

## City of New York Parks & Recreation



Hearing before the New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation

Fiscal Year 2011 Preliminary Budget

March 24, 2010

Testimony by Adrian Benepe, Commissioner

### INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Chair Mark Viverito, and members of the Parks Committee, for giving us the opportunity to discuss the budget for our City's parks, recreation centers, and other facilities. As I am sure you have heard at your other oversight hearings or if you read the papers this morning, this is a time of fiscal austerity for the City's agencies, and the Department of Parks & Recreation is not immune to this period of economic retrenchment.

All across the country, we have been hearing of the difficulties that state and local governments are facing with their park systems. Cities have had to raise fees for programs, reduce or privatize essential services, and we have all heard about the struggles our New York State parks system has been facing with keeping its parks open. We're hoping to avoid some of the deepest cuts to our budget, but we are fortunate that our Mayor and City-elected officials understand that a city's parks are as essential as other key services. That's why our budget has not been reduced to a degree out of line with our sister non-uniformed agencies. We will have to do more with less, and maybe much less, but we will still aim to provide a level of service that can satisfy our most loyal customers – the people of New York City.

We're going to keep our focus on providing core services. Barring significant changes in our projected budget, we'll keep our parks open, and our beaches will be ready and prepared for the millions of New Yorkers, neighbors, and tourists who visit them each year. We're going to keep our parks and facilities safe, and we'll continue to maintain them. We will continue to host events throughout the year, and will renew our commitment to provide dozens of free programs and recreational activities. We will continue to offer some of the best facilities in the country to the public, at low—or no—cost to its members. And we won't let this period of fiscal uncertainty prevent us from building towards the future of a greener New York.

#### **FY2011 BUDGET OVERVIEW**

At the same time, as with every other agency in the city and every other municipality throughout the country, we will be forced to make difficult choices this fiscal year. All told, our current plan will reduce our Fiscal Year 2011 Preliminary expense budget by a little more than \$40 million from our Fiscal Year 2010 Adopted budget, which is an 11 percent cut.

We plan to reach this goal by cutting back in a few areas. The most significant will be headcount, where we are aiming to reduce our workforce by more than 11 percent from Fiscal Year 2010 levels. We will extend our hiring freeze another year and reduce our number of Job Training Participants by 735 full-time equivalent positions. We have also come up with an innovative accelerated attrition program, where all full-time employees who voluntarily resign or retire will be eligible to take a two-month seasonal position at their current title and base salary level. We have already received some interest from employees in this program, and we are currently in negotiations with labor unions to offer it to all employees by mid-April. If this program is unsuccessful, we will be forced to implement layoffs to meet our target headcount.

You may also have heard that we currently plan to close four outdoor pools and shorten the pool season by two weeks. We don't relish this task, but doing so would help the City save more than \$1.4 million. The four pools have not been chosen yet, and we are reviewing user rates, proximity to other swimming venues, and pool conditions to make a final decision. The last two weeks of August have traditionally been the lightest in terms of pool attendance. Unfortunately, it will be a tough decision for us no matter what the outcome.

Through these, plus other, smaller, cuts, we expect to be able to weather this difficult year. Of course, the preliminary budget forecast also depends upon the results of budget negotiations that are currently being held in Albany. As you know, all non-uniformed agencies were asked to cut an additional 7.3 percent. We have not had time to come up with a specific menu of cuts, but our contingency plan is to prepare for close to 500 additional layoffs beyond our current attrition. This extreme level of layoffs would lead to significant service interruptions, including the possible closure of recreation centers or even some parks. I am sure the Council and our State officials will agree that we are all hoping to avoid this scenario.

#### 2009: A LOOK BACK

To see how the agency will operate going forward, it's instructive to review what we have accomplished in 2009. Last year, we weathered a few storms as an agency—not only the start of the fiscal downturn, but also literal storms, such as the one that ripped through northern Manhattan, the Bronx, and Randall's Island last August, destroying hundreds of trees, or the storm in the Rockaways that eroded more than 120,000 cubic yards of sand from the beach, or the beach closures forced by tropical storm Danny, or even the recent nor'easter, which generated the second-highest number of requests for immediate tree-related assistance of any storm in the past ten years. Despite these setbacks, and those of losing headcount and budget cuts, we were able to keep our parks clean and our beaches staffed. In fact, we recruited more than 1,200 lifeguards to monitor our City beaches and pools last summer, surpassing our annual goal for the first time.

Beyond that, we also got to work on building and renovating parks. From signature projects such as Concrete Plant Park in the Bronx, to neighborhood playgrounds such as Bushwick Playground or Corona Golf Playground, we completed projects across the city—141 in all, surpassing even our initial targets, and 80 percent of those projects were on time and under budget.

We've continued to offer a wide array of programming throughout our park system. We joined with non-profit and private partners to develop new nutrition programs, such as Fun Food, Smart Food, a 12-week cooking and nutrition program administered by the Children's Aid Society and funded by Jessica Seinfeld, and Cook Shop, a program run by the Food Bank of NYC that will encourage our children to eat healthier. Much has been made of the crises of obesity and its related illnesses that are affecting our children, and programs such as these will help us to combat this problem.

We're also continuing to teach children swimming skills, to help them avoid drowning and help them learn to love the water. Our Learn to Swim program has kept growing in 2009. Last year, we taught 22,236 young New Yorkers how to swim, and we increased the membership of our summer program by 15 percent more than the year before.

