and materials that
10 the borough shops cover in their budgets, also
11 applies to the \$107,000. So it really is \$207,000,
12 ah, that is provided per year for all 23 sites. And,
13 again, \$70,000 of that gets carved out for service
14 contracts. So it brings, you know, the grand total
15 down to about \$137,000 a year that is spent on the 23
16 sites for maintenance and operations.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So how much of that
18 \$107,000 is left for this year?

19 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Ah, presently we have
20 about \$30,000 that remains.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Ah, there [inaudible]
22 where Parks is not able to provide funding. And what
23 happens then?

24 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So if, if, again, the
25 \$107,000 that's allocated to us runs out we would

1
2 really look to the borough shops who, again, have a
3 budget, um, which actually is a, also a pretty finite
4 resource for them, um, against, um, you know, all of
5 your public quite familiar with the, the, the, the
6 sort of, ah, budget strains that the city is
7 encountering, um, and the challenges that we have, of
8 course, sort of keeping up with maintenance really
9 across the city. Um, it's, um, it's a very challenge
10 situation. It's really no different for our houses.
11 Um, but I have to say borough shops have always come
12 through for us. There has never been a situation
13 where we had to go back and say we can't perform the
14 work this year because there's no money, um, and we
15 hope that that remains the case, um, and we've not
16 encountered a situation where we've been told we
17 cannot, could not perform that, with the one
18 exception that it, when we get close to the end of
19 the fiscal year if something is not a real pressing
20 priority we may just ask that we hold off on it until
21 the budget is renewed, um, so that we can cover it in
22 that year, and that might be the one exception where,
23 where we just ask if it's not something critical, um,
24 that we, we sort of, um, you know, forward, forward

1
2 the work on to the next fiscal year when the, when
3 the funds have been replenished.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. So how many of
5 your staff members and how many of the Parks
6 Department's staff member are assigned, assigned to
7 work on the historic houses? Three, right?

8 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So, um, so of the,
9 ah, of the staff members that work directly on the,
10 ah, capital projects and the maintenance and
11 operations, um, we presently have two that work
12 directly with, with those. If you count me, I guess
13 that would be three, and I do spend quite a bit of
14 time um, overseeing and managing, ah, maintenance and
15 operations and capital projects. So that would be
16 three, I guess, technically. Um, we presently have
17 one vacancy for a senior architectural conservator
18 that we're hoping that we can fill, ah, just as soon
19 as, um, the city moves forward with, with hiring.
20 And then that would really give us, you know, some
21 additional capacity to, um, really sort of tackle the
22 capital projects in particular.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So during our September
24 hearing on the hurricane recovery we heard that there
25 were several outstanding fallen tree issues at

1
2 various historic houses. Has Parks addressed all
3 fallen trees and hurricane-related damages since our
4 last hearing? Have you taken care of all the
5 problems, the trees and the?

6 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Yes, so I'd, I'd be
7 happy to, um, address that as well. So, um, all of
8 the, um, all of the most pressing priorities for tree
9 removals, the ones that are going to create, um,
10 hazards to the public have been addressed. Um, and,
11 um, I, I don't know if you've in the past had
12 introductions to how our forestry department, um,
13 operates, um, but they have a very skilled and
14 talented team that really, um, manages, does an
15 incredible job managing our urban forest, ah, New
16 York City parks, um, and they also have very finite
17 resources that they, ah, can, ah, put towards the,
18 those, those situations, especially after a major
19 storm or a hurricane where there are a lot of downed
20 limbs that can really, um, ah, be an extreme hazard,
21 um, and also prevent appropriate usage of, of parks.
22 And so they have a ranking or rating system, and so,
23 um, at all of our house sites, um, that received
24 storm damage from trees, um, we had pretty immediate
25 response from the forestry team, who went out and

1
2 looked at those sites and then determined the level
3 of priority, and they addressed the highest levels of
4 priority, which were public safety related, um, and
5 then those that weren't necessarily related to public
6 safety but could be captured later were kind of given
7 a lower ranking and so they will be addressed just as
8 soon as possible. Um, the city is still digging out
9 from that storm and, um, it's really months and
10 months of work, from what I understand, in order to
11 really address all of those tree issues. Um, and so
12 we're in constant touch with our house partners about
13 the status of those trees, um, and when we can take
14 care of them we absolutely will. I'm not aware of
15 any, um, issues at any of the houses now that really
16 rise to a high level of, um, of priority. Um, if
17 there are situations with downed limbs they're on the
18 ground safely, um, and, ah, just as soon as our
19 forestry department can, um, circle around to them
20 they will be, um, getting to those sites and making
21 sure, um, that those limbs are removed.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So how you decide
23 whether something is of a pressing priority? Does
24 the priority in group, does the priority, does the

1
2 priority in group, ah, a priority for trees that can
3 completely damage these centuries-old houses?

4 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Oh, yes.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: Um,
6 Chair, if I could take that one. Um, I, you know, I
7 don't, I'm a little, um, hesitant to get into too
8 many details about, ah, how we, how the agency rates,
9 um, tree damage and, ah, forestry items just because
10 [inaudible] our foresters so I don't want to, don't
11 want to go into too much detail here...

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: ...lest
14 we accidentally give you a wrong piece of
15 information. We're very happy to follow up with you
16 regarding details on those items. But, ah, I will
17 say generally, you know, the most urgent items are,
18 you know, a tree on a roof, or a tree blocking a
19 street, right? Those are, um, items that create
20 immediate hazard or immediately get in the way of
21 necessary movement. Those come first.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Does it mean, does that
23 mean, ah, we still have older trees with limbs that
24 are dead and hanging over homes? Do we still have
25

1
2 some of those [inaudible] problems, the tree limbs
3 over the roof, yeah. Do we still have the problem?

4 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Sorry, this is, this
5 is Matt, ah, director of government relations. I
6 mean, and, again, as, as Sam noted, you know, you
7 know, I think we can generally characterize that by
8 and large any, any sort of tree condition that would,
9 that would, ah, relate as sort of a risk tied to the
10 property or to people, those have all been addressed,
11 ah, following Isaias. And to the design that there
12 are any conditions, ah, remaining, ah, they are,
13 generally speaking, downed limbs or things like tree
14 debris, for lack of a better phrase, um, that are
15 safely down on the ground and in some cases maybe,
16 you know, cosmetically, you know, ah, might not, you
17 know, I can understand someone, that, that remaining
18 on our radar and it does remain on our radar, but as,
19 as you can understand, given our risk management
20 approach, you know, not, not, not a threat to life,
21 safety, or to property, ah, so generally speaking
22 we're not aware of any tree conditions that are
23 threatening either one of the homes or otherwise.
24 And, and if that is the case John and his team are
25 obviously in close, ah, contact with the homes. If

1
2 that comes to our attention we'll work with our
3 forestry team or our borough operations team and make
4 sure that that's addressed.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Ah, several
6 of the historic homes have shared concerns about
7 security. Are the homes prioritized for PEP officers
8 in response in case of any incidents?

9 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So I would be happy
10 to address, um, to address that question, Chair Koo.
11 Um, the answer would be absolutely. Um, ah, Parks
12 enforcement patrol, also known as PEP, um, is always
13 available to assist when there is a situation at one
14 of the houses. We also have, ah, central
15 communications at the New York City Police Department
16 which addresses, um, alarm breaks and so, ah, that
17 system combined really helps us to make sure that
18 the, the houses are secured. And on the occasion
19 that there is an incident at the house we have
20 procedures in place for our house directors to, um,
21 file incident reports with us so that we can notify,
22 um, the local, um, ah, enforcement, um, you know, ah,
23 system in place, ah, at each borough or within each
24 district so that they can be aware, especially if
25 there is something that's ongoing or, or continuing.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So that's Parks or HHT
3 that plans to add security systems to the, to all the
4 historic houses. Do they have security systems now,
5 or do you plan to add security systems?

6 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: All of the houses
7 presently have security systems in them. Um, and,
8 um, and some of them are monitored by the house
9 partner, ah, because the, ah, arrangement, um, for
10 most of our houses is that the collections that are
11 within the house, um, are owned by the nonprofit
12 organization that has the license agreement with the
13 city. So we like to make sure that they, one, feel
14 comfortable with the security systems in, that is in
15 place and, two, if they feel that they would like,
16 um, to have more direct investment with the
17 monitoring and the oversight of, of that particular
18 property and the collections within, um, that they
19 have the ability to do that. But quite a number of
20 our houses have, um, have chosen to stay with the
21 central communications and the city-provided alarm
22 systems, um, which are, are quite effective.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So has COVID-19
24 affected the ability to operate historic houses?
25 Has, ah, the Parks Department required any safety

1 protocols or any new protocols for historic houses to
2 operate to the department's satisfaction.

3
4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: John,
5 I'll, I'll defer to you on details with this. But,
6 um, Chair, I would note that in the very beginning
7 of, ah, the COVID crisis, ah, Historic House Trust,
8 John in particular, I want to give him credit, was,
9 um, one of our, um, all of our partners were great,
10 they, they really were, but, um, HHT to me stood out
11 as a partner who reacted quickly and, um, was very
12 collaborative in, um, coming up with ways that, um,
13 we could keep house resources online available, um,
14 while at the same time closing the houses when
15 necessary as the crisis grew and grew. Um, so, yes,
16 I mean, in short the answer to your first question is
17 yes. I mean, in some very clear ways COVID has
18 impeded the normal operation of these houses, right.
19 I mean, as, ah, John noted, the majority of them are
20 closed, ah, due in part to, ah, the, the small spaces
21 and limited staff resources, um, that don't allow,
22 um, either individual guided tours or the small, um,
23 COVID-safe tours that would be necessary at this
24 time. Um, but, ah, by and large I, I have to say
25 that HHT just from my own perspective and, and I

1 think I speak for the agency, deserves extremely high
2 marks for, um, their houses themselves, or their
3 collaborative spirit and their creativity
4 [inaudible]. John, I, I defer to you about matters
5 of, um, details of operation.
6

7 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: I'd be happy to add
8 to that, um, ah, Commissioner Biederman, that, um,
9 that, you know, during that, that time, ah, it was a
10 pretty scary and unknown time, particularly at the
11 beginning and I think we were all trying to figure it
12 out in, in the moment. Um, and I think it was of
13 particular concern for our houses because of the
14 close proximity with which our house directors and
15 their staff interact with the public. Um, but I, I
16 have to say it was, um, we all came together, we all
17 figured it out. It was a wonderful spirit of
18 collaboration, um, in order to make sure that we
19 understood that yes, this was the right thing to do
20 to make sure that the houses, um, closed down until
21 we knew exactly what was, was, was happening with the
22 pandemic, and since then, as I had stated earlier in
23 my testimony, nine of them have reopened. Um, the
24 others aren't quite feeling comfortable with doing it
25 at this point. Um, we're hoping at some point we can

1
2 get there, um, but, um, but all of the COVID safety
3 guidelines are in place at our houses and, and that
4 goes for really all Parks Department, ah, facilities
5 where the public is interacting, um, with staff and
6 with other, ah, volunteer members of, of, um, and
7 partners of the, of the Parks Department. So, um, I
8 think we're feeling pretty good about it and I think
9 we've gotten some pretty positive feedback from our
10 houses. We very early on formed a task force of all
11 of our houses, um, that was led by Victoria Monroe,
12 um, of the Austin House, um, ah, in concert with HHT
13 and our other house directors to make sure that we
14 were all communicating at the same level for the real
15 specialty needs, um, that our historic house museums
16 have. As you can imagine, they're a bit different
17 than a cultural institution like the Metropolitan
18 Museum. Um, they really do require, um, a different
19 approach, um, and I think we, we landed on that. Um,
20 at times we're still trying to figure things out, but
21 mostly I feel like we have a good system in place,
22 um, and I feel like the public, who has been
23 returning to our sites, has been doing that in a
24 really safe, um, way and, um, I think they're feeling
25 like they are reengaging in very positive ways, um,

1
2 with the important work that our historic house
3 partners do on their sites. So I think, ah, as good
4 as it can be during a pandemic, um, I think we're
5 doing pretty good with, ah, with those houses that
6 have, have reopened and feeling very good about the
7 work, um, and the safety of the public, um, at the
8 sites.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. I have more
10 questions, but at this time I want to give my other
11 council members to ask questions. Please use your
12 raise hand function. Ah, Counsel, do we have anyone
13 who raised their hands?

