

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

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Chairperson

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Elizabeth Crowley
Julissa Ferreras
Vincent J. Gentile
James Vacca
Daniel Dromm
Jimmy Van Bramer
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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

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

Maria Roca

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CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Good afternoon. My name is Melissa Mark-Viverito. I'm chair of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. I really want to take a moment to thank everybody that's in this room. I really appreciate personally that people take time to come here and to express their positions and their points of view and to express their concerns. During the budget cycle in particular it's important that we hear from everybody. So I really want to thank the people that are here.

I want to welcome all of you to our fiscal 2011 preliminary budget hearing. Before I begin, I really would like to acknowledge first of all the colleagues that are here joining me. I have to my left Council Member James Vacca and to my right Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer. We do expect other colleagues to come in.

Today we are going to hear testimony from the Department of Parks and Recreation about its expense and capital preliminary budget actions, general agency operations and the fiscal 2011 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report.

The department's fiscal 2011 preliminary budget is approximately \$307.9 million, including city and non city funds. Approximately \$40.5 million less than the fiscal 2010 and opted budget. It includes \$37.1 million in programs to eliminate the gap or PEGs, \$910,000 in new agency needs and \$8.4 million in other adjustments.

The January 22 in capital commitment plan includes \$1.87 billion in fiscal 2010 through 2013 for the Parks Department, including city and non city funds. This represents 4.7% of the city's total \$39.14 billion January plan for Fiscals 2010-2103.

The agency's January commitment land for fiscal year's 2010 through 2013 is less than 1% greater than the \$1.85 billion scheduled in the September commitment plan, increase of \$17.8 billion.

The committee looks forward to hearing from the department about several critical issues including a reduction to the number of job training participants in the Parks opportunity program, the elimination of 173 Parks workers

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2 through managed retirement and layoffs, the fiscal
3 2010-2011 hiring freeze, delays in hiring seasonal
4 workers for PlaNYC projects and obviously by the
5 presence here in the room, about the closing of
6 the Park pools.

7 I would like to thank the committee
8 staffer their work in preparing for this hearing.
9 I want to thank Lyle Frank who is counsel to the
10 committee, Patrick Mulvihill who is the policy
11 analyst and Walter Pitts, finance analyst. I want
12 to thank you commissioner for being patient.

13 As you can well imagine, due to the
14 difficulties and the situation we find ourselves
15 in, our budget hearings have a lot of people
16 present to express their concerns. That's
17 important as well. I thank you for your patience.
18 With that I'd like to introduce Commissioner
19 Benepe. I would like to ask that you present your
20 testimony.

21 ADRIAN BENEPE: Good afternoon,
22 Chair Mark-Viverito and other members of the
23 committee. I'm Adrian Benepe. I'm the
24 Commissioner of the Department of Parks and
25 Recreation. I'm here on behalf of Mayor Bloomberg

and our First Deputy Mayor Harris. I want to thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today about the preliminary budget for fiscal year 2011.

I did bring with me a number of the key members of my staff. If you don't mind, I'll just quickly introduce them. If the questions get beyond my level of knowledge, I'm going to ask them to come help answer. With us today is our First Deputy Commissioner Liam Kavanagh, Robert Garafola, our Deputy Commissioner for Management and Budget; Kevin Jeffrey, Deputy Commissioner for Public Programs; Larry Scott Blackman, Deputy Commissioner for Community Outreach; Therese Braddock, Deputy Commissioner for Capital Projects; Keith Kerman, Assistant Commissioner for Citywide Operations; Jack Linn, Assistant Commissioner and Senior Counselor; Joshua Laird, Assistant Commissioner for Planning; and Parkland's Sue Donoghue, Assistant Commissioner for Sustainability and PlaNYC; Joanne Imohiosen, Assistant Commissioner for Nonprofit Partnerships; Betsy Smith, Assistant Commissioner for Revenue and Marketing Special Events; Mike Dockett,

Assistant Commissioner for the Urban Park Service;
David Stark, Assistant Commissioner for Budget and
Fiscal Management; Fiona Watt, Assistant
Commissioner for Forestry and Horticulture.

We also have with us Annika Holder
who is the Chief of the Parks Opportunity Program
and Mary Pazan who is our agency Contracting
Officer, particular for capital projects, and
Jonna Carmona-Graf who works at our capital
projects division. She is our Chief Team Leader.

And a number of other people here
of the Parks Department including Vickie Karp, our
Director of Public Affairs; Victor Calise, our
Accessibility Coordinator, and sitting with me is
Mike Schnall, Director of Government Relations and
alumnus of this fine body.

I want to thank you for giving us
this opportunity to talk to you. I do also want
to thank all the New Yorkers who have come out
today, in particular you've heard of New York's
bravest, you've heard of New York's finest, New
York's strongest, this is New York's fittest, our
very brave lifeguards.

We're also joined by a number of

other New Yorkers and people representing various Parks advocacy groups including New Yorkers for Parks, and our very good friends at the City Parks Foundation who are bringing wonderful free programs to parks across the city throughout the summer.

I'm sure as you've heard at your other oversight hearings or if you've read the papers this morning, this is a time of fiscal austerity for all the city's agencies and sadly the Department of Parks and Recreation is not immune to this period of economic retrenchment.