And we are building for the future. I know we have often mentioned the number of trees we have planted since the launch of MillionTreesNYC, but the total is staggering. By the end of 2009, we planted 303,827 trees, and we're up to 315,979 today, and we remain well ahead of our planting projections. As part of PlaNYC, we also converted a hundred schoolyards to playgrounds to the public by year's end, and started our work on Calvert Vaux Park and the McCarren Park Pool, two of the plan's eight regional parks projects. In a period where we have had to recommit our resources, we also have to work to build with the long term in mind.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

In fact, we have broadened our focus on sustainability. We are making inroads in greening and energy efficiency, and as you'll soon hear, we are at the forefront of practical environmental education. As this fiscal crisis has shown us, we must work to make New York more sustainable not only to improve the local environment, but to help our pocketbooks and checkbooks as well. If we make small investments in the environment now, even in this economy, they will pay off for us the next time we have to make these difficult choices.

#### Green Roofs

In prior testimony, we have told you about the green roof that our Five Borough Technical Services Division installed on top of their facility on Randall's Island. This is not only the first green roof installed in a Parks Department complex, but it has also become a living laboratory for green roof technology. It is the only known green roof in the country to feature distinct green roof systems side-by-side. The 18 systems are testing different soils, soil depths and plant life, covering almost 17,000 square feet of the roof of the Five Borough Technical Services Center. We plan to expand this program in 2010, adding 11 more systems, and covering as much as an acre of the facility. I encourage each of the members of the committee to take a tour of this roof if you have not yet seen it.

We are not only making the city greener and more energy efficient through the installation of the green roof systems, but we are also contributing to the knowledge base of this emergent field. That is why we are going to expand our green roof campaign to ten recreation centers, in partnership with staff members from Columbia University. These ten locations will give us a test area of more than 10,000 square feet, where the native plants, growth medium and maintenance conditions will be the same. The only variables will be the various roof locations in the city and any local micro-climate conditions.

## Recycling

In 2010, we also plan to begin expanding our in-park recycling program. We have been working closely with the Department of Sanitation, who will provide us with metal decorative recycling bins that we will then place at up to 50 park sites. In addition, our own Operations division is planning to ramp up our bottle recycling program as well, which we hope to roll out to more than 100 locations throughout the city. Outdoor recycling will always be a challenge, but it is one that we hope to meet.

#### Green Fleet

Moreover, our award-winning green fleet will be getting even greener. Already, 64 percent of the Parks-operated vehicles are green, but by the end of the year, that number will rise to 72 percent. Just to give one example, we have purchased 17 new medium duty hybrid electric rack trucks. These are the cutting edge — our first diesel-electric units, as opposed to the gasoline electric light duty hybrids like the Toyota Prius and Ford Escape. Parks is the second biggest purchaser of these units in the nation.

And we're continuing to seek out new ways to save energy. As I speak, we are testing a new solar panel that we have placed on top of one of our electric GEM carts. We want to learn if the solar panel can help us save money on battery costs by increasing their life.

#### **Natural Research**

In the same way that we're studying the effects of solar panels upon our energy usage, we're using New York City's urban tree canopy as a setting for natural science. Last year, we finished converting an old officers' building into the Urban Field Station at Fort Totten, Queens. This knowledge center is an extension of our partnership with the United States Forest Service's Northern Research Station, and we expect it will become a base of operations for local and visiting scientists.

Additionally, we have received millions of dollars in grant funding to research our city's environment. Thanks to grants from the USFS and the National Urban & Community Forestry Advisory Council, we have partnered with major universities to study the relationship between trees, air quality, and respiratory health. Last year, we also partnered with USFS and our own Department of Health & Mental Hygiene to collect urban forest data in 150 locations throughout the city, as part of the new New York City Community Air Survey. And thanks to a long-term grant from the National Science Foundation, we expect to create a time series of LANDSAT satellite imagery quantifying the change in vegetative cover in New York City.

### Green Design

Additional grants, including a \$2 million grant though the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Clean Water funding, will allow us to build Greenstreets that capture stormwater, and then study their effects. This is one manifestation of our commitment to designing greener parks, facilities, and open spaces. Our new parks are also being designed to direct runoff into rain gardens, rather than into catch basins, where runoff could instead overwhelm our sewer system. We're also implementing grey water systems that will re-use spray shower run off to irrrigate planting beds. We are also ensuring that any new building costing more than \$2 million is Silver LEED certified. The first LEED-certified building, the Carmine Carro Community Center in Marine Park, Brooklyn, is already under construction. Even our existing facilities are getting greener. This winter, we began using biodiesel 20 in all our heating oil tanks, building on last year's successful use of biodiesel 5.

#### **Green Jobs**

Just as with our Greenstreets, we are fortunate to be able to secure funding through ARRA and other federal grants, with the help of many of our partner agencies. We have secured at least \$12 million in funding for green jobs through ARRA so far, for a total of 553 full-time equivalent jobs (494 JTPs, 59 CSAs). We are offering these jobs through our Parks Opportunity Program, or POP, which is our landmark transitional employment program that has already successfully transitioned more than 11,000 New Yorkers from public assistance into the workforce. Among the new initiatives are POP Connect, a year-long program that will give 100 potentially "disconnected" young people between the ages of 18 and 24 the chance to gain education and employment. POP Ed/Hort, an existing program that trains our POP participants in horticultural skills, will be expanded by 14 additional positions. Perhaps no program, however, demonstrates our commitment to sustainable growth as much as our landmark MillionTreesNYC Training Program.