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, Chair Koo. Um,
15 we'll now begin with other council member questions,
16 um, and we'll ask council members to ask their
17 questions in the order, ah, they have used the Zoom
18 raise hand function. Ah, if a Council Member would
19 like to ask a question and you have not yet used the
20 raise hand function please do so now. Council
21 members, please keep your questions to five minutes.
22 The Sergeant at Arms will keep a timer and will let
23 you know when your time is up. You should begin once
24 the council member, ah, once the Sergeant at Arms
25 has, has given you the cue. We'll now hear from

1 Council Member Holden, and he will be followed by
2 Council Member Cohen and Council Member Levine.

3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair
5 Koo and, ah, I have a question for, ah, Assistant
6 Commissioner Sam Biederman. Um, we often see that
7 trusts associated or affiliated with the Parks
8 Department have Parks Department employees as the
9 directors. Um, do you consider this a conflict of
10 interest?
11

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: Ah,
13 thanks for the question, um, Council Member. Ah, it,
14 I do not consider it a conflict of interest, ah,
15 because it is cleared by the Conflict of Interest
16 Board. Um, every, ah, every individual who, and
17 there's a handful of them, as you noted, um, who has,
18 ah, what we call a joint position as, um, both a park
19 administrator, a park director, you know, it varies
20 from title to title and, ah, leader of, ah, an
21 affiliated licensed park nonprofit organization, ah,
22 must have that joint position, ah, cleared by the
23 Conflict of Interest Board, so an independent, ah,
24 body outside of the Parks Department, ah, gives the
25 go-ahead for those positions.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Right, but that,
3 that, that again needs to be examined because you can
4 understand why other not-for-profits may view this as
5 a concern, like who does the director take their
6 marching orders from? Parks, ah, or are they, do
7 they have the interest of the trust? Ah, which is, I
8 think this needs, ah, Chair Koo, I think this needs
9 to be looked at more because, um, there can be
10 conflicts and I had to disassociate myself when I
11 became a council member from any not-for-profit or
12 board or anything else. Ah, so it puzzles me how
13 they, they, they tell us, they tell me that I have
14 to, I have to get off of organizations that I formed
15 or organizations that I'm a member of, I can't be on
16 the boards of this and that. But you have Parks
17 employees actually getting paid to run a not-for-
18 profit. I can't figure that out. Ah, that's not,
19 you know, a question for you. I'll, we'll have to
20 look into this. Um, I just think it, it kind of
21 doesn't pass the smell test. I don't care what the
22 Conflicts of Interest Board says. Ah, ah, and John
23 Krawchuk, ah, Director, ah, you mentioned, ah, in
24 your testimony that the HHT consists of seven
25 employees, three of which are Parks employees and

1 four of which are privately paid staff. Now, I, I
2 guess that's, ah, for your organization. Does, ah,
3 so Parks pays you, right, ah, Mr. Krawchuk?

4 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Correct.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: OK. And, um, so
6 this is the thing I have a problem with, that you're
7 a separate not-for-profit yet the city is paying you.
8 Um, so, you know, again, what do, you know, for your
9 board, what do the Parks employees do on HHT? What
10 do they do? There's, like you said there are, ah,
11 three of them. Can you give me some of the duties,
12 other than your own?

13 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Sure. I'd, I'd be
14 happy to, to speak to that, Council Member. Um, so,
15 ah, the Historic House Trust has a license agreement
16 with the New York City Parks Department and with the
17 City of New York which clearly outlines, um, our
18 responsibilities, um, and, and our role in, um,
19 helping to facilitate and promote the 23 historic
20 houses. And so in that it's an important, um, sort
21 of guide for both, um, me as the executive director
22 as well as my board, who has the fiduciary
23 responsibility for the nonprofit organization to
24 assist with these houses, and like many of the, um,
25

1
2 Parks nonprofits that came out of the 1980s, they
3 were really formed to facilitate the work in, um,
4 specific Parks and with specific Parks resources to
5 make sure that they could assist the city and
6 supplement what the city could do with private, a
7 private fundraising arm or the ability to bring
8 additional resources to these, um, to these sites.
9 And in the case of the Historic House Trust it's the,
10 originally 15 houses, which is now up to 23, um,
11 that, um, that are, are, are what we live to do.
12 It's what, what my board, many of my board members
13 are founding board members of 30 years and very
14 committed to this work. So, um, as part of this
15 agreement with the city, the city understands that,
16 um, having 23 separate nonprofit organizations sort
17 of under our umbrella is a big task. Um, having 23
18 house sites, some of them with multiple buildings, is
19 an even bigger task. And so they realized that, that
20 for a small nonprofit, we are definitely not the
21 Central Park Conservancy, but for a small nonprofit,
22 um, it's, it's a, it's a very challenging situation
23 from a staffing perspective on, um, how, how you...

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

25 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: ...[inaudible].

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Ah, I just want
3 to get one other question in, ah, 'cause, ah, do
4 individual houses ever conduct fundraising for the
5 purpose of raising funds to, to, ah, for repairs, ah,
6 for the house?

7 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: On occasion they do,
8 yes.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: On occasion?
10 They have to get approval from your office?

11 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: They have to get
12 approval for, to perform the work, um, on, on city-
13 owned buildings, um, and on properties that have
14 landmark designation.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: OK.

16 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: [inaudible].

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Are all the
18 historic houses under your jurisdiction in the City
19 of New York?

20 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Ah, all of the, the
21 houses that are member houses, the 23 are, um, are,
22 are in license agreement.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Ah, thank you,
24 Chair. Are you going to do a second round, ah, Chair
25 Koo, of questions?

2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Ah, we will do a second
3 round, yeah.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: OK, thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Right. Any other
6 members who what to speak, I mean, who want to ask
7 questions?

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next, ah, next up is
9 Council Member Cohen, followed by Council Member
10 Levine.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Ah, thank you,
13 Chair. Thank you, guys, for your testimony. I'm, so
14 each house has its own board under your organization,
15 is that correct?

16 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: That's correct.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Ah, I don't, do
18 you play a role in like evaluating which, which
19 houses are run well and which houses are struggling
20 or not, I mean, boards vary in strength and
21 sometimes, you know, for whatever reason these, these
22 not-for-profits have internal difficulties. How
23 would you rate sort of the, the health of the boards
24 under the, the trust?

1
2 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Overall I would say
3 that, ah, they're very good, um, and, you know,
4 they're, they're everything from operating budgets,
5 you know, of, you know, \$70,000 a year to, you know,
6 five times that, and so we have a real range of, um,
7 ability depending on...

8 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: What, what makes
9 the ones successful to the point where they have such
10 a big, you know, where they're generating high
11 numbers of visitors, they're, they're generating and
12 able to raise money privately. What's the difference
13 between ones that do a very good job of that and ones
14 that struggle?

15 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Um, I guess my own
16 personal perspective on it is that a lot of it has to
17 do with location, um, and location to particular
18 resources, as well as a lot of hard work on the part
19 of those houses that have worked, in many cases, for
20 decades to sort of build a following, um, um, in
21 addition to being in proximity to, um, the resources,
22 ah, who are the people that, ah, that can come there.
23 Um, and so I don't know that I have any one
24 particular answer for the success of one versus
25 another, um, but I do feel like there is something to

1
2 be said for, um, ah, proximity or location that has
3 really, um, ah, resulted in the great success of some
4 of our houses, um, while others have really, um, to
5 answer your question I don't feel any of them at this
6 point, any of our 23 houses, is, is struggling in a
7 way that I have concerns about. And my organization
8 is there to help all of them. It's actually the
9 reason we exist. Not just to raise money, but to
10 provide support on every level, whether it's capital
11 projects, maintenance and operations, governance of
12 their boards. Um, my board members consist of people
13 who are very knowledgeable about all aspects of that
14 and I rely on them as well at times for advice on,
15 um, on assisting our, our house sites.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I'll just say I
17 think that you know, you know, I worked closely with
18 the, the mayor in the last budget and we got a, a
19 huge grant for, ah, the Van Cortlandt House.

20 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Yes, thank you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: And, and the
22 Valentine-Varian House is in my district. But I'll
23 you, this is just anecdotally, like I really
24 struggled about what to do, ah, with the Van
25 Cortlandt House for many years because I thought it

1 was under-utilized in, as an asset. I didn't think
2 that enough people used it, and it was a little bit
3 of a chicken and egg situation in that there, you
4 know, their ADA accessibility limited, um, their
5 ability, you know, for, for school programming. But
6 it still seems to me to be because, you know, an under-
7 utilized resource in the city, that there's so much
8 history there, it's an amazing facility in, you know,
9 in an amazing setting. It's accessible by the
10 subway. Um, trying to promote these as, as an assess
11 in the city and I think ultimately being able to
12 generate some revenue to support them better, ah, and
13 maintain them, which, which we, you know, everyone
14 acknowledges is, is difficult, that they're expensive
15 to maintain. I just think that we need to do more to
16 support them in, in, in their ability to program in a
17 way that helps them become more sustainable.

19 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Thank you, Council
20 Member, and noted. Um, ah, I'd like to thank you
21 for, for those comments. It's always helpful to
22 heard feedback on, on your perspective.

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: And I,
24 I would just add, ah, Council Member, as you very
25 well know, the recently, relatively recently, ah,

1
2 finalized Van Cortlandt Park Alliance, um, agreement,
3 um, I, I think, added a little jet fuel to that park
4 and, ah, a little support to all of its assets, along
5 with, um, the welcome addition of Stephanie Ehrlich
6 as, ah, Van Cortlandt Park administrator. So, um, I,
7 I personally am looking forward to more and further
8 programming developments across that park.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Yeah, and, and I
10 think when the house ultimately, you know, I know
11 we're only at the very beginning of this process, but
12 when the house is at the other end of it I hope that
13 it, it really becomes a, a showcase and, and, and
14 destination in the city for people to come see one of
15 the, you know, premiere historic homes in the city.

16 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: It's
17 an amazing place, it really is.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you, Chair.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
20 hear from Council Member Levine.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member
23 Levine, are you there?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Hello, I
25 apologize. Ah, thank you, Chris, and thank you, Mr.

1
2 Chair. Can you all hear me OK? Excellent. Um, I
3 want to start by thanking John Krawchuk for, for your
4 service to Parks and your many roles over the years,
5 um, and for your work with the Historic House Trust
6 now, which is extremely important citywide and, ah,
7 and in northern Manhattan. I live just a few blocks
8 from, um, the Morris-Jumel Mansion, which is just an
9 absolutely precious institution, um, that, that I
10 truly love and, ah, I just want to, I want to ask you
11 about, ah, the capital process, um, which in the best
12 of circumstances in, ah, New York City is complicated
13 and, ah, I want to understand the extent to which,
14 um, it may be more complicated because you have the
15 Parks Department, HHT, and then individual 501(c)(3)s
16 managing some of these houses. Um, can you start by
17 explaining our, our, um, capital allocations from the
18 city made through HHT or to individual houses?

19 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So the, the
20 allocations, and thank you, Council Member Levine,
21 um, ah, it's good to see you again and we appreciate
22 the fact that you love our, our historic houses that
23 are, are near your district. Um, yes, um, ah, the,
24 the Historic House Trust does not receive, um,
25 director capital funding from that comes to our

1 organization. Um, we actually in our license
2 agreement don't have any, um, any sites that are
3 specifically identified for our use with the
4 exception of the Arsenal, where our offices are
5 located. We are allocated space there to conduct our
6 operations. Um, and so when we do request an
7 allocation for capital funding, um, it is allocated,
8 um, through, um, council members, um, all of you, as
9 well as borough presidents, and then occasionally the
10 mayor, um, site-specific. Ah, and what we do have
11 the ability to do is to receive those funds on behalf
12 of the city, ah, and to manage the design and the
13 construction contracts through something called the
14 sole source agreement that we have with the city.
15 Um, it actually is, um, ah, ah, a process that helps
16 with efficiency, with how things get done, and not
17 only with efficiency, it helps with, um, the
18 specialty work that is needed at these house sites.
19 Um, as you can imagine, these are historic houses.
20 Many of them are wood structures or have old masonry,
21 and so we do need to make sure that those, the
22 specialty nature of them is understood in the, in the
23 contracting. So that is one of the services we
24 provide and we have the ability to, um, really, um,
25

1 facilitate that in a very, um, um, close way and a,
2 and a careful way through our [inaudible].

3
4 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I, I appreciate
5 that. And sorry to interrupt, only because, ah, the
6 clock is ticking and, and I just want to follow up.
7 So, um, ah, it sounds like HHT is in the driver's
8 seat, then, for capital. Are, are there conditions
9 where an individual house would just need to pay, ah,
10 out of its own funds for, for repair work or
11 something larger, um, because they need to act
12 quickly, for example, and the normal process is too
13 slow?

14 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: There have been
15 situations where that has occurred. Um, as we all
16 know that the city's procurement process, ah, is very
17 important for us to uphold and understand, with PPB
18 rules it's critical, and there have been times when
19 the houses have decided that it would be, one, less
20 expensive for them to do it on their own and quicker.
21 Um, they're very rare when that happens but, um,
22 there are examples where that has occurred, and we
23 appreciate the partnership and the houses very often
24 also, um, ah, I think appreciate the opportunity to
25 help out when they can.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Is, is there a
3 risk that considering you have dozens of, of
4 wonderful houses under your auspices that you'll have
5 finite bandwidth for capital work and that that could
6 create something of a backup, um, ah, that could mean
7 ultimately a, a slowdown in, in the pace of the
8 capital process for some of the houses?

9 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: We have a plan for
10 that, which is, ah, we're not the only ones that are
11 managing capital projects. Um, as I mentioned in my
12 testimony we have a sole source agreement, so we have
13 the ability there to manage things. But we also will
14 be working very closely with the Parks Department
15 Capital Division as well as DDC to accomplish, um,
16 all of the capital work that is presently happening
17 at our house sites.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Understood. Ah,
19 but, you know, delays are a problem for the Parks
20 system in the best of circumstances and we just want
21 to make sure that we're not adding a layer of
22 complexity, ah, that would only slow down these
23 processes even further for these houses which are
24 juggling, ah, such challenges at this time. Um, ah,

1
2 are, are there plans to streamline, ah, the capital
3 process for historic houses in any way?

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired. John, I
5 think you can still answer that.