I've had the opportunity to speak to some of my colleagues in other cities and states and counties and as I talk to them all across the country, I've been hearing difficulties that state and local governments are facing particularly with their park systems.

Cities across the country have had to impose or raise fees or programs, reduce or privatize essential services and even here in our own Empire State we've heard how the New York State park system has been facing some real difficulties with keeping its parks open.

We are, of course, hoping to avoid some of the deepest cuts to our budget. But we are fortunate to have both a Mayor and a City Council who probably understand better than any of their peers in other cities how important parks are and how essential parks are as a key service.

That's why when I look for silver linings, one of the silver linings is that in the old days the Parks Department used to get cut worse than the other agencies and out cuts are commiserate with all the other non-uniformed agencies.

We are going to have to do more with less. I'm afraid that's the mantra we're all dealing with, and perhaps much less. But we're still going to do our best and this team working with me and the 6,000 or so Parks workers will do what we can to satisfy our most important and most loyal customers, which is the people of the City of New York who pay their taxes and pay our salaries.

That will mean focusing on core services. Barring significant changes in the projected budget, we'll keep the parks open, our

beaches will be open and ready for millions of New Yorkers and neighbors and tourists who visit them every year. We're going to keep our parks and facilities safe and we'll keep maintaining them.

We'll continue to host events throughout the year and we'll renew our commitment to provide scores if not hundreds 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 perhaps no cost to our citizens. We won't let this period of fiscal uncertainty prevent us from continuing to build a very green and productive future for the City of New York.

At the same time, however, as with every other agency in the city and every other municipality throughout the country, we'll 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 was about an 11% cut.

This goal we will try to reach by cutting by cutting back in a few areas. The most

significant will be headcount, where we'll be reducing our workforce by more than 11% from Fiscal Year 2010 levels. That means we'll be extending our hiring freeze another year and reducing the number of Job Training Participants in the Pop program 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, however, we will likely be forced to implement layoffs to meet our budget and target headcounts.

You may also have heard recently that we plan to close four outdoor pools and shorten the pool season by two weeks. This is not something we relish, but doing so would help the City save more than \$1.4 million. We haven't

chosen the pools to be closed yet. We are viewing usership and the proximity to other swimming pools, pool conditions and beaches and so on because we make a final decision. Also we will be closing a couple of weeks early. The last two weeks of August have traditionally been the lightest in terms of pool attendance. Either way this is a tough decision to make and none of us make it happily.

Through these, plus other, smaller, cuts, we expect to be able to weather this difficult year. Of course, and this is the big but, the preliminary budget forecast also depends upon the results of budget negotiations that are currently going on in Albany. As you know, just yesterday, all non-uniformed agencies were asked to cut an additional 7.3%.

Now, with less than 24 hours since that cut request was made, we don't have a detailed menu of cuts. But having made all the less painful cuts, it's likely that we could anticipate an additional 500 layoffs if this gets implemented. There is no doubt that this level of layoffs will lead to service interruptions. It

may force things such as the closure of recreation centers or even some parks. I know that the Council and our state elected officials will agree that this is a scenario we'd all like to avoid.

As we think about moving forward, it's instructive to review what we have accomplished over the last year. We have weathered a few storms really quite literally, not just the beginning of the fiscal downturn, which is a figurative storm, but the literal storms, like the one last August 18th that ripped through northern Manhattan, the Bronx, and Randall's Island and destroyed thousands of trees.

And then 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 calls and the most tree damage of any storm in the last 15 years.

Despite these setbacks and the meteorological mayhem that we had to deal with and despite the losing headcount and the budget cuts, we were able to keep our parks clean and our beaches staffed. In fact, and we're very proud of

1
2 this and some of them are here today, we were able
3 to recruit and hire more than 1,200 lifeguards to
4 keep our beaches and pools safe last summer, which
5 surpassed our annual goal for the first time in
6 the history of the Parks Department. I want to
7 thank these brave young men and women who do this
8 every year. And by young, I include the people in
9 the 50s who are still working as lifeguards.
10 They're still young.

11 Beyond that, we've been pretty busy
12 building and renovating parks, from signature
13 projects such as the Concrete Plant Park in the
14 Bronx, to neighborhood playgrounds such as
15 Bushwick Playground or Corona Golf Playground in
16 Queens. We have completed projects across the
17 city. There were 141 projects completed last
18 year, surpassing even our initial targets, and 80%
19 of those projects were on time and under budget.

20 We've continued to offer a wide
21 array of programming throughout our park system.
22 We joined with non-profit and private partners to
23 develop new nutrition programs, such as Fun Food,
24 Smart Food, a 12-week cooking and nutrition
25 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 and others that we offer will help to combat this problem.

One of the things that very important to me is continuing to teach children swimming skills, to help them avoid drowning and help them learn to love the water and maybe one day work as lifeguards. 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% over the previous year.

And we are building literally 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 really worthy of respect. By the end of 2009, we had 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 100

1
2 schoolyards to playgrounds to the public by year's
3 end, and started our work on Calvert Vaux Park
4 which is in South Brooklyn near Coney Island and
5 McCarren Park Pool, two of the plan's eight
6 regional park projects. In a period where we have
7 had to recommit our resources, we also have to
8 work to build with the long term in mind.

9 In fact, this has been an
10 interesting time