This program gives several young adults, many of whom have previously struggled to find educational and employment opportunities, a chance to take a position—and develop a career a career—in the green jobs sector. For seven months, these participants take courses in botany and biology, learn about the urban environment, and meet with leaders in their future field of employ. These young people, many of whom once had virtually no connection to the natural New York, today can hack through vines or scale a tree without thinking twice.

Trainees also develop the skills they need to get hired, such as how to prepare a résumé, or to write a cover letter, and their talents are in demand. Of the first graduating class of 25 members, twenty have already found green jobs in the not-for-profit or government sectors. Next month, 31 more Trainees are expected to graduate, and we have funding for an additional 15 Trainees to enter the program in October.

#### **CONCLUSION**

We have always enjoyed working with the City Council during the budget process. In the past, the Council has helped us hire and deploy more playground associates, Parks Enforcement Patrol officers and Urban Park Rangers, and field staff to help the public. Now that times are tight, we hope to continue to work productively to keep our city's green spaces and active programs running as smoothly as possible.

In closing, we want to share with you one other initiative that we will be launching this spring. As you know, we have already have thousands of dedicated volunteers who devote their free time to caring for their neighborhood parks. We want to broaden that model and create a Park Greeter Corps program, where volunteers from in and around designated parks, would serve as Park Ambassadors. Each volunteer would commit to at least one three-hour shift per week in their park. Greeters would travel through their park, offering our patrons directions and information. They may also give out local and citywide park information, help us promote events, report emergencies and issues to 911 or 311, and conduct surveys and remind park users of our rules. In particular, the greeters will encourage park visitors to throw away their litter in bins and promote recycling at locations where we have bins.

And we need their help, because there has been a spike in litter conditions in parks. These conditions could be drastically reduced if New Yorkers would simply throw their trash into garbage bins. This spring Parks will focus on making sure that ball fields, picnic areas, and barbeque areas are treated as litter-free zones. We will work with permit holders to ensure that they are cleaning up after their games or picnics are over, and our Parks Enforcement Patrol officers will be on-site to educate permit holders and enforce litter compliance when necessary. The volunteer Greeters would be another friendly face at these locations and throughout the park system encouraging people to keep our parks clean.

We would welcome the Council's support when we finally roll out this initiative, and we also hope you can help us find dedicated New Yorkers in your district who might want to be part of our Park Greeter Corps. We thank you for your support, and we can answer any questions that you may have at this time.



## City Council Preliminary Budget Hearing Parks & Recreation Committee Fiscal Year 2011

New Yorkers for Parks Testimony March 24, 2010

Good afternoon. My name is Lee Stuart and I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks, the only independent watchdog and advocate for all New York City parks, beaches and playgrounds. The mission of New Yorkers for Parks is to ensure that all New Yorkers enjoy a world class parks system. Of particular concern are parks in all five boroughs that rely primarily on city funding.

#### Overview

Not since 1992 has the Parks Department's budget seen such drastic cuts as those proposed for fiscal year 2011. New Yorkers for Parks is here today to stress the gravity of this situation and to implore the City Council to act so that our parks get the support they deserve. Our parks are our back and front yards, our access to open space and fresh air, and have often been called the city's lungs. They are as essential to our quality of life as other major infrastructure systems. Some of our parks are world renown, others are known only to their neighbors, but all are loved and the city would be a poorer place without them.

In the Preliminary Budget for FY 2011, the Mayor has proposed a nearly \$20 million cut to Parks, with only \$239 million allotted in City Funds. This is still less than half of one percent of city spending. This \$20 million decrease from last year most notably includes the reduction of nearly 500 staff positions, the closure of four pool closings and a reduced summer swimming season. The loss of jobs and income to the workers will place additional burdens on families already struggling under a tough economy.

If the budget is passed as it stands, \$45 million will have been cut from Parks in the last three years: That is more than a 15% reduction!

In a time when many New Yorkers are staying local for their vacations, clean, safe and well maintained parks and beaches are in high demand. A study by the Trust for Public Land suggests that the economic downturn has resulted in an increase in the use of public parks and playgrounds, particularly among families with young children. It is the City's obligation to ensure that our parks are sufficiently funded to ensure safe recreational opportunities.

## **Contingency Budget**

In addition, if the City does not receive expected support from Albany, park services will be even more drastically reduced. Mayor Bloomberg testified in front of the State Assembly and State Senate that the Governor's proposed budget would mean the

following for New York City's parks: "close to 19 percent of parks personnel, almost 500 people would face layoffs - the equivalent of closing all pools, beaches, and recreation centers, citywide."

We are glad to see that both the State Senate and Assembly in their budget resolutions include the necessary funding to keep state parks open. Our hope is that the final state budget will include sufficient aid to the City to avert draconian cuts in park staff and services.

#### Restorations

Clearly, in these dire economic times, all agencies will have to do more with less. At the minimum, New Yorkers for Parks requests that out of the proposed nearly \$20 million cut, the following \$16 million is restored:

## \$2 Million to Swimming Pools:

This restoration would prevent the closure of 4 swimming pools and keep pools open for the full swimming season.

### \$500,000 for Seasonal Staff

The Parks Department anticipates delayed hiring for selected seasonal positions for FY 2011. Seasonal Staff positions care for parks during the busy summer months.