6 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: I can still answer?
7 OK, sorry. Um, so to answer your question, ah,
8 Council Member, um, ah, we're always working
9 internally at the Historic House Trust on how to
10 streamline our process because of, again, the
11 additional layers that are involved with dealing with
12 the historic property. Um, and whether that is, um,
13 getting the house, um, into procurement, in design,
14 or an unanticipated, um, issue that may come up in
15 construction, which very often happens with older
16 houses. Um, we, um, have a really great team at the
17 Historic House Trust. Um, ah, presently it's one
18 person. Ah, as I mentioned earlier, we do have one
19 vacancy, um, and our hope is that once that vacancy
20 is filled we'll be able to sort of, you know, move
21 forward, ah, even more expediently. Ah, but in the
22 meantime we do have our partners at the Capital
23 Division at Parks, as well as DDC, um, that also can
24 assist us with moving our historic house site
25 projects forward with oversight from the Historic

1 House Trust. Ah, I'm not sure if I answered your
2 question, but, um, but, ah, I'm, we are certainly
3 doing our best to, ah, to facilitate moving this
4 forward, this, this work forward expediently. It's
5 important in order to keep our houses in good health.
6

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Um, absolutely.

8 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Um, and we do our
9 best to, um, to really move that forward, so.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: I, I agree with
11 that, and I apologize, I was, I was momentarily on
12 mute, and my time has expired. So thank you, John,
13 um, and thank you, Chair Koo, very much.

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Ah, we'll
16 now hear from, Chair Koo, did you?

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Do you have more
18 members, ah, who want to ask questions?

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, OK, good.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member Rivera
22 would like to ask a question next.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Oh, before that, I, I
24 anterior to say, ah, Council Member, we are joined by
25 Council Member Borelli.

1 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Thank you so much
3 for your testimony. Thank you for being here and
4 answering our questions. I guess, ah, I want to just
5 start with the, the Merchant's House, which is in my
6 district. Early in my term there was a potential
7 development being considered next door. It could
8 have seriously damaged the structural integrity of
9 the Merchant's House, and while I did successfully,
10 ah, get, get that development, that development
11 stopped I was concerned that the Parks Department
12 really didn't take a strong enough role in ensuring
13 the museum was protected from any adjacent
14 construction. And so while Parks did send a letter
15 saying that the Merchant's House Museum should be
16 protected, buildings like this should have real Parks
17 oversight and access to resources. And Parks should
18 have provided a real engineering analysis in this
19 case. So my question do you think Parks should have
20 more of a role in the long-term planning and capital
21 efforts to shore up and protect these properties from
22 effects of nearby construction, climate change, and
23 other issues instead of what is essentially
24 happening, which is relying on the benevolence of
25

1
2 others in private donors? And then my other
3 question, and this is the only other question I have,
4 um, and I guess I could wait, but, um, how does
5 funding of these properties reflect larger equity,
6 you know what, I'll wait, I'll wait until you answer
7 the first one. Sorry. I was afraid of time
8 expiring, but the Chairman is great.

9 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Thank you, Council
10 Member Rivera, I'm happy to jump in quickly and, and
11 answer your question. It's good to see you again as
12 well. Um, and we appreciate your support, um, during
13 the whole situation with the developer next door to
14 Merchant's. Um, I know we've worked very closely in
15 partnership with you and with the Merchant's House
16 Association. So, so to answer your question, what we
17 do rely on very often is, um, the expertise that I
18 had mentioned earlier that Historic House Trust
19 brings and our sort of network of, of supporters,
20 whether they're volunteer supporters or whether
21 they're paid, um, consultants that really have the
22 expertise to look at something like the Merchant's
23 House, which dates to 1832 and has all of the
24 original interiors and furnishings and is a really
25 precious and special resource. Um, ah, generally to

1 find the individuals that really understand, ah,
2 historic plaster work of that nature or buildings of
3 those types, you really need to go to specialty
4 engineers and architects and we don't always have
5 them on staff at NYC Parks, because very often they
6 are working on sort of more traditional parks-related
7 resources. And that is the reason why HHT exists,
8 and it actually is the reason why our house partners
9 exist, um, that even though we take a strong role in
10 capital projects in maintenance and operations, um,
11 it doesn't preclude us from partnering with them to
12 help us with that when needed. Ah, we'd like to try
13 to avoid it when possible so that their private
14 resources can really go into programming and events.
15 But there are times when they can draw on their own
16 resources to assist us, and in the case of Merchant's
17 they did, ah, brought in really incredible
18 consultants quickly, um, and gave us really the
19 specialty expertise that we need to really push back,
20 um, and make sure that this house would survive
21 construction, if it were to be approved, um, and so,
22 um, so that, I guess, is my short answer to say that
23 those resources did not exist, the, the preservation
24 resources within Parks, so we definitely needed to go
25

1 outside of, of the city for that. Um, and it's not a
2 reflection on, on Parks, it's more just the nature of
3 the work that we do is so specialized. And then
4 lastly, um, did you have a, an equity question, ah,
5 Council Member?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Yes, I did, and,
8 and thank you for your answer. You know, Merchant's
9 House is in the SoHo NoHo area so it's, you know, in
10 a more affluent neighborhood where they can rely on
11 the benevolence of others and, and private donors
12 and, and wealthy families. However, my other
13 question I guess is, is particularly around equity
14 and how does funding of these properties reflect
15 larger equity concerns around Parks funding and
16 specifically what efforts are made to prioritize
17 funding for houses in communities with limited open
18 space or limited cultural institutions? How do
19 historic houses work to help students from other
20 parts of the city access these kinds of resources?

21 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So, um, I, I could,
22 um, and I'm not sure, ah, Commissioner Biederman, ah,
23 if you would like to speak about, um, Commissioner
24 Silver's work in general for Parks, um, with CPI and
25 other initiatives, um, that are equity initiatives

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2 that are specific to NYC Parks. Um, but certainly
3 that is, um, has positively, ah, affected at least
4 two of our house sites. Um, Van Cortlandt House,
5 actually, in Council Member Cohen's district, is the
6 recipient of CPI funds for the improvement of an
7 entrance right near the house, um, and King Manor,
8 um, in Jamaica, Queens, is another one where the
9 entrances to that park would greatly improve access
10 by the public, um, to enjoy the historic resources
11 that is right in their, their neighborhoods. Um,
12 there could be other, um, general initiatives, and I
13 know this is a historic house hearing, so perhaps the
14 [inaudible]...

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Is related to, um,
17 equity for historic houses. But Commissioner
18 Biederman, I don't if you or Matt Drury would like to
19 further add to that?

20 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: Ah,
21 just, you know, as you noted, John, um, and I'm sure,
22 ah, Council Member Rivera knows well that the, um,
23 Commissioner Silver is very, very focused on equity,
24 it really is in the DNA of [inaudible] since he came
25 on, um, and just one thing I just want to highlight,

1
2 um, ah, you, you noted, John, is that it, these, ah,
3 houses don't exist in isolation, or most of them
4 don't. I think the, um, Merchant's House is a kind
5 of unique case because it sits in the middle of a
6 block, right, not next to a park or not abutting a
7 park or not in the middle of them. Most of them,
8 most of these houses are within parks so they, ah, do
9 benefit from park resources, which, as you know, this
10 agency takes, um, takes our commitment to equity not
11 only in capital work but, um, in maintenance and
12 operations and programming very seriously. So, um,
13 that commitment to equity is translated just on the
14 borough level, um, as we do capital work and as we do
15 maintenance work in the spaces surrounding these
16 parks.

17 DIRECTOR DRURY: Sorry, and I, I just, I
18 just, and John, please, you know, feel free to fill
19 in, but I think many of the houses have also forged
20 amazing relationships with other local, you know,
21 visits from local schoolchildren and/or, or actually
22 frankly since these are citywide resources, you know,
23 visits from schoolchildren all over the city, and I
24 know there's been, you know, ah, a lot of great, you
25 know, relationships and efforts sort of forged in

1 that manner, and COVID notwithstanding, you know,
2 obviously, I, I think that's something that agency is
3 absolutely looking to kind of continue and deepen.
4

5 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: And I would further
6 add that the Dyckman Farmhouse is another house that
7 although it wasn't specifically funded through the
8 CPI program, um, Community Parks Initiative, um, ah,
9 it does have a significant amount of funds for
10 restoration and so we're now in the process of hiring
11 a designer to really, um, look at the approach to
12 that house, especially the accessibility approach.
13 It's quite high up off of Broadway. Um, and to
14 really implement some of Commissioner Silver's great
15 ideas for, um, park equity and park initiatives,
16 opening up the corners of the house, really bringing
17 the public, um, um, into the site in a way that, um,
18 lets people know that this really important house
19 exists, um, 20 feet above Broadway because of the
20 elevation changes.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: Thank you for
22 answering my questions. Um, you know, again, my
23 concern is always about equity and, and the old
24 Merchant's House I was kind of disappointed with how
25 things unfolded. Um, I was glad that I was able to

1
2 help them with those discretionary funds. I know not
3 every historic house is so lucky and, and realizing
4 that Parks is historically underfunded, um, you know,
5 I hope we can work together just to make sure that
6 we're addressing some of the issues that I brought up
7 in my questioning. Thank you for answering it, and
8 thank you, Mr. Chair, for the time. Thanks for all
9 that you do.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We'll now
11 return to Chairman Koo, who has an additional round
12 of questions, and he'll be followed by Council Member
13 Holden, who has an additional round of questions.

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Ah, yes, thank you.
15 Ah, Director Krawchuk, you brought up licensed
16 houses, ah, multiple times. Our understanding is
17 that some of these agreements are expired. So can
18 you tell us how many have expired license? Hello?

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: John, you're muted.

20 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: OK, I think I'm
21 unmuted now. Sorry about that. Ah, yes, I'd be
22 happy to answer that, Chair Koo. Um, ah, many of the
23 license agreements have been extended, um, by, by
24 letter. And typically they are extended from
25 anywhere from six months to one year, um, once they

1
2 get an extension and, ah, HHT is presently in the
3 process of working closely with NYC Parks general
4 counsel to look at renewing the license agreements.
5 Many of them, ah, the language is, um, you know, from
6 a decade or so ago and so it's time to do an update
7 on that and to really have discussions with our house
8 partners, um, with NYC Parks about how we can
9 continue to collaborate, um, to benefit these sites,
10 um, and upgrade the and update the license
11 agreements. So there are some that are expired. I
12 don't have the exact number, um, but, ah, it's a
13 fairly, um, easy process, ah, and they do continue
14 on. It's not like, ah, once the license agreement
15 expires that, that it's not effect. Um, and many of
16 them have been extended by letter, so they are in
17 effect.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Ah, last
19 time I, I visited the Brown House, I'm sure you know
20 about the Brown House in my district, right? I
21 noticed that there were, ah, several outstanding
22 repairs, ah, including a leaking sink, which is the
23 only public bathroom, and also dangling ceiling
24 fixtures wrapped in black electrical tape. Ah, this

1
2 was a year ago. Have those things, have been
3 repaired?

4 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Ah, I would have to
5 get back to you, ah, Council Member Koo. I don't
6 have a specific, um, answer on those repairs. Um, I
7 am aware of those situations and so, um, I'd be happy
8 to look into it and circle back to you and the, the
9 Brown House, ah, Historical Society.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Ah, going back to the
11 previous question, you said some houses they have
12 expired licenses. Can you tell us how many are
13 expired?

14 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Um, the, the overall
15 agreements of the houses of the, of the 23 we
16 actually, ah, 21 agreements, ah, because one of the
17 agreements has two houses on it. So it's technically
18 22.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Oh.

20 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Um, and that would be
21 the Bronx County Historical Society has two houses
22 within their license agreement. Um, but the master
23 agreements, um, have, have all expired, but they've
24 been extended by, by letter. And so, as I had stated
25 earlier, our plan is to work very closely with NYC

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2 Parks general counsel to, um, to update those, um,
3 and to work with our house partners, um, to, um, have
4 the new agreements in effect.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. Ah, so when
6 historic houses are funded for capital projects how
7 is the funding and the project handled? Who
8 determines the contracting agency, and who has
9 oversight over the budget, ah, over the project?

10 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So, um, ah, NYC Parks
11 has the jurisdiction, um, at all of the historic
12 house trust sites, ah, and, um, ah, and there's one
13 sort of anomaly which is, ah, Historic Richmond Town,
14 where the parkland, um, the land on which the
15 structures, the village sits, is parkland, but the
16 structures are under the jurisdiction of the
17 Department of Cultural Affairs, and so that's sort of
18 one specialty, um, situation. Um, but in general,
19 um, you know, NYC Parks has the jurisdiction on
20 behalf of the city. These are city-owned properties,
21 and so, um, so NYC Parks, um, ultimately Commissioner
22 Silver, um, would have the final say and all projects
23 are brought to him for approval, design projects. He
24 has a chance to see them, um, and become familiar
25 with them, and he always enjoys seeing our historic

1 house, ah, projects. So, so to answer your question,
2 um, ah, ah, Parks has the sort of final say on what
3 happens on the properties the city owns. Um, but we
4 work collaboratively with our house partners on those
5 doing projects and get their input so that we really
6 understand, um, their needs, and the advocacy for the
7 funding can either come from Parks, HHT, or house
8 partners as far as securing the capital funds, and
9 I'm sure many of you are aware of, of, ah, those
10 meetings, um, you've had them with our house partners
11 as well as with NYC Parks, our borough commissioners
12 and their staff, um, probably with Matt Drury and
13 others, um, when it comes time to do new needs
14 requests. And so it's always a team effort and, ah,
15 and we enjoy the process and always appreciate when
16 we have much-needed capital dollars assigned to our
17 house sites.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Please
20 explain the role of HHT and Parks in terms of capital
21 projects. What is Parks responsible for and what is
22 the trust responsible in terms of moving capital
23 projects forward?

24 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So, um, with regard
25 to, um, the responsibilities, we divide the

1
2 responsibilities but always work closely with NYC
3 Parks ultimately on all of our projects, even our
4 pass-through projects, um, and presently we have, um,
5 ah, at least three pass-through projects that HHT is
6 working on directly, and so we take a, a more active
7 role, um, in that and facilitating the, um, moving
8 forward of, of those particular projects. But,
9 regardless HHT, whether the projects are being done
10 at NYC Parks Capital or at DDC, um, we have a role in
11 being present at the table, um, and really helping to
12 oversee and push forward with, with the work. And so
13 it's always a collaboration, um, and, um, we're
14 always working to, to move the projects forward in an
15 efficient manner, um, so that we can get in the
16 construction and, and perform the necessary work
17 that's needed on these historic buildings.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Ah, I have, I have
19 secured over 2.5 million dollars for the Brown House
20 for interior and exterior renovations, and a visitor
21 center. So what is the current status of the
22 interior renovation? My understanding is that it was
23 stopped despite funding being moved to completed.
24 Can you tell us the status...

25 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: ...of the interior?

DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So the, ah, the interior restoration project is a project that's being done at the Department of Design and Construction. Um, the project had moved forward to the point where we were pretty close to completing the design work on the project. Um, and then it got, um, estimated in order to determine, um, were the allocated funds enough to, um, to bid the project out. And we determined that there was a funding shortfall in that particular case. Um, but, um, ah, many of our projects, as you may be aware, have been on hold since the pandemic has started and so, um, all of the DDC projects presently have been paused. Um, and so once those, um, are released and once we have determined how to address the funding shortfall then the interior restoration project, which is a really special and incredible project that we're excited to move forward with, um, and once, once that, those two particular situations are worked out, um, we have every hope that it will move forward in a quick and efficient manner. With regard to the visitor's center, that is another project that we believe is, um, significantly underfunded, um, just

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2 based on current, um, prices that have been coming in
3 for city bid work. Ah, and so that would be another
4 one, Council Member Koo, that we'd love to work with
5 you and our other elected officials in Queens, um, if
6 they can sort of assist us with determining how to
7 sort of address that, that shortfall. Um, but that
8 one has not moved into design, again, um, right when
9 we are getting ready to have discussions about, um,
10 where the visitor center stood with DDC, um, our
11 projects, um, were paused and they remain paused.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Well, the longer Parks,
13 ah, takes the more money it will cost, you know,
14 because it takes a long time for you guys to design
15 something. So can you give us a breakdown on how
16 much funding we may need in each, ah, in both
17 projects?

18 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Ah, yes. Um, let me
19 just see if I can bring up my spreadsheet here.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: And also can you tell
21 me like, ah, where is the project, all under EDC, and
22 when does it go to Parks Department?

23 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Oh, yes, I apologize
24 that I didn't answer your question on that. Um, ah,
25 it depends. It's, it can be a combination of

1 reasons. Um, one, if we're feeling like HHT and/or,
2 um, NYC Parks Capital does not have the capacity to
3 move forward with the project we have a very nice
4 arrangement with the Department of Design and
5 Construction, um, in order to, um, facilitate work,
6 um, on park land in general, but specifically our
7 historic houses, and because they do have a
8 preservation department we're very fortunate to have
9 that partnership with design, Department of Design
10 and Construction to assist us with Parks projects,
11 including our historic houses. Um, and so, and
12 sometimes our house partners prefer to work with an
13 agency they've worked with before and so, ah, at
14 their request they, um, you know, it may either being
15 done either through HHT sole source contract or
16 through the Department of Design and Construction
17 and/or through the Parks Department Capital Division.
18 So it's always a, a conversation, um, and, ah,
19 discussion on, um, on where we feel the project can
20 sort of best move forward. And to answer your
21 question about the remaining funds, the interior
22 restoration project currently is funded for
23 \$3,909,000 and the visitor center project has 4.955
24 million remaining.
25

2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: But you said the money
3 is still not enough.

4 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Correct.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So how much is the
6 shortfall?

7 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Ah, the shortfall,
8 ah, I apologize, Chair Koo, I don't have that
9 information directly in front of me, but I'd be happy
10 to get back to you with, um, with that figure.

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. Yeah, please get
12 back to us.

13 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: OK. And, and, and
14 for the visitor center until DDC reactivates
15 projects, um, they, they, um, they aren't able to
16 have their, um, consultants, um, come up with that,
17 what that exact figure is. So, again, that would be
18 one that I'd be happy to circle back to you on.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. So, ah, my last
20 question is do any of the houses or a representative
21 on their behalf sit on the trust board?

22 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: No.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: No?

24 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Ah, I believe there,
25 presently there are not any, um, houses on the New

1
2 York, on the Historic House Trust, ah, board of
3 directors.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Is there a reason why,
5 conflict of interest or what?

6 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Ah, I don't believe
7 it's a conflict of interest. Um, ah, but I wouldn't
8 be able to say. I think that would be something I
9 would want to have a discussion with my board chair
10 about. Um, and so, um, ah, but we work very closely
11 with the houses, so I, ah, I wouldn't want to give
12 the impression that, that we aren't communicating
13 with them on a regular basis. We do. Um, but
14 whether that would result in a seat on our board is
15 something that my organization, I think, um, would
16 have to have an internal conversation about. Our
17 goal is always to represent the houses collectively
18 across the board and to make sure they all have
19 representation and that it's not obviously just one
20 particular site, um, that, ah, that has special
21 access or, you know, um, a, a particular role at the
22 site. Ah, but it is something that I think, um, in
23 light of conversations I've recently had with many of
24 my house directors that we'd be happy to consider a
25 stronger role for them in our organization and to

1
2 really, um, hear, hear from them about their needs,
3 um, collectively. Um, because, again, we always want
4 to make sure that we're really being as fair as
5 possible to all 23 sites, which is, um, sometimes
6 hard to do, um, especially when certain, um,
7 opportunities come up to, for funding at sites that
8 have particular themes, for instance. Um, but, ah,
9 but it is something that we always strive to do at
10 Historic House Trust is to really, um, ah, work with
11 them collectively as a whole, all 23 sites.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So I think it's
13 important, ah, for you to have a representative, ah,
14 to represent all the houses to sit on your board.
15 Otherwise, it's easier for you to manage because, you
16 know, communication is easier, because they have a
17 board member on the trust. And, ah, my last
18 question, actually, is how does the Parks Department
19 help provide PPE to, to the houses and/or any other
20 types of COVID-19 support, related support?

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: John,
22 I think you know the details of, um, the PPE
23 distribution for houses better than I do, but I can
24 talk generally, if you want to go first.

25

1
2 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Sure. So I'd be
3 happy to address that. Um, ah, we didn't have any
4 direct investment with the applications that the
5 houses made. Um, but we were very much in touch with
6 all of them on regular weekly calls, um, after the
7 shutdown in March to make sure that we were all
8 communicating on opportunities to apply for PPP
9 loans, where to get them, um, I don't know if a lot
10 of you remember the big scramble of a lot of
11 nonprofits and other businesses to really have access
12 to PPP loans. It was a pretty, ah, frightening time
13 and, um, you know, I, I think we were all trying to
14 make sure that we got our applications in before, um,
15 ah, you know, before, um, the, the loans dried up,
16 including the Historic House Trust. We applied for a
17 PPP loan and received it, um, as did many of our
18 house sites, um, not all of them, but most of them,
19 um, did receive PPP assistance. Um, we have very
20 skilled directors and, and all of them are skilled
21 fundraisers at our, our house sites. It's really,
22 um, the collaboration that we cherish at the Historic
23 House Trust and at New York City Parks that not only
24 is it my board of 27 board members, ah, who are all
25 volunteers, but when you multiple that out over 21

1
2 other boards, um, 22, um, it really, um, creates a
3 great, um, sense of community and a, and a great
4 sense of, of power that we have to really assist our
5 historic house sites collectively with the important
6 fundraising that has to be done. So we really rely
7 on all of those volunteer board members at each of
8 those sites to be doing that very same thing that HHT
9 is doing every day. Um, and they do it very
10 effectively and, ah, thankfully most of them received
11 PPP loans.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So all this individual
13 houses they applied, ah, PPP loans, ah, individually
14 or all collectively by, by the trust?

15 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Individually. Um,
16 the Historic House Trust would not have been able to
17 have applied for PPP loans for the houses because
18 their employees are not on our payroll, and as part
19 of receiving a PPP loan you had to provide pretty,
20 um, strong proof that someone was full time, or they
21 could be part time in some instances, ah, but, but
22 they, they had, they could not be a 1099 employee.
23 They had to be a full-time employee of the
24 organization and you had to prove that, ah, from past
25 payroll history. So our organization would not have

1
2 been able to have applied on behalf of the house
3 sites for PPP loans.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: OK. Thank you. Thank
5 you very much. Ah, now we'll go to the second round
6 of, ah, questions by other council members. Is
7 council member, ah, still on?

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, thank you, Chair
9 Koo. Council Member Holden does have a question.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair
12 Koo, and thank you for the second round. Um, I just
13 want to touch upon the capital projects again. Um,
14 Parks projects almost all the time cost much more
15 than any other capital projects in this city, and
16 I've a history with Parks for 30 years and, and
17 working with Parks and overseeing it. Um, so I'm
18 just, ah, certain capital projects, I mean, this
19 could be for anybody, but, um, wouldn't it be better
20 if the historic house trust was able to secure the
21 money, give it to the houses, and allow them to put
22 it to better use and, and get a better price? For
23 instance, um, the Trust for Public Land, which I,
24 I've worked with, often do it, the capital projects
25 cheaper, better, and on time, much more than, um, my

1
2 experience with Parks. So couldn't we restructure
3 some way to do capital projects that really doesn't
4 necessarily go to the Parks Department, because
5 everybody, you could talk to every council member and
6 they'll say the same thing, that the capital projects
7 are ridiculous through Parks. They take too long and
8 they cost too much.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: Um,
10 Council Member, if I could, and then I will happily
11 defer to John, the, um, the details on the historic
12 houses. Um, thanks for the question. I, I certainly
13 hear the frustration with, um, the, the capital
14 projects at Parks can take some time. You know, I
15 would be remiss not to note, um, in our defense that
16 Commissioner Silver has shaved an average of about,
17 um, I believe six to nine months off the overall
18 capital, um, process with a set of reforms that we
19 could just do ourselves here at Parks. Council
20 Member, I'm sure you know about it already. We have
21 spoken about it before. Um, but I, I do just want to
22 note that. I, I believe that and, John, please step
23 in, that, um, the reason why the capital project with
24 HHT works the way that it does is that, um, this is

1
2 Parks property, this is city property, so it must be
3 handled by, directly by the Parks Department.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Wait, wait,
5 Commissioner. The Trust for Public Lands does work
6 on city property, too. So, we're not, we're not
7 separate and apart. Yes, they're, they're owned by
8 Parks or at least, but the Trust for Public Land does
9 work on school property, they work on properties all
10 over public land. So, um, we're not coming up with
11 something very different here as a concept.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN:
13 Certainly happy to explore it more. I myself off the
14 top of my head, um, cannot think of an instance where
15 we have, TPL, we love TPL, they're great. But where
16 we, um, have worked with TPL on a piece of, um, Park
17 land proper, you know, capital P Park land. But, um,
18 it's certainly something I'm happy to look into. I
19 may be wrong.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: All right. Ah, I
21 just want to talk about the license, ah, agreement
22 again. Um, ah, and John Krawchuk, I'd just like to
23 ask. Ah, you said you didn't know how many license
24 agreements, ah, I think there's 23, but how many,
25 when, when the chair asked you how many expired you

1
2 didn't know. Um, that seems like weird because why
3 wouldn't you know that? Um, I mean, you only have 23
4 agreements. I mean, if I was a director I would say
5 yeah, I got five that, you know, or 10, or whatever,
6 why would they, wouldn't that be a top priority of
7 your office or the Parks Department to not let them
8 expire?

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER BIEDERMAN: I,
10 John, I know...

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah, this is
12 John Krawchuk, yeah.

13 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So I'm happy to
14 respond to that, Council Member, and thank you for
15 the question. Um, ah, just for clarity, I, I, um,
16 and I know it was sort of a, a bit of an explanation
17 as I was, I was describing the expired license
18 agreements. But they are all expired, um, and, and
19 they all, and then some of them are extended by
20 letter agreement, typically we do that when, um, when
21 there's, um, a requirement to use the document, ah,
22 for a specific purpose, um, ah, that might be, um,
23 you know, um, procuring funds for a capital project
24 at that site. Um, it's an immense amount of work,
25 um, in order to, um, really, um, move forward with

1
2 all the capital projects and we're actually just on
3 the verge or, or all of the, um, license agreements
4 and we're just on the verge of starting that process
5 with, um, our general counsel's office. , um, it's,
6 um, usually they're working on, um, multiple, ah,
7 there are multiple, um, organizations, ah, that are
8 affiliated with Parks that have license agreements,
9 but it's one license agreement. Um, our organization
10 has 23, which I think makes [inaudible] of the
11 license agreements that the Parks Department holds.
12 So I guess I don't want to, um, downplay, um, the,
13 the, um, the ah, the amount of time that it's gonna
14 take to make sure we're working very closely and
15 carefully with all of our house partners to make sure
16 that those agreements are satisfactory to...

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Well, let me, let
18 me just jump in because my time is going to expire.

19 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: Sure.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: But this is like
21 your job to manage these license agreements and the
22 fact that all of them expired because it's a lot of
23 work, ah...