## \$3.5m for Tree Pruning

The tree pruning budget was cut last year by 53% and has not been restored, leaving our many new trees without regular pruning. Considering the city's goal to plant one million trees through PlaNYC, the ongoing concern of street tree maintenance, and the recent passage of Local Law 4, this is a particularly harmful loss. We are grateful that the Council has historically restored cuts to tree pruning and hope that this year will be no different.

## \$10m for Job Training Participants (TPs)

These essential staff positions provide year-round daily maintenance, supervision, and "eyes on the park" for parks in all five boroughs. The Parks Opportunity Program (POP) is one of the nation's largest transitional employment programs. The proposed cuts to this program will have a significant and adverse effect on the maintenance of our City's 29,000 acres of parks, beaches, and playgrounds by limiting personnel to only work in the spring and summer months. Without year-round care, the resulting deferred maintenance will add real costs to the Parks. It isn't smart fiscal policy to call deferred maintenance a "savings."

Again, on behalf of all New Yorkers in all five boroughs whose quality of life is improved because of the recreational, open space, and sheer beauty of our parks, New Yorkers for Parks calls on the City Council to restore the needed funding for a world class parks system for a world class city. We simply can not afford, either through action or inaction, to allow our parks and city to move back toward the conditions of the 1980s.

Thank you.



Testimony: Hearing on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2011 Preliminary Budget Parks & Recreation - March 24, 2010

"The budget isn't a true budget. It is a sham....it does not reflect the demands of the department." - Parks Commissioner Robert Moses testifying before the City budget Director in 1935 after being instructed by Mayor LaGuardia to submit a less than appropriate budget.

Good afternoon, my name is Geoffrey Croft. I am the president and founder of NYC Park Advocates. NYC Park Advocates, Inc. is a non-profit, non-partisan watchdog group dedicated to restoring public funding, improving public parks, increasing park services and expanding open space and public recreation in NYC. We are the only city-wide park advocacy group that monitors all city, state, and federal parkland and open space.

I am here today to give testimony on the FY 11 budget for the Parks Department, specifically the Expense Budget. Over the last 40 years no other city agency has lost a greater percentage of its workforce than the Parks Department. Despite a \$ 3 Billion Surplus this year (IBO - March 4, 2010) Mayor Bloomberg proposed budget allocates only a fraction, just \$ 239.1 million in tax levy funds, of the money desperately needed to properly maintain, operate, secure, and program our public parks. This is a reduction from \$264 million - to \$239 million, a \$ 25 million dollar cut in expense funding from the adjusted expense budget from a few months ago.

As a percentage of the City's budget, this would represent only a 0.37% allocation in tax levy funds to maintain and operate parks. This represents a historic low for the agency responsible for 14% of the City's land.

These cuts would be devastating to an already decimated city agency. Severe cuts being proposed under the Mayor's plan include staff and programs:

- The Mayor's forecast for the next year and a half calls for the Parks Department to lose 748 out of 3,722 full-time jobs (20%). And if you count full-time and full time equivalent head-count they lose 1,156 jobs.
- 450 seasonal jobs delayed or cut this year.
- Four pools will be closed all summer and the swimming season will be shortened by two weeks citywide. (NYC already ranks dead last in the provision of public swimming pools for a high density city)

- . Headcount Reduction: Eliminate 173 full-time positions either voluntarily or through lay-offs. The target goal is 173 positions but according to the DPR's budget office "there is no cap."
- The full-time and seasonal hiring freeze will affect many staffing areas, including maintenance and operation. Severe cuts include \$ 4.5 million over the next few months for Job Training Participants, (JTP's) and \$ 10 million reduction next year. The last number represents s 25% cut in the program. (The federal government puts in fifty percent of the JTP's forty million dollar budget with the city and state splitting the rest.) These positions are essential in providing basic cleaning services during the busiest season for parks. Due to the hiring freeze 105 vacancies will remain unfilled.
- PlaNYC Hiring Delay: Parks will delay for one year the hiring of 88 new full-time and 11 employees in Fiscal 2011.

For more than four decades, the city, state and federal governments have allocated a fraction of the funds needed to maintain our vast park system. The city's parks, once the most celebrated and unprecedented public works program in the nation, have become dumping grounds and havens for drug use, prostitution, the homeless and criminal activity. Their maintenance and safety have plummeted under the weight of crippling budget cuts. Despite being in violation of the City Charter for decades, the City has been able to get away with this with virtual impunity. The question is, how much longer will the city's elected officials collectively be able to ignore this public heath crisis.

The parks department is in dire need of thousands of additional workers and hundreds of millions of dollars of additional expense funding. Funding and personnel many say the agency will never receive. This is shameful. The city routinely allocates one third of what the parks department actually needs. It is imperative the city allocate a budget that reflects the true needs of the parks department. Unfortunately this one does not come remotely close as usual.

For decades the public has been told the expense funding needed to hire the skilled laborers, park enforcement, qualified managers, among other positions, that are so desperately needed, are not available for our public parks. This proposed budget is an unfortunate and constant reminder of how in both good economic times and bad, public funding for parks is simply not a priority. Our elected officials refuse to allocate adequate funding. The political will necessary to provide funding for safe, well maintained parks, and public recreation programs that every neighborhood deserves, simply does not exist. It is not a priority.

Land under the jurisdiction of the City's parks department occupies more than 14 percent of the city yet the city's elected officials regularly allocate less than one half of one percent from tax levy funds for the maintenance and operation of our parks. But that wasn't always the case. Until 1960, the DPR regularly received 1.4 % percent and higher. However, due to a drastic shift in priorities – coupled with the city's increased financial responsibilities for other government services – over the last 45 years the park's department share of the city budget from tax levy funds has rapidly declined. The city has routinely allocated less than one half of one percent.

That is more than a \$ 10 billion dollar decrease in expense budget allocations over the last 45 years, had the appropriations ratio remained fixed at 1.4%. In 2004, the City allocated only \$ 153 million or (0.38%) of its \$ 44.3 billion dollar budget for the parks department, the lowest percentage in modern history. Billions of dollars in capital funding have also disappeared. These funds are also desperately needed to repair a vastly aging and neglected infrastructure.

Until the early 70's, virtually every park and playground had fixed staffing, with most having multiple staff assigned to their maintenance and the provision of recreation programming. Today, less than two percent have dedicated staffing. With increasing regularity, parks with permanent employees are those that benefit from having significant private funds. Unwilling to accept its Charter - mandated responsibilities for the care of its parks the city has instead turned to the private sector. In city parks today, adequate maintenance, programming and dedicated park enforcement now depends on what zip code you are in, and the willingness and ability of our citizens to raise and leverage private funds. With increasing regularity, the public is being asked to shoulder the municipal responsibility of managing and maintaining what is supposed to be a basic, essential city service. Services for which we already pay taxes.

However, the City's increasing reliance on these public/private partnerships has resulted in a vastly inequitable distribution of services. It has quickly become "a tale of two cities." Experience with public/private partnerships over the last twenty years has proven that private subsidies to individual parks has created an enormous gap between the haves and the have-nots, while ignoring the real problem - that our parks are not funded as an essential city service.

Every September the local community boards meet with the various city agencies to present their budget priories and requests. And before they even get started they are invariably reminded by the parks department not to bother to ask for expense items because the chances of receiving them are next to zero. And if they do bother to submit a request, they receive the same official response, year after year, if they are lucky, "The agency recommends funding this expense budget request, but at this time the availability of funds is uncertain." Its important to remember that in most instances CB requests represent just a fraction of what the community actually needs.

The deplorable conditions found in many of the city's parks and open spaces has been caused by the tremendous losses in public funding over the last 45 years. The neglect of these valuable assets has caused a serious underutilization of parks in an overcrowded city and has created significant barriers to promoting health and providing safety. These issues affect public health, public safety, the environment, ADA, environmental justice, the equal protection clause of the Constitution, the economy, education and basic quality-of-life.

And although this is a city-wide problem that affects virtually every segment of the population, it is no secret that a disproportionate amount of the most severe issues exist in poor neighborhoods, the city's underserved communities, namely, the working class, the poor and the disenfranchised and in areas populated by people predominantly of color. This is of course the great irony considering these are the communities that rely on these public services the most. This pattern of neglect must be reversed.

Adequate funding for parks will help to make every neighborhood in NYC a better, safer and healthier place to live, work and raise a family, as well as to encourage economic investment. We believe if the City of New York is committed to having a park system, then it must be adequately funded. It will require far more political will and collective, focused public participation, much greater than has been demonstrated over the last 40 years. The health and well being of our great city absolutely depends on it. It is quite simple: Safe, properly maintained and well programmed parks save lives. Our goal is to help solve this public health dilemma.

The solutions to this public heath dilemma can only be solved with the cooperation of our city, state and federal elected officials in partnership with the public at large. Our city is in desperate need of a "sound, basic" park, open space and recreation system, to borrow language from the public education funding fight. This means a much greater commitment and priority, including a far greater allocation of resources. This also means much greater accountability from our elected officials and the agencies charged with the delivery of such services. The public, and all of the city's elected officials, must come together to demand the equitable delivery of services, based on needs, not politics. One City, One Standard.

The City Charter clearly states the Park Department's responsibilities are to "manage and care for all parks, to maintain the beauty and utility of all parks, playgrounds and other recreational properties, to maintain trees and other plantings, to maintain areas for conservation and the preservation of natural beauty, and to supervise recreation programs." These are among the many responsibilities charged to the agency. But without adequate funding, the agency is unable to perform its duties.

Unfortunately, the city's long pattern of neglect is all too evident. A great deal of work must to be done, but success can only be achieved if we begin to address these issues honestly, which unfortunately the city has consistently refused to do. The response from the city is always the same: "We have the greatest parks in the world. Parks have never been better." During the last mayoral campaign the favored phrase was "we are witnessing the golden age of parks."

I can not help but be reminded of that Robert Moses quote that I began my testimony. Every time a parks commissioner or parks official comes before the City Council and is prevented by a Mayor from presenting the true financial and personnel needs of the agency, they are doing a tremendous disservice to the people of this great city.

"A budget is more than an accounting tool; it is a public statement reflecting the priorities and political philosophies of the mayor who proposes it and the Council that passes it." —League of Women Voters



# Testimony of David Rivel Executive Director of City Parks Foundation Wednesday, March 23, 2010 NYC Council Parks Committee FY2011 Preliminary Budget Hearing

Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairperson Mark-Viverito and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify today. My name is David Rivel. I am the Executive Director of City Parks Foundation (CPF).