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: You know, I, I
3 get that, my time expired. But obviously something
4 is not being done that should be done and, ah, I just
5 want to ask one other question because, ah, can you
6 tell us, you know, exactly what kind of input the
7 individual houses have in decision-making? Ah, where
8 does their ownership end and Historic House Trust
9 begin? Because there's a thing I'm, I'm wrestling
10 with, because you work for the Parks Department and,
11 ah, the trust, the, the houses are, are, you know,
12 trying to do what they have to do, but I mean, there
13 seems to be a gray area here and it sounds like the
14 Parks Department is just heavy handedly, ah, dictate
15 to the, to the houses. So I want to know if there's
16 a give and take, enough that the houses are happy and
17 you're happy.

18 DIRECTOR KRAWCHUK: So we always, we
19 always strive to have collaborative relationships,
20 um, with all of our house directors and their, um,
21 various boards. They all have, um, you know, ah,
22 volunteer boards that they work with. Um, and I
23 would like to think I have a very good relationship
24 with them, um, it doesn't mean that it's not a
25 perfect relationship or that it isn't without some

1 little hiccoughs along the way. Um, but in general
2 we are always available and, um, and very often
3 reaching out to communicate with our historic houses,
4 um, doing the best that we can, managing a very
5 complex portfolio, um, and this isn't meantime to
6 dimension anything, um, any concerns that might be
7 raised, um, about, um, perhaps how that relationship
8 works, um, but, um, I would hope that our house
9 directors and their boards feel that HHT is working
10 very hard for them in order to, ah, facilitate the
11 important work that they, they do onsite. And that
12 includes the license agreements, and I do want to
13 come back to that, just for one quick second, that,
14 um, that, you know, although they have expired they
15 continue, um, and they continue very much in a way
16 that Parks is pretty comfortable with. Um, these are
17 agreements that are, you know, in some cases maybe 10
18 years old and still valid and still operational. Our
19 goal is to absolutely to get to them, um, and, um,
20 and, um, and juggling, again, um, the, all of the
21 incredible workload, um, with the finite resources
22 that was, that we have available to us at HHT as well
23 as NYC Parks. And so, um, I just want to assure you
24 that...

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: [inaudible] the
3 job. Maybe, maybe you should, I mean I've, I've
4 spoken to a number of houses, and a lot of them, and
5 as a Parks Committee, ah, member, um, I'm hearing a
6 frustration that I've never heard before. So I, I
7 just think, there's no, there's no reason to have a
8 license expire because it's a lot of work or, or then
9 there's no reason to have an expiration date, um, if
10 we're going to allow them, every one to expire. And,
11 and I'm hearing a consistent message here that
12 there's a frustration dealing with the Historic House
13 Trust, and I think you need better communication,
14 because I'm hearing it from and, and I can tell you
15 it's, it's double figures of how many, how many
16 frustrated houses we're hearing from. And
17 something's not working. So we need to revamp
18 something. We need better communications. But we
19 need accessibility, um, from not only your office but
20 from Parks, ah, that give these, give these houses a
21 better ability to raise money on their own if Parks
22 is going to, you know, keep them hanging on projects
23 for years and years and years, that, that are
24 necessary to, to really have the house survive,
25 'cause we're not hearing that. We're hearing

1 projects to go on and on since 2005, there's projects
2 that haven't been done and the houses are in
3 jeopardy. So I think we need better communications
4 and think that Parks Committee, we need, um, to have
5 more of these hearings than the last one we had 15
6 years ago. So thank you, Chair. Thank you so much.

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. So, um, so
9 Parks, you had to get rid of the trees and go to the,
10 ah, get to the license agreements. It sounds like
11 you guys are really behind on a lot of things, so of
12 course we want you to improve and, and especially on
13 those contracts, yeah. Thank you. So, ah, are there
14 any more members who want to ask questions?

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: There are none, Chair
16 Koo.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So now we go to public
18 participation.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes. Thank you to
20 the Parks Department and Historic House Trust. Ah,
21 we'll now turn to public testimony. For the first
22 group of panelists, represent various historic
23 houses, ah, they will present their testimony as one
24 panel since they are located together in one
25 location. I will be calling on each individual on

1
2 the panel to speak in turn, so please wait until I
3 call on you to deliver your testimony. Once called,
4 please state your name and the organization you
5 represent once you begin. Council members who have
6 questions for this panel should use the Zoom hand
7 raise function and I will call on you after the
8 entire panel has completed their entire testimony to
9 ask any questions. For all other panelists, unlike
10 our council hearings, our typical council hearings,
11 rather, we will be calling on individuals one by one
12 to testify. Ah, so please begin once your name has
13 been called. Council members who have questions for
14 a particular panelist should also use the Zoom hand
15 raise function and I will call on you after the
16 panelist has completed their testimony. Ah, once the
17 historic house panel has completed their testimony we
18 will hear testimony from Maria Becce and followed by
19 Maria Carasco. I will now call on the historic house
20 panel to testify, and I will ask Ran Yan of Latimer
21 House to begin her testimony please.

22 RAN YAN: Hi, good afternoon, Chair Koo
23 and council members of the Parks Committee. We're
24 thankful that the committee is holding this hearing
25 and allowing us to testify. My name is Ran Yan. I'm

1 from the Louis Latimer House [inaudible]. The New
2 York City Council last held a hearing on the historic
3 houses in 2005. A lot has changed in the last 15
4 years and we're excited to share updates with the
5 committee today. This testimony is representative of
6 14 of the independent nonprofit organizations that
7 fall within the Historic House Trust. Together we
8 represent nearly 95% of the visitorship of these
9 historic sites which are located in all five
10 boroughs, most in areas less traveled by traditional
11 tourist industry. Our institutions are part of New
12 York City's rich cultural background and tell the
13 story of the mosaics that make up the city we all
14 love. We are [inaudible] Museum in the Bronx,
15 [inaudible] House, Old Stone House, and Wyckoff House
16 Museum in Brooklyn, Dyckman Farmhouse, Merchant's
17 House Museum, and Morris-Jumel Mansion Museum in
18 Manhattan, the Brown House, King Manor Museum,
19 Kingsland Homestead, Louis Latimer House Museum, and
20 Queens County Farmhouse in Queens, Alice Austen
21 House, and the historic Richmond Town in Staten
22 Island. For the ease of facilitating this important
23 hearing, many of us gathered here to a nationally
24 designated site of LGBTQ history, Alice Austin House.
25

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 90
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We will
3 now hear from Kelsey Brow of King Manor, followed by
4 Elizabeth Branfman.

5 ELIZABETH BRANFMAN: Yes, I'm Elizabeth
6 Branfman from the Wyckoff House. Kelsey will follow.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: OK.

8 ELIZABETH BRANFMAN: Um, OK. So when the
9 Historic House Trust was first established we were a
10 smaller collection of 15 houses in varying stages of
11 infrastructure, and most with modest budgets and no
12 substantive funding potential. At the time most of
13 these institutions were run by volunteers and local
14 boards who are passionate about the operational
15 capital and marketing experience. And so despite the
16 best of intentions they were limited in what they
17 could achieve. In the past two decades our
18 nonprofits have grown. Our operating budgets are now
19 over a quarter of million dollars each, and several
20 of us sustain annual operating budgets much higher
21 than that. Our staff [inaudible] providing the
22 leadership and expertise in marketing,
23 communications, and other areas that allow each of us
24 to reach target audiences and partially control our
25 own destinies. We have also grown in the relevance

1 of our missions and the quality of our programming to
2 become vital parts of our immediate communities. So
3 we have individually made great strides in the
4 quality, I'm sorry, great strides in terms of
5 accessibility as well, welcoming and serving
6 differently abled and [inaudible] diverse audiences.
7 You're not here merely from unsustainable audience of
8 one-time visits by a minute audience of historical
9 tourists, but have become part of the fabric of our
10 respective local communities and developer, develop
11 our customers for life. We invest deeply in our
12 local area as our neighbors are the repeat visitors
13 for whom we served and we also inspire multi-borough
14 tourism. However, fundraising is always a challenge,
15 and as I'm sure you are keenly aware we are often
16 burdened by the dichotomy of operating and capital
17 funding. Accordingly, we seek reciprocal recognition
18 and commensurate support from the city for our
19 investment in our largely underserved communities.
20 Our nonprofits need direct support, investment in our
21 organizations through capital and operational support
22 in an investment in New York City. Thank you.
23
24
25

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Ah, we'll hear from Kelsey Brow now of King Manor, ah, followed by Jennifer Walden Webrin.

KELSEY BROW: Our organizations are the stewards of these historic sites, which are situated on New York City park land throughout the five boroughs. Collectively we manage buildings and properties that represent over 350 years of New York City history. We value our relationship with the Parks Department and look forward to it evolving to more accurately reflect our status as independent nonprofits that are quite different today than that which existed in 1989. Our nonprofits tell a story of how New York City grew around them and our core work is to provide impactful educational, cultural, and enrichment programs, public events, and volunteer op policies for our surrounding communities, often in multiple languages for an immigrant audience. Not one of our houses resides on Museum Island, Manhattan. In fact, most are primarily in geographically remote residential corners of the city and are recognized in the 2017 Social Impact of the Arts Project as being in areas of low economic well-being. These highly relevant and meaningful

1 resources that we provide are essential to these
2 underserved communities that are located very far
3 from the city's largest cultural organizations,
4 meeting the needs of audiences who cannot or do not
5 visit large museums for geographic, economic, and
6 cultural reasons, making us true community
7 cornerstones in the areas that need it most. As
8 several of those who spoke iterated each one of our
9 cultural nonprofits makes a difference by enriching
10 our communities, fostering connections, caring for
11 and managing our facilities, and telling stories that
12 matter to our audiences. We don't sit around playing
13 historical dress-up. We engage youth in vulnerable
14 communities and give them hope as they see themselves
15 reflected in our work. We are safe spaces for
16 critical thinking, for gathering and for learning.
17 We enrich the lives of all who pass through our
18 doors, come across our grounds, and access our online
19 materials.
20

21 JENNIFER WALDEN WEBRIN: Hi. In addition
22 to operating within the historic landmark buildings
23 owned by the Department of Parks and Recreation, we
24 are also deeply imbedded in the cultural sector. In
25 October 2019 New York City comptroller, Scott M.

1 Stringer, released a report, The Creative Economy,
2 [inaudible] in New York City. This report serves as
3 a benchmark for the creative sector and cultural
4 community and it gives a detailed analysis of what
5 the sector looks like at its strongest. While the
6 report mentions DCLA, the Mayor's Office of Media and
7 Entertainment, Economic Development Corporation, and
8 NYC and Company as agencies that support the creative
9 sector, the Historic House Trust and the New York
10 City Parks Department are conspicuous in their
11 absence. Two recommendations outlined in the report
12 which seem particularly apt for our nonprofits are,
13 one, to improve the capital funding process for
14 cultural nonprofits and, two, to deepen our
15 connections to local communities. The report also
16 urges us to "Fortify and grow the creative sector and
17 expand access to New Yorkers of all incomes and
18 ethnicities. The city must first and foremost treat
19 the sector as the economic engine and resource center
20 that it is." The creative sector accounts for 13% of
21 the city's total economic output. The collective
22 economic output of our nonprofits is significant and
23 the ability of our individual 501(c)(3)s to welcome
24 and be relevant to diverse communities as mentioned
25

1
2 in the comptroller's report is undeniable. As our
3 city fights back from the COVID-19 public health
4 crisis and fewer people travel to and even within the
5 city, local communities will be the driving force
6 behind the city's economic recovery. We each
7 continually rise to meet the needs of our
8 neighborhoods as small nonprofits, stewards of park
9 land, and fixtures within our individual communities
10 we pivoted quickly to adapt our operations to the
11 ensuing health crisis. While our museum doors were
12 closed, our nonprofits actively addressed the needs
13 of our city's citizens from at-home education to food
14 access to health and wellness in the streets,
15 including distributing PPE. Our virtual program
16 garnered nearly one million impressions.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. I believe
18 that was Jennifer Walden Webrin. And we'll now hear
19 from Victoria Monroe of the Alice Austin House.
20 Thank you.

21 VICTORIA MONROE: Thank you. For so many
22 of us our most urgent need is the autonomy to grow
23 and the city support so that we can sustainably and
24 equitability serve our communities as they, too, grow
25 and diversify. The need to be nimble has been

1 further amplified during COVID-19. Fresh eyes on the
2 operational structure of Historic House Trust seems
3 necessary so that we, the nonprofits that manage
4 these historic sites, can effectively respond to the
5 needs of our audiences. Moreover, this mission
6 critical work is not possible without ensuring the
7 stability and maintenance of the historic structures
8 that house our nonprofits. We are professional
9 organizations, each with a mission statement that
10 guides how we activate our sites. Each of us devotes
11 countless hours of strategic planning, management,
12 fundraising, and creativity to strengthen our
13 organizations. We are collaborative, agile, and
14 resourceful. We hire staff to support our
15 organizations' mission and growth. We work with
16 local vendors and collaborate with partners that
17 support this growth. Since the last hearing 15 years
18 ago we have each grown tremendously. One of the few
19 silver linings of this pandemic is the way it shed
20 light on our nonprofits' ability to respond nimbly to
21 crisis and that our flexibility is key to our ability
22 to be similarly responsive going forward. Although
23 we are historic sites we are not stuck in the past.
24 We are continually reinventing ourselves as relevant
25

1
2 cultural institutions to serve our diverse
3 communities. Fresh eyes on these process will
4 hopefully eliminate redundancies and create
5 transparent and streamlined pathways for us going
6 forward. Thank you so much for the opportunity to
7 share this testimony, and we are happy to answer any
8 questions the committee has, either as a group or as
9 individual sites. Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much
11 to all of you. We will now turn to Chair Koo, who
12 does have a few questions. Chair Koo, please unmute
13 yourself.