The City Council has a long tradition of supporting City Parks Foundation's work in parks, and I am here to request your support for CPF's \$200,000 Leadership Expense Request to assist us in providing our free education, sports, and community organizing initiatives, as well as a \$250,000 Leadership Capital Request to create a *Junior Tennis Center* in Queens.

As many of you know, CPF works in over 800 parks city-wide and plays an indispensable role in sustaining parks as focal points of urban communities. Our free programs serve 600,000 New Yorkers of all ages, backgrounds and ethnicities, with a focus on underserved communities. We run *Partnerships for Parks* (with the Department of Parks and Recreation) to help citizens become a force for change in their parks on a local level.

We work in every City Council district throughout the five boroughs.

We have an annual budget of \$9.5 million, and 90% of our income is raised privately from corporations, foundations, and individuals, with 10% coming from the City of New York, federal and state agencies. Your support allows us to provide free programming to communities all over New York City. Because of the economic downturn, it has been increasingly difficult to raise private funds, and City Council support now will help these free programs continue.

City Parks Foundation contributes to New York City's economic engine by employing 350 people every summer to conduct its free programming city-wide. CPF hires sports instructors for our free tennis, golf, and track & field programs; artists and performers for our cultural programs; and dozens of production assistants, stagehands, security staff, clean-up crews, and street teams. Our programs also have a significant "multiplier effect" in neighborhoods all across the city, drawing citizens into their local parks and supporting vendors, restaurants, and other neighborhood businesses.

#### Capital Request

In light of the tremendous success of our *Junior Golf Center* in Brooklyn, which the Council helped to fund, we now want to develop a *Junior Tennis Center* in Flushing Meadows Park in Queens. Like our *Junior Golf Center*, the *Junior Tennis Center* would provide equipment and instruction free of charge to youth, ages 5 to 16. Last year, with the support of Councilmember Ferreras, we received \$250,000 in capital funds from the City Council. We are asking the Council for the remaining \$250,000 needed to purchase the bubble to create an indoor facility, the *Junior Tennis Center*. The *Junior Tennis Center* will be operated in conjunction with the United States Tennis Association and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.

Testimony of David Rivel, Executve Director City Parks Foundation NYC Council Parks Committee FY2010 Preliminary Budget Hearing Page 2 of 4

### **Expense Request**

Below are detailed descriptions of our free programs. Included in your packet are our 2009 brochures, a list of our summer programs by borough, and a list of the local groups we work with through our *Partnerships for Parks* program. As always, we are grateful to the Council for its support.

### **Sports Programs**

- One of the largest municipal programs in the country, CityParks Tennis provides free equipment and instruction to more than 7,000 kids, ages 5-16, each year. This free program lets young people learn the sport and progress through three levels of instruction, with additional opportunities to build their knowledge and skills through tournaments, clinics, and an advanced training academy. Hundreds of graduates have won college scholarships, achieved regional and national rankings, and a talented handful has even played in the US Open.
- CityParks Track & Field offers free instruction and use of equipment in a variety of track
  and field events, including short distance running with hurdles, shot put, long jump and
  more, to 2,000 children ages 5-16 each summer. The program culminates with a citywide
  track meet held at Icahn Stadium, where our young athletes compete individually and in
  teams representing their home park.
- CityParks Golf brings free instruction to over 3,000 children ages 5-16 each year. In addition to beginner and intermediate lessons, we offer an advanced training program for 25 talented youth under the direction of PGA professionals, supplemented by instructional clinics with professional players and advanced tournament play. By offering free instruction and access to equipment in communities across the five boroughs, CPF has been able to introduce thousands of kids to the game, who would not otherwise have the opportunity.

The CityParks Junior Golf Center is a state-of-the-art facility in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn that provides free golf instruction to more than 1,600 kids each year, ages 5-17. Completely free of cost and only open to juniors, the Junior Golf Center is the first comprehensive facility of its kind in the nation, and features a six-hole golf course, practice putting green, chipping green with sand trap, covered driving range, and a clubhouse with classroom space for learning.

• CityParks Seniors Fitness presents two sessions of classes (spring and fall) that introduce nearly 1,000 seniors to athletic activities in a supportive and social environment each year. In addition to promoting fitness and well-being, the program also encourages seniors to enjoy and utilize the community resource of their local park.

#### **Education Programs**

City Parks Foundation's free education programs help over 5,000 students meet state standards and connect teachers, students, and families with parks. CPF works in Title I schools that need educational support. Our education department works with teachers, providing development and training workshops and equip educators with the skills to teach science and environmental

Testimony of David Rivel, Executve Director City Parks Foundation NYC Council Parks Committee FY2010 Preliminary Budget Hearing Page 3 of 4

classes in an outdoor setting. CPF works with special needs students, bi-lingual classes, and provides an alternative mechanism for children who may have difficulties learning in a traditional classroom setting.

- Coastal Classroom educates youth and adults about their waterfront and facilitates local
  action to improve it. The program uses the waterfront as an outdoor classroom with
  topics of instruction including the the impact of illegal dumping and sewage runoff; local
  habitats; invasive species; and restoration and preservation. Coastal Classroom fosters an
  increased awareness of the importance of the NYC waterfront and local parks, and offers
  simple steps that everyone can take to protect them.
- Seeds to Trees introduces New York City elementary and middle school children to
  nature in the urban environment, and provides public school teachers with professional
  development workshops, empowering them to use city parks as an extension of the
  classroom. We have also launched an early childhood development version of the
  program, working with Head Start programs, to bring three and four year olds into parks
  for hands-on, exploratory lessons.
- Learning Gardens has renovated four abandoned lots and turned them into community gardens that are used as environmental and social learning resources for 2,500 participants from local schools, youth programs, churches, and other community organizations. The program consists of structured lessons provided to schools and community centers during the academic year, a summer program, workshops, festivals, and family days open to all community members.
- CityParks Productions, an expansion of CPF's technology after-school program formerly known as Hook & Smith Productions, now operates out of five recreation centers, one in each borough. The program combines video and sound production, media literacy, and creative writing activities with academic support and life skills for middle and high school students. Smith Productions' documentary, "Gentrification of the Lower East Side," written, directed and produced by our summer participants, won Kodak's Excellence in Filmmaking Award, and was honored as "Best Documentary" at the RECYouth's 4th Annual Multimedia Festival.

### **Partnerships for Parks**

- Partnerships for Parks rallies people around park revitalization, helps New Yorkers work together to make neighborhood parks thrive, and supports a growing network of 65,000 volunteers and 4,000 community groups respond to conditions in their parks where a strong, organized voice can make a difference. Partnerships for Parks operates on the belief that active, involved communities are essential to vibrant parks and a healthy city. Partnerships for Parks is a recognized model of success in bringing about concrete, lasting transformations in our parks and in changing the way various stakeholders work together to improve our city's public spaces.
- Catalyst: Reclaiming the Waterfront is a four-year, multi-million dollar initiative to
  revive three significant waterfront sites across New York City: Soundview Park in the
  Bronx, Kaiser and Calvert Vaux Parks in Brooklyn, and East River Park in Manhattan.
  Catalyst will focus an intensive investment of staff and resources to improve shoreline

Testimony of David Rivel, Executve Director City Parks Foundation NYC Council Parks Committee FY2010 Preliminary Budget Hearing Page 4 of 4

access for local residents, address gaps in citywide waterfront revitalization efforts, and transform underused waterfront parkland into active public spaces. CPF recognizes the importance of public involvement in revitalization efforts and is dedicated to cultivating local constituencies for the long-term protection of New York City waterfronts and the enduring revitalization of the communities they border.

Once again, thank you for hearing my testimony today. We hope we can count on the City Council's support for the free programming we provide in council districts all over the city.



www.CVHaction.org

#### Good evening.

My name is Darryl Pleasant. I am a leader of Community Voices Heard for the last year. I was in the Parks Opportunities Program in 2006-2007. The good part about the program was I was getting a paycheck, and I was able to take care of my family a little better than I would have on Public Assistance. I was able to pay my rent.

At first I was the clean up crew at the Park on Grand Street and I did not really enjoy that but I stuck with it. Then I did security for East River Park through POPs which I though would have more security and I would get hired. POPS is a good program. The only bad part was I did not get a job at the end of the six months

Community Voices Heard has been fighting to end WEP, workfare unpaid slave labor since 1996. We believe subsidized transitional jobs are a great alternative to WEP, New York City's version of workfare which is slave labor.

I also did a WEP assignment in my housing development, Taft Houses. WEP is slave labor. It is like getting paid \$1 an hour to do the same job another person is getting a real paycheck and security. You have to do this in order to receive your cash assistance and to keep a roof over your head so that your children are taken care of.

The city created a couple of transitional jobs programs in 2001.

Last year, CVH helped get the city \$13.1 million TANF Emergency Contingency Fund money so there could be more subsidized jobs like POPS (Parks Opportunities Program). This should be increasing the number of POPS not cutting the program.

Instead of expanding the subsidized jobs program Commissioner Doar and Mayor Bloomberg plan to cut the program. Cut jobs when we are in a recession and there is more of a need than ever for jobs. This is an outrage.

The State received 1.2 Billion dollars in TANF Emergency Contingency Fund money. That is to help folks like myself who are low income, not to fill other budget holes.

We need you to put that money back and increase the number of transitional jobs, not cut them. There should not be any reduction in those jobs.

End WEP, create alternative jobs programs like POPS. Thank you.



www.CVHaction.org

#### Good afternoon.

My name is Suzanne Lavington. I am a native New Yorker. Thank you to Community Voices Heard I am able to give a testimony today.

I worked for POPs Program in 2004 and 2007. I worked at PS 155 playground in Manhattan between 118th and 117th Street. I worked for District 11. I am well known in the community. People trusted me to watch their kids while they ran errands.

The reason I was not extended for permanent work I do not know. I was a good worker. There is favoritism within the Parks Department. It is not clear why certain people are chosen and others are not. This should be looked into.

You can advance in POPs and also take a training class. The Parks Department does help you do your resume but you do not even get a response saying they received your resume. This leaves people feeling very unclear about what is happening.

The transitional jobs should be expanded to even more city agencies.

You can receive unemployment after your six months if you do not get picked up when your time is up.

The experience with POPs can be rewarding as long as HRA doesn't interfere.

We need the City Council to put the money back and increase the number of transitional jobs, not cut them. There should not be any reduction in those jobs.

End WEP, create alternative jobs programs like POPS. Thank you.