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Chris. And
15 thank you for all of you coming to testify. Ah, we
16 all know that Historic House Trust was created 30
17 years ago to assist what were then smaller
18 organizations. Each organization has evolved and
19 grown. Are there new needs or supports that each
20 organization or the house needs? Ah, I don't know
21 how you guys answer but can you, ah, each house to
22 have, ah, one answer, can you answer?

23 MELISSA: Sure, OK. I think I spoke, this
24 is Melissa from the Wyckoff House, and I think I
25 spoke to this a little bit in my first [inaudible]

1 testimony. Um, I think it came up earlier, ah, when,
2 under the, when the Historic House Trust was asked
3 about, um, what funding goes directly to the city.
4 When we were volunteer-run we didn't, you know, I
5 mean, it was, it was a wonderful effort by our
6 communities often to save our houses, get them
7 landmarked, make them a part of Parks' land, um, and
8 these were really, you know, I mean, people putting
9 in all that extra labor and, um, today we have, we
10 have staffs ranging from one full-time employee to
11 four, and those come with real costs. Um, our job
12 requires us to all fund raise our own salaries, plus
13 that of any staff we have to care for these houses,
14 operate them, and manage them. So operational
15 support is a very ongoing need. Um, for many of us
16 we get, we get significant funding through the city,
17 but usually it's through portals like, um, Department
18 of Cultural Affairs. Um, there is recently been a
19 Parks Equity Initiative, which spoke to, I think, um,
20 I'm sorry, the council member in, in, ah, Merchant's
21 House district, um, however, you know, we get some, I
22 know I can speak for the Wyckoff House, we get
23 something like 40% of our budget through DCLA. We
24 get anywhere from about \$5000 from the Parks Equity
25

1 Initiative. And we're one of only two sites I know
2 in this year who even get that funding as we're
3 located in East Flatbush. Um, so I think the
4 operational support in a tangible, in some kind of
5 tangible way is a significant need. Um, as John
6 mentioned, we do get \$2500 a year that the Historic
7 House Trust Fund raises, which we really appreciate.
8 Um, for the Wyckoff House I think that operates, that
9 gives us about two-and-a-half days out of the 365-day
10 year. Um, for some of the sites, like Queens Farm,
11 that's not even a full day's operation. Um, and in
12 the past, you know, I've been here about eight years.
13 In the past there was a point where we were getting
14 more. Obviously, the fundraising efforts have
15 changed. Um, \$2500 definitely just doesn't go as far
16 as it used to, especially when we're trying to, um,
17 practice equitable, um, equitable hiring and, um, yet
18 to support, support the people who do the work, um,
19 in our community. Um, and then the second major
20 need, I think, really falls into the capital, ah,
21 support, and that's something I know each of us could
22 share our personal stories and uphill battles. I
23 know that that's, that's something that HHT is keenly
24 aware of and certainly their best efforts to try to
25

1 support it, um, as well as the Parks Department. But
2 I do think it's time to revisit. Um, the last
3 hearing was in 2005 and the Wyckoff House had raised
4 several million dollars, both [inaudible] and public
5 for a visitor center. Um, at that point we had
6 purchased a farm. It's 2020 and we still are hoping
7 for that project to happen. It's been through three
8 different revisions and we're at the point where that
9 funding now purchases us a comfort station. Um, we
10 are hopeful. Our borough commissioner has been a
11 huge, ah, ah, motivating force in, in pushing its
12 through and making it happen. Um, but these are
13 kind, these are the kinds of day-to-day, um,
14 challenges we face on both the operational side and
15 the capital, and in short I don't want to speak for
16 others, but I do know that a few others could
17 probably speak to some of their personal capital,
18 their operational challenges.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

21 MELISSA: Thanks.

22 SHILOH FOLLY: Hi, my name is Shilo
23 Folly. I'm from the [inaudible]. I just want to
24 speak a little bit more to capital. Um, so we are
25 currently going through a major reinterpretation plan

1
2 inside the museum where our private nonprofit has
3 privately fundraised to redo most of our nine period
4 rooms. Um, we have had a pipe burst in our attic in
5 2018, um, due to, you know, various issues
6 structurally and, um, you know, maintenance concerns
7 that we have. Ah, the flood happened on all four
8 floors of our, our, of our museum, um, and, ah, we
9 were at a point where we needed to repair our ceiling
10 in order to reopen back to the public, and we had to
11 spend about 8% of our operating budget to do that
12 because Parks maintenance was unable to do that work
13 for us. Um, so this really speaks to, to, you know,
14 a concern that we have is we are, we are, we are
15 making our sites lively. We are programming the
16 interiors. We are using our own resources to become
17 vibrant, to be vibrant historic sites. But our
18 exterior is crumbling around us, um, and we really
19 need, you know, capital support so we can ensure the
20 longevity of, of our structures.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Ah, anyone
22 else? So how does Parks or HHT communicate with you
23 all regarding various policy changes, planning,
24 etcetera? Are the nonprofits included in the trust

1
2 decision-making process? Can anyone of you answer
3 that?

4 MELISSA: Sure. I'll give, I'll give,
5 I'll give a introductory shot. Um, I do think that,
6 you know, we appreciate, again, Melissa from the
7 Wyckoff House in East Flatbush, Brooklyn. Um, we do
8 appreciate that following the pandemic we've had more
9 communication with the Historic House Trust, which
10 started, I think, maybe May, with weekly meetings
11 and, um, expanded and then became about every other
12 week, which is definitely an improvement from the
13 past years where we met maybe quarterly. Um, so, so
14 that, you know, so that's certainly built a level of
15 communication. However, as I mentioned, I worked
16 here about nine, eight or nine years, and it's only
17 through these conversations that we're starting to
18 learn about, you know, about funding, about the way
19 the Historic House Trust operates. So I think to a
20 certain extent we've kind of, you know, opened up
21 Pandora's box and we're reliving how much we didn't
22 know about. For instance, you know, one of the
23 things we learned was that when HHT makes their
24 budget for the year the GOS support about \$2500 we
25 each get is not built into the budget, right? That

1
2 is if their gala does well and their, the silent
3 auction does well at their gala. That is the money
4 that gets divided up by the house. This year when
5 they didn't have a gala, I do know that the Historic
6 House Trust, John and Matthew, went to the board and
7 really went to bat for us to say they really need
8 their GOS and we were really pleased that that was
9 able to come through. However, the, the mere fact,
10 and, and I have expressed this, that our support
11 isn't really built into their budget, in my opinion a
12 budget is a statement of their values, it's where you
13 put your money and how you operate, and some of that
14 is public and some of that is private, of course.
15 But, um, I, I think it's, it's, you know, again, we
16 appreciate that this communication has enabled us to
17 see these things. But, um, you know, I think, I
18 think we're just starting to get that and some of the
19 other areas we've been advocating to have more, um,
20 more indulgment and include things like hiring
21 decisions. Um, I think, you know, some of the
22 positions at Historic House Trust have existed
23 because they've existed, you know, since 1989. But
24 at this point as we've, as we've articulated, we've
25 really evolved and some of our meetings are

1
2 different. Some of us have those expertise within
3 our own houses, um, and we really can call on each
4 other more than we often need to call on the Historic
5 House Trust. Um, so, so I think, we're, we're
6 building transparency, but as we're sort of
7 unraveling that we are starting to, we're starting to
8 see the places where it really could be better, and
9 if this agency is really there to advocate for us and
10 support us, um, I think that we could structurally
11 change things so that that support is really, um,
12 really involves us in how that, in how that happens.
13 Um, and I certainly see efforts from the Historic
14 House Trust to move in that direction, um, and, you
15 know, I still, I do think nonetheless that we could,
16 we could rethink just how it is that, that, you know,
17 we can really be, um, we can be called on as the
18 experts for our own site. Anything else, anyone
19 wants to add?

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Anyone else?

21 VICTORIA MONROE: Yes, um, Melissa, ah,
22 touched on several, um, items that relate to the
23 growth of our, ah, organizations whereby many of us
24 already employ, ah, staff members which were
25 important to us within our boroughs as well our

1 communication specialist and social media specialists
2 and such. And so what has come to light, especially
3 through increased communication is that often the
4 Historic House Trust has begun to grow and increase
5 their positions without actual consultation of what
6 the houses need and there's either a doubling up, but
7 often a conflict within these roles and often the
8 historic houses are very willing to share and want,
9 of course, the extra exposure to the amazing
10 progressive programming that we're producing, but we
11 want to make sure that the messaging that is going
12 out about those programs is correct. Um, you know,
13 it's very sensitive what we deal with. We are
14 dealing with immigrant communities. We are dealing
15 with Black Lives Matter this year. Ah, my site, of
16 course, is a nationally designated site with LGBTQ
17 history. So I do not want some of my posts taken in,
18 in the wrong direction, let's say, and if there is
19 going to be a shared communication we all need to be
20 at the table. Um, and that, that's really essential.
21 Does anyone else want to speak to that? But it
22 happens across the board. Jennifer.

24

25

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 106
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Before you go, Ms.
3 Monroe, could you just please reidentify yourself,
4 just for the record.

5 VICTORIA MONROE: Oh, sorry. Victoria
6 Monroe from the Alice Austin House.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. And I
8 just ask when everyone, when anyone comes back up to
9 speak just, if you could just reidentify yourself
10 just for the record and for our [inaudible] keeping
11 purposes. Thank you.

12 JENNIFER WALDEN WEBRIN: Sure. I'm
13 Jennifer Walden Webrin, ah, executive director of the
14 Queens County Farm Museum. And, ah, my comment on
15 communication, um, just, I want to sort of direct my
16 answer towards how often, surprisingly, some, and a
17 Parks employee, although well meaning, will show up
18 at my site without an appointment, unannounced.
19 Today while we were all gathering here and having
20 some lunch prior to this testimony I got a text that
21 a Parks employee wanted to look at our phone lines,
22 ah, just showing up. You know, we have a busy team,
23 a short-staffed team, um, many operational issues
24 since we're among the longest [inaudible] farm sites
25 in New York State so we have a lot going on, and

1
2 during my very busy season, September through
3 October, it's very hard for my team to get some time
4 off, so we kind of work those days in between, with
5 working weekends and around the clock. And so having
6 an operational person to show up unexpected, um, and
7 needing to me, you know, myself and my director of
8 operations unannounced, um, and also we're not sure
9 they're authorized to be there, either. So, um, that
10 communication, you know, I've often shared this with
11 John, as it happens real time, like, who is this
12 person and why are there here. Um, just two weeks
13 ago out of nowhere somebody showed up first thing in
14 the morning, um, and hung two bathroom signs, as a
15 silly example, um, in our, in the barn where the only
16 public rest rooms on the site are in our barn
17 complex, which is where our offices are, and they
18 are, had the incorrect hours of our restrooms, um,
19 and they're like screwed into the plaster on the wall
20 in front of the ladies' room and the men's room and,
21 and, um, and it's just maddening to see like who
22 would come all the way up to [inaudible]. We're not
23 [inaudible], we're almost in Nassau County, so who
24 would come all the way out there, hang up two
25 incorrect signs, don't make any sense for our

1 organization. I was told that they were there to
2 hang up signs for, they were the comfort station
3 signs, which I have none on my site, and, and I know
4 it's sort of a, in the weeds type of detail, but I
5 wanted to share how, how this can happen. If there
6 were good communication this would not be happening.
7 Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thanks. Ah, so one of
10 the assertions I raised was the houses to be
11 represented on HHT's board. Ah, the organizations
12 are perfect for that. You have a representative to
13 seat on the board.

14 KELSEY BROW: Good afternoon, again. I'm
15 Kelsey Brow at King Manor Museum in Jamaica. Um, we
16 do not have a seat on the board and we have, um,
17 asked to see their board meeting minutes, um, just so
18 we can see really what decisions are made by the
19 board, because as was iterated previously we are, um,
20 not particularly sure who is accountable for what at
21 the Historic House Trust or to whom. Um, for
22 example, there used to be a curatorial position at
23 the Historic House Trust and they have a collections
24 committee, which we recently found out about on some
25 of our COVID-inspired biweekly phone calls. And, um,

1 this committee makes decisions about what curatorial
2 needs we have in our houses, and I've iterated this.
3 I, I don't understand how that committee can make
4 that decision if one of the houses are on that
5 committee. And there used to be someone, and there
6 used to be someone prior to that who liaised with the
7 houses a little bit, um, but really it was kind of
8 like are you having any problems, maybe I can assist
9 you. Um, you know our expired license agreement says
10 the Historic House Trust is supposed to provide us
11 with data loggers, this is a little technical, um,
12 to, to track our temperature and humidity of our
13 rooms for the safety of our collections. We don't
14 have those in most of our sites. Um, this curatorial
15 person was really there to sort of in case you had
16 any programs. Um, I have a very strong curatorial
17 background. Often, um, both of the people who have
18 been in this position [inaudible] different historic
19 house trust sites have asked me for advice, which
20 isn't to like pat myself on the back, but really to
21 say that the expertise lies with all of us, and also
22 if this agency is supposed to advocate for us and
23 provide expertise for us, ah, they really don't have
24 a very strong mechanism of understanding what sort of
25

1
2 expertise and advice we need. And for some of the
3 houses, some of these efforts, maybe more [inaudible]
4 others we all understand about the 23 sites there are
5 23-plus different needs and that not everything the
6 Historic House Trust did, does, is going to be
7 relevant to all of our sites. However, the fact that
8 we don't have any formal voice in what they do, and
9 many times our initiatives that come, in fact all of
10 the initiatives really seem to come top down as a
11 surprise, and sometimes, um, are duplicative of the
12 work that we are already doing. For example, there
13 was, um, a small initiative that didn't happen
14 because of the COVID pandemic about women's history
15 for the centennial of women's suffrage that was sort
16 of, um, just dropped, like hey, we're doing this, can
17 you provide us with resources, the research about the
18 women at your site. We're going to create some sort
19 of thing. Um, most of us already do that for our own
20 site. We didn't need this sort of initiative, um,
21 and also if it was meant to celebrate the women's
22 suffrage centennial we have all been planning our
23 celebrations for this many years ago. So this was
24 not substantive and it was duplicative of our work
25 and was not something that we had asked for, nor

1
2 desired. Um, and this is not to say anything about
3 any of the individuals who were in any of the
4 positions. I think all of us are, um, happy to speak
5 to that maybe individually, but it's more we want to
6 iterate that this is not about the person who is in
7 the curatorial spot perhaps not having the expertise,
8 but they showed that's not the issue. The issue is
9 that we don't have a say in what type of help we're
10 getting and that just seems a bit backwards to us.
11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. So many of
13 the nonprofits, ah, who run these homes are cultural
14 organizations, ah, who receive funding from other
15 city agencies, including DCLA. Can you speak to
16 that? Any one of you?