Testimony of Jay O. Sanders
On behalf of
The Public Theater
Before the New York City Council Committee for Parks
March 24, 2010

Good morning, my name is Jay O. Sanders, and I'm an actor. Since the day I arrived in New York City right out of college 34 years ago and auditioned for Joseph Papp, I've appeared regularly at The Public Theater downtown and the Delacorte Theater in Central Park; they have become second homes to me. So, I was honored to be asked to offer testimony today on their behalf and thank Chairman Melissa Mark-Viverito along with your colleagues on this committee, for holding this hearing and affording us this opportunity. Let me start off by thanking the Council for all of the support you showed to our Cultural Institutions last year.

The Public Theater is a member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG), a coalition of 33 cultural institutions that are charged with, and provide, exceptional stewardship for many of the most important New York City-owned properties throughout the five boroughs. Among the CIGs are many of our city's cultural and neighborhood cornerstones and, proudly, a large number of the most respected art, science, and performing institutions in the world. The CIG's diverse exhibitions and educational programs attract 18 million New York residents, families, schoolchildren, teachers and international tourists each year. They are the jewels in our City's crown and an important reason my wife and I chose to raise our son here. Now, at sixteen and a product of the NYC Public school system, he is a sophomore in the drama department at LaGuardia, and passes daily between Lincoln Center and Julliard on his way to and from school.

The Public Theater, itself, serves over 300,000 visitors annually. Each summer, The Public's signature program, Shakespeare in the Park, attracts over 100,000 visitors who are given the opportunity to enjoy professional productions in the open air, completely free, the first of its kind in this country. During the summer months, it provides jobs to countless people working in and around the theatre. Tourists from all over the world come to see premier actors perform at the first free outdoor Shakespeare Festival in the country, drawing large numbers of people into the park who patronize the vendors and surrounding restaurants. Each year, The Public's associated education programs are attended by 2,000 NYC school children from underserved areas. The Public also brings our Shakespeare Lab Education programs to all of the Boroughs, so that children and families can learn how to read, understand and perform Shakespeare, and this year, we are working closely with the Parks Department to hold free performances of a Shakespeare production in parks throughout the city.

My own first Delacorte experience was from the audience while I was still in high school — Stacy Keach's "Hamlet;" James Earl Jones as Claudius, Collen Dewhurst as Gertrude, Barnard Hughes as Polonius, and Laertes was a young Sam Waterston. And, since "Hamlet" is a famously long play, Joe Papp, in his fabled ringmaster style, decided to arrange for stars from his three simultaneous Broadway hits to run up to the Park after their curtain calls to appear in the fifth act; Tom Aldredge from "Sticks and Bones" and Charles Durning from "That Championship Season," came up to play the two gravediggers, and Raul Julia raced over from the rock musical version of "Two Gentlemen of Verona" just in time to slide into costume and onstage for a showy turn as Osric. But what I remember most, the fateful moment that sealed my fate, making me realize I had to find a way to get myself up onto that stage one day, was a moment in the very

opening scene. As the last remnants of the day's sun made the skyline glow in the distance, handing off the duties of illumination to the stagelights, Bernardo and Marcellus raced up Ming Cho Lee's circular staircases into the heavens, calling out in pursuit of the Ghost of Hamlet's father, when suddenly, out of nowhere, a strong gust of wind came up and whipped their capes behind them as though they might lift off and I could feel the whole audience, as one, take a breath. Mother Nature had made her entrance, taking her rightful place among the leading players, and we all settled in together for the ride. "Here we go!" I thought. "Prospero's tempest, Romeo's moonlight, Lear's thunder – this is Shakespeare right where he belongs, wrapped in the elements!"

Many other CIG's also have special relationships with the Parks Department; the Botanical Gardens and Zoos need to tend to their animals and plants seven days a week, 365 days a year. In support of the Parks Department's "MillionTreesNYC" program, the New York Botanical Garden has planted more than 3,000 new trees in its native Forest, historic living collections, and community gardens in the Bronx. They also partner with the Parks Department to train Park Foresters in Urban Tree Care, and to train the next generation of horticulturists in the Park Opportunity Program. The Wildlife Conservation Society manages the world's largest system of urban wildlife parks. The Parks Department provides essential capital infrastructure funds for aging facilities, supporting the refurbishment and maintenance of the parks which will improve the guest experience, increase attendance, and protect the health of the animals.

I understand, of course, that this a trying time for the City of New York and that difficult decisions must be made regarding funding. However, if the proposed cuts to The Parks

Department or to the Department of Cultural Affairs go through as planned, many institutions and programs, including the ones I just spoke of, will suffer. I ask the Council to maintain its commitment to New York City's Parks and Cultural Institutions, that you support the CIGs request for a restoration of FY10 funding of \$16 million and FY11 proposed PEG of \$8.7 million. In addition, we are asking for an additional \$2 million that was not restored in FY10 for a total request of \$26.7 million.

O, for a muse of fire that would ascend the brightest heaven of invention; a kingdom for a stage, Princes to act, and Monarchs to behold the swelling scene! We have a calling; not just to entertain but to inspire, using the blueprints that Shakespeare left us in this brilliant natural setting to dig deep and raise up the spirits of our collective past, to sound the resonance of our common humanity, to reach out to the best in ourselves and our world as we sit shoulder to shoulder as a community under the stars and take the time together, a breath, a pause to consider who we are, a moment gifted to us, for free...for our "public." With your leadership and support, the Cultural Institutions and Parks Department can continue our work together to maintain New York City's gems, to keep these uniquely important experiences alive and available to all New Yorkers. You are the guardians of their magic. Thank you for your time.

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