17 JENNIFER WALDEN WEBRIN: This is Jennifer
18 Walden Webrin [inaudible] again. Um, I'll, I'll
19 talk. I'm the largest organization of, ah, historic
20 houses. My operating budget pre-COVID is around 3
21 million dollars. We bring in over 400,000 visitors
22 per year, again pre-COVID numbers, which is more than
23 half of the annual visitation, um, of the total sites
24 combined, um, and typically around 100,000, over
25 100,000 schoolchildren a year. So it takes a lot of

1
2 money to do all that great work. Um, DCLA, for an
3 example, gives me, you know, obviously depending on
4 the city budget, somewhere around 10% of my operating
5 budget comes from the Department of Cultural Affairs.
6 Um, our local council person, Barry Grodenchik, is
7 very generous, obviously, supporting us. We are the
8 only cultural organization in his district, so we'll
9 get discretionary funding through him, um, through
10 DYCD or Parks equity, um, and some of the cultural
11 and, and some of the other initiatives as well, and
12 council members on this call, I'm so grateful for
13 your support. Um, we get CASA funding and CII
14 funding. So that's the city's piece of, of our
15 funding. Um, other components come from my events.
16 Um, I'm a free site 354 days per year, so most of
17 those people coming through are not paying for
18 anything, um, and so how do we raise funds to
19 optimize the site, create in between opportunities,
20 connect with our communities, and that's sort of the
21 work that we do. Did I answer?

22 UNIDENTIFIED: Yeah.

23 JENNIFER WALDEN WEBRIN: Did I answer
24 that properly? I'm sorry.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Yeah, good,
3 yeah.

4 MELISSA: I'd like to add a little, some
5 things. Um, just some of, um, I think, [inaudible]
6 I'm sorry, this is Melissa [inaudible] from the
7 Wyckoff House. Um, one of our colleagues, Jessica
8 Phillips, couldn't be here today. Um, but, um, I
9 know that she is a representative of Historic House
10 Trust. I'm sorry, Historic Richmond Town. Um, and
11 I'm not that familiar with the people at the Bronx
12 Historical Society. Those are two organizations that
13 are both CIGs, culture institute groups, within the
14 Department of Cultural Affairs. As CIGs, um, I think
15 there's about 34 since we've [inaudible], 34, um,
16 sites that get funding from the department directly
17 to their operations to support their staff. Um, I
18 believe, if someone could double check, um, Historic
19 Richmond Town gets 49% of their budget through CIG
20 funding, half of the their budget, through DCLA. And
21 they get \$2500 because of the Historic House Trust
22 and, I guess, you know, I mean, we understood sort of
23 how the funding from Parks comes in. Um, while I
24 understand that we do ge things like funding, um,
25 from Parks and that \$400,000, often that funding is

1 less helpful and more complicated. For instance, um,
2 several of us sort of opted out of the, ah,
3 exterminator services this year because it was
4 becoming so difficult with the communication, 'cause
5 we can't talk directly to the exterminators. We have
6 to go through one or two people within the Historic
7 House Trust. They weren't showing up on days they
8 were, you know, they were scheduled to, and obviously
9 this isn't the, you know, Historic House Trust
10 employees are working hard to try to remedy, remedy
11 that. But it's always triangulated and I can't tell
12 you the times I've had to call Derrick, Danielle, and
13 John while standing there with the exterminator
14 asking if he should go or not. So it's just sort of
15 adding it, I mean, and they're working hard. They
16 really are working and they're putting all the time
17 in and it takes our time as well, and often these
18 services just, you know, aren't, I hate to say,
19 aren't worth the hassle. Um, and, um, so I just
20 thought, you know, from, from the perspective of, of
21 the funding. Um, I also want to point out that we do
22 get \$2500 in GOS from the Parks Department, I mean,
23 from the Historic House Trust and we really
24 appreciate it. That being said, it isn't without
25

1 certain requirements. Um, there are requirements,
2 basically each year in order to get our GOS funding
3 we have to make sure that we've submitted all the
4 documentation and our license agreements. My
5 particular site, my particular site, our license
6 agreements dates to 1977, so obviously those, we're a
7 unique case. A lot of them are on a standard
8 agreement and I have been told by the Historic House
9 Trust that whether, you know, it might not be up to
10 me, but we will, we will be necessarily put on that,
11 that, um, license agreement eventually. That being
12 said, we always do provide the list of things, like
13 our 990, our audit, our, um, our board minutes, our,
14 ah, our budgets, and our tax returns. Oh, also our,
15 um, monthly maintenance check lists and our
16 attendance records. So these are also the
17 requirements. Now they're not, we don't report on
18 that GOS money, but we do have to provide that
19 information up front. And, and that being said we
20 would certainly provide that information, um, whether
21 it was a requirement in our license agreement or not,
22 but it's sort of being stipulated on whether we get
23 our \$2500. It leaves a bad taste in our mouth and I
24 think I've articulated that. It feels really a lot
25

1
2 like kids getting their allowance if they do their
3 chores. Um, like we mentioned, we are professionals,
4 you know, we care deeply about these houses. Several
5 of us have spent the majority of our lives, if not
6 careers, um, championing these houses and, um, really
7 moving them into the 21st century to become places
8 of, um, you know, where, where we're really, you
9 know, we're, many of us work on issues that are near
10 and dear to hearts and social justice oriented
11 through the lens of history and our sites. Um, and I
12 think sort of the way that we feel sort of have, what
13 we have to kind of, our role is really just to report
14 back and stay within the parameters of a license
15 agreement, which could be a whole other conversation,
16 um, that really doesn't necessarily benefit us, um,
17 and, ah, I do know, that as I mentioned, they are
18 planning on doing sort of a revisiting of that. We
19 are in the process right now of negotiating our
20 caretaker agreements, um, and, and I certainly
21 understand it is a very long, arduous process, um,
22 but we're really here to make sure that, that we're
23 able to, um, we're able to keep these sites alive and
24 we, you know, and we certainly together have the
25 expertise, ah, to do so.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

3 VICTORIA MONROE: Thank you. This is
4 just Victoria Monroe, very quickly, um, to add to all
5 of that, um, what has, ah, is another layer is that
6 access to certain funding is blocked to us as
7 historic houses because of our current, ah,
8 relationship or contract with HHT and Parks. So we
9 are not allowed to apply for certain discretionary
10 funding to update things like our computer software
11 and telephone systems. And there actually was an
12 award made to the Morris-Jumel and they have not been
13 allowed to access that money. So, um, often there is
14 a conflict to us, even moving forward with successful
15 grant, ah, applications because of the nature of our
16 relationship and the, ah, problematics with, um,
17 contracting out or using any kind of capital monies.

18 UNIDENTIFIED: [inaudible] that's DCLA
19 money.

20 VICTORIA MONROE: That was DCLA capital,
21 because DCLA was part of, ah, you know, your
22 question. And, of course, every, ah, we have no
23 security on how much DCLA funding we will receive at
24 each of our sites and renew our requests for our CASA
25 programs, cultural immigration, theaters of color,

1
2 which at our own individual sites of course we write,
3 produce, and do everything for those programs.

4 They're not a complete program that's given to us.

5 We sculpt them in alignment with our own missions.

6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Ah, Chris,
8 do, do we have other council members who want to ask
9 questions?

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, Council Member
11 Holden does have a question, does have questions.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair
14 Koo. And thank you, panel. I mean, some of the, ah,
15 the testimony, ah, that I'm hearing, it sounds like a
16 deep frustration here, and this is what I'm, ah, I'm
17 afraid of with when you have Parks personnel, people
18 who work for Parks, part of any trust or, or
19 overseeing, ah, ah, organization like the Historic
20 House Trust. This is what I'm afraid of, adding more
21 bureaucracy and making your lives miserable or more
22 frustrated. Nobody knows your houses like you, like
23 the panel that we just heard. Nobody. And I hate
24 the fact that we have bureaucrats dictating what
25 should be done when you know best, and then don't

1 offer any communication or very little. And just
2 that \$2500, which is really a stipend, that you have
3 to earn it with paperwork, um, and many of you, what
4 I just heard was that sometimes it's not worth it,
5 the fact that you have all these strings attached.
6 So I, I, what I would like from this panel, and this
7 is personal, I'm not speaking for the committee or
8 the chair, but I'd like recommendations for possible
9 legislation, which is my job, by the way, our jobs as
10 council members is to come up and correct situations,
11 and correct problems like this, because, um, you,
12 you're responsible for your houses, yet it only goes
13 a certain way. It looks like it's a one-way street.
14 So we need more input, we need more communications
15 with the Historic House Trust, that's what I heard,
16 ah, and we need solutions. So the fact that, ah,
17 that the Parks Committee hasn't had, ah, you know, we
18 should have regular hearings on this and not once
19 every 15 years. So, um, I, I thank you all for your,
20 your testimony and, um, for all your hard work,
21 because it is frustrating when somebody tries to
22 dictate, um, especially the city, ah, takes, takes it
23 away from you and says this is what's going to
24 happen, or we're gonna show up unannounced and put up

1 signs. Um, it's frustrating. This is, these are
2 really, you are, you are just so committed to the
3 houses, what I've, what I've seen, that it really
4 needs to have more communication with not only Parks
5 but the Historic House Trust. So we need, the morale
6 is, I, I see is, will you say, ah, anybody can answer
7 this, but, you know, how is the morale at the houses,
8 what I've heard, but are you in like, are you
9 thinking about, um, just resigning because you can't,
10 you can't take this anymore? You know, are you
11 thinking about giving up? Does this drain you to the
12 point that you just had enough?
13

14 KIM MAIER: Hi, I'm Kim Mayor. I'm the
15 executive director of the Old Stone House in Brooklyn
16 and I've been with the house for 16 years. I think,
17 ah, what you see here today is really the tremendous
18 growth of these organizations and our passion for the
19 work that we do. I don't think that anybody is
20 interested in resigning out of frustration. I think
21 our goal is to find a path forward to be able to work
22 more effectively with Parks and the city and this is
23 a great opportunity and a great start and to be given
24 a charge of suggestions for legislation is, ah,
25 gratifying for us, and we appreciate that very much.

2 Ah, I don't think that any of the houses we have come
3 to the place that they are without the foundation of
4 the trust, but things evolve and times change and
5 organizations grow, and so to be able to look at this
6 critically and think about how moving forward is
7 essential at this point in time. Thank you very
8 much.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you.

10 Anybody else? OK, so nobody is resigning. Good.
11 All right. We're, we're all gonna stay with it.

12 UNIDENTIFIED: Yes. As we said, you know,
13 there are people not in the room for a reason
14 [laughs].

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: All right, all
16 right.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, thank you
18 Council Member.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you all the
21 directors for your passion and your dedication. So
22 my last question is my understanding is there are
23 concerns about safety. Can someone speak to that?
24 Safety, yeah.

1
2 UNIDENTIFIED: Um, OK, [inaudible], ah,
3 we're gonna read a statement by one of the directors
4 that isn't able to be here because of a conflict on
5 the topic.

6 KELSEY BROW: This is Kelsey Brow once
7 again from King Manor Museum. Ah, I'm reading a
8 statement from Meredith Horsford at the Dyckman
9 Farmhouse Museum in upper Manhattan. The reason why
10 I wanted to read her statement, since she couldn't be
11 here today, is because she has some very serious
12 security concerns, and some of you may be, ah,
13 cognizant of the shooting that happened in King Park
14 that was about two yards away from King Manor Museum
15 just a few weeks ago, and police officers asked my
16 staff, I wasn't present, I was at a meeting
17 elsewhere, um, if we had security cameras because
18 they would have liked to be able to use our footage
19 to identify the perpetrator, who has not yet been
20 caught. Um, we do not have security cameras, um, for
21 in this 250-year-old site, um, just let that be. So
22 I would like to read this statement from Meredith. I
23 think you'll find it enlightening, and thank you for
24 your patience in letting me read the testimony of
25 somebody who couldn't make it all the way to Staten

1
2 Island today. So, again, this is from Meredith
3 Horsford at the Dyckman Farmhouse in upper Manhattan.
4 So Dyckman Farmhouse has 15 benches outside of the
5 property along the sidewalk. Five of them are along
6 204th Street, which is dimly lit and home to a group
7 of drug dealers day and night. Those drug dealers
8 watch the comings and goings of the museum staff, a
9 staff of three women, one of whom is often there
10 alone, and they store drugs on the property and
11 weapons in the sidewalk tree pits. People also climb
12 onto these benches and over the little fence to break
13 onto the property. The staff has come to work in the
14 morning to find someone passed out in the park with a
15 needle in their arm. Two summers ago the muscle was
16 broken into twice. The security alarm alerts Parks
17 when it's tripped, and in both instances Parks did
18 not call the police. So staff could have walked onto
19 an active crime scene. One of the museum windows is
20 still boarded up from a break-in in July of 2019.
21 Meredith has been advocating for cameras and
22 lighting, and to have those benches along 204th
23 Street that facilitate climbing over her fence
24 removed for several years, to no available. Along
25 Broadway there are 10 benches, several of which are

1 used by regulars to openly drink alcohol and do drugs
2 all day. They have threatened the Dyckman Farmhouse
3 Museum's volunteers and exposed themselves to the
4 staff, and that museum is diagonally across the
5 street from a school. Finally, Meredith has
6 expressed to the Parks Department, the New York
7 Police Department, and to many other facets of city
8 government that she feels very unsafe at work and
9 would like to make it home safely to their families
10 but nobody seems willing to do anything about it.
11 She says, and I quote, "I also receive complaints
12 from people living in neighborhood apartment
13 buildings about their safety concerns and I have to
14 explain to them that we, too, want safety for the
15 community, but we haven't been able to get anyone to
16 help." Thank you for listening to Meredith's
17 statement.

18
19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

20 VICTORIA MONROE: This is Victoria Monroe
21 once again from Alice Austin House. I just want to,
22 um, make sure that it's clear that we pay for, um,
23 out of our own general operating budget our security
24 system. Um, and that is the case for many of the
25 houses, and we would dearly love, ah, a camera system

1
2 to be able to be set up, even a Ring doorbell, so
3 that we could monitor who's coming to the door when
4 we have one woman working here alone. Um, we had,
5 ah, just last weekend our benches were graffitied.
6 Um, we have also a very low picket fence and someone
7 can just open our gates and wander into the parks.
8 Plus we were delivered Parks signage, ah, just in the
9 past 12 months that said that our park was open until
10 1:00 a.m., which is it not. It should be closing at
11 dusk. And we've had no adjustment to that signage.
12 That signage is applicable to the beach in front of
13 the house, not our actual park. Um, so security
14 cameras would be ideal. As John said, we often
15 maintain our own security systems because we own our
16 collections, um, which we do, of course, here. But,
17 ah, we value, ah, the security of the outdoor of the
18 house. We don't want to see our homes graffitied.
19 We don't want to see this Parks property graffitied,
20 and any other security issues that help protect our
21 park-going communities. Thank you. Oh, yes, and
22 we've been, obviously, many of us would fund our own
23 cameras, ah, or apply for funding for cameras, but
24 we've been told we cannot attach any cameras to the
25 houses.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Yeah, we
3 will address the issues to the trust and Parks
4 Department, yeah. Ah, do you, do any of you have
5 more, ah, suggestions or complaints, or [inaudible] I
6 mean you bring up all the issues, right? Yeah.
7 [inaudible] any more? So, ah...

8 MELISSA: I, I guess, this is Melissa,
9 sorry, real, I'll be pretty quick. This is Melissa
10 from the Wyckoff House. So I think one of the
11 overall, you know, I appreciate, um, Council Member
12 Koo and Council Member Holden's, um, just, you know,
13 asking us what is it that we'd like to see and
14 certainly I think we, we are almost like taking aback
15 by the question, and, and I'm excited by the
16 opportunity, um, and I hope we have some, we have the
17 opportunity to work on, um, developing solutions
18 together with the Parks Department to [inaudible].
19 Um, I think one of the overriding themes we kept
20 finding as we were talking was really being able to
21 represent ourselves, um, advocate for ourselves, and
22 leverage our own resources and expertise. Um, you
23 know, this, this hearing came on pretty quickly and
24 we, we, um, we did have a meeting at HHT to give us
25 an overview, but we did organize relatively,

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2 relatively nimbly and fast with less than a week to
3 put together a statement, and in doing so we started
4 to realize, um, where our, where our, um, our
5 challenges overlapped and also, um, how many
6 resources we have amongst ourselves. So, um, being
7 able to sort of grow into ourselves and continue to,
8 to be supportive is really, um, we hope the path
9 forward. Um, so thank you.

10 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you for all of
12 you coming to testify. I want to thank each one of
13 you for your dedication and your passion and in
14 preserving the history for the City of New York. Ah,
15 we look forward to work with you and we will
16 cooperate with you. Just let us know any things we
17 can do. Ah, so I think, ah, we finished all the
18 questions with all of you. Ah, Chris, are there
19 other public participations?

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, Council Member,
21 there are two more people who are registered to speak
22 as of now. The next person is Maria Becce, and I
23 apologize if I mispronounced that, but she is up next
24 and she will be followed by Maria Carasco.

1
2 MARIA BECCE: Thank you. Ah, Chair Koo,
3 I am Maria Becce. I bring a new perspective, ah, to
4 the subject at hand today as a relatively new trustee
5 of the Queens Historical Society. Thank you for the
6 opportunity to speak today about the Queens
7 Historical Society based at Kingsland Homestead in
8 Flushing, Queens, at Weeping Beach Park. We are
9 heavily reliant on the Parks Department. Queens
10 Historical Society is the only historical society
11 impacting all of the borough's 15 districts. The
12 society documents, preserves, and presents the
13 borough's history through exhibitions, community
14 outreach programs, and various volunteer
15 opportunities. We respectfully request your
16 consideration of the following matters: Improve the
17 efficiency of the capital budget process between
18 Parks Department and historic house museums; more
19 transparency in the capital budget funds allocation
20 process. Kingsland Homestead has been located for
21 over 50 years on the premises of the historic Weeping
22 Beech Park. The weeping beech tree that once rooted
23 itself in this park lived for 151 years from 1847 to
24 1998, one of the city's few trees to be landmarked.
25 The weeping beech tree and its descendents represent

1 the focal point of the park's integrity. Capital
2 funding requests include restoration of the unique
3 decorative middle gate. The parks surrounding middle
4 gate has not been repainted or replaced in over three
5 decades. Driveway: The museum's driveway remains to
6 be a constant concern. We respectfully request
7 additional funds to be allocated for an appropriate
8 and functional paved entrance driveway. Forestry:
9 Timely and consistent maintenance of the historic
10 weeping beech tree. Expense budget request: Queens
11 Historical Society has successfully implemented free
12 and in some case very nominally charged online events
13 for families, seniors, and public school students.
14 We ask that the committee please consider additional
15 operating budget allocations for our educational and
16 community outreach programs offered in Mandarin
17 Chinese, Spanish, Korean, and English. In closing,
18 Queens Historical Society aims to build upon and
19 enhance the goals and aspirations of Historic House
20 Trust through greater transparency and clearly
21 defined methods of procurement. Kingsland Homestead
22 is an historic gem located in the robust immigrant
23 community of Flushing, Queens. Now more than ever
24 clearly and focused leadership collectively
25

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2 advocating for sufficient financial stability,
3 preventative maintenance, and general upkeep of
4 historic houses and public green space is crucial for
5 the preservation of historic homes in New York City.

6 Chair Koo and Director Krawchuk, please, let's
7 provide improved communications and efficient and
8 effective systems to all the dedicate people who
9 preserve the history of New York City. Thank you
10 very much for letting me speak today,

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

13 We will next hear from Maria Carasco.

14 MARIA CARASCO: Thank you, ah, Chair Koo
15 and all committee members. I am Maria Carasco, vice
16 president of public programs with Prospect Park
17 Alliance, a nonprofit organization that operates
18 Prospect Park in partnership with the city, as well
19 as Leffert's Historic House, also located in Prospect
20 Park in partnership with the Historic House Trust.
21 Leffert's Historic House Museum is an 18th century
22 farmhouse that features a working garden, historic
23 artifacts, period rooms, and interactive exhibits.
24 Located in Prospect Park and nestled between the
25 carousel and zoo, the museum welcomes over 30,000

1 visitors a year, with families and young children
2 representing a large part of our audience. At the
3 museum Prospect Park Alliance sheds light on the rich
4 history of Brooklyn the lives of the people that
5 lived and worked on the land, including the Lenape,
6 Dutch, and enslaved Africans. Visitors explore
7 history through hands-on experiences, imaginative
8 play, cultural performances, and also gather to
9 celebrate the diversity of our community today. In
10 addition to our seasonal programs, which take place
11 April through December, the alliance also partners
12 with many community organizations to present free
13 cultural programs. In the past several years this
14 has included We Are Brooklyn, Immigrant Voices, a
15 multimedia exhibition based on immigrant oral
16 histories from the Brooklyn College Listening
17 Project, Nothing About Us, an exploration of
18 educational segregation, written and performed by New
19 York City public, ah, high school students through
20 the support of New York Appleseed, Live Here Learn
21 Here, and the Epic Theater Ensemble, the Brooklyn
22 Roots Festival, a day of performances and workshops
23 by the borough's many diverse cultural and ethnic
24 groups, presented in partnership with the Brooklyn
25

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2 Arts Council, and Caribbean Prospect Park, an exhibit
3 and program series celebrating Caribbean American
4 Awareness Month. When faced with the COVID-19
5 pandemic Prospect Park Alliance launched a virtual
6 Prospect Park website portal filled with activities,
7 online programs, and self-guided tours that park
8 lovers could enjoy from the comfort of their home.
9 To date this portal has received more than 22,000
10 views. When the restrictions began to be lifted we
11 quickly pivoted our program back to the park, but in
12 a safe and socially distant manner with the launch of
13 popup Leffert's Play and Go kits. This program was
14 developed as a mobile education station where
15 families and children were given the opportunity to
16 explore the leisure time activities of the Lenape,
17 Dutch, and enslaved Africans. Participants were also
18 given kits that had materials and instructions to
19 make a few historic games at home. The Alliance
20 popped up in locations throughout the park, as well
21 as Jackie Robinson Park in Bedford Stuyvesant and the
22 New Lots Library in East New York. The program
23 served 1519 visitors over the course of eight events
24 who, ah, with families and children borrowing 2500
25 games and activities. Prospect Park Alliance is

1
2 incredibly grateful to have received 2.5 million in
3 funding from former speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and
4 the Brooklyn Delegation of the New York City Council
5 to restore Leffert's Historic House. This funding is
6 critical to stabilizing the house to ensure it able
7 to serve families for many decades to come. The
8 restoration will enable the Alliance to replace the
9 roof and restore the exterior, which have
10 significantly deteriorated over time. The house was
11 slated to kick off construction in the spring, when
12 construction was halted citywide. Unfortunately,
13 when restrictions were lifted the city did not
14 release the funds so that work can start on the
15 project. We are asking for the City Council's
16 support in lobbying for the release of these funds
17 with the Office of Management and Budget so that work
18 can start on this project before the house falls into
19 further and more severe disrepair. In conjunction
20 with the restoration, the Alliance will re-envision
21 the programming and mission of the museum, rethinking
22 the purpose of a historic house museum and how it can
23 shed light on the experiences of our ancestors, but
24 also serve as a community hub and a space for
25 dialogue in today's Brooklyn. We look forward to

1
2 partnering with our local electeds, community
3 partners, and house museum scholars on this work in
4 the coming years. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you very much.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. At this
7 point, ah, if we have inadvertently missed anyone who
8 has registered to testify today and has yet to have
9 been called, please use the Zoom raise hand function
10 and you'll be called on in the order that your hand
11 has been raised. Seeing no one else at this point, I
12 will then turn it over to Chair Koo to offer some
13 closing remarks. Oh, I see Council Member Holden
14 does have a question.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: I just have a
17 statement. I just want to know if, or a question,
18 is, is the Parks, ah, Assistant Commissioner
19 Biederman still on the hearing, 'cause I, I didn't
20 see him. Sergeant?

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ah, no, the
22 commissioner has left, the Parks Department is no
23 longer at the hearing.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah, 'cause I
25 think it's kind of a shame. I know that one person

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2 from Parks, ah, Matt Drury is on, I think? But it
3 would have been nice to see the Parks, ah, assistant
4 commissioner stay on the hearing at least to hear
5 from the directors of the historic houses, their
6 testimony, since we haven't a hearing, ah, in 15
7 years. So I, I just think that he could have stayed
8 on to listen, and I hope he looks at the, um, the
9 tape of this, because it's important testimony that
10 he must hear, so, ah, thank you. Thank you, Chair,
11 and thank you, ah, Committee Counsel for the great
12 hearing. Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair
14 Holden, ah Council Member Holden. At this point I'll
15 turn it back to Chair Koo to offer some closing
16 remarks and adjourn the hearing.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Chris. It
18 has been a very fruitful public hearing. We learned
19 a lot and I hope the Parks Department, ah, will, ah,
20 listen to the complaints and suggestions and do
21 improvements as soon as possible. Ah, communication
22 is very important. So I want to thank the Parks
23 Department and of course our committee, ah, chair,
24 ah, our committee counsel, Chris, and Patray and
25 Cheema and Monica for doing a lot of work in the

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background, and also my chief of staff, ah, Elaine
Chong. So everyone have a good day. Thank you. The
meeting is now adjourned. [gavel]

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 December 13, 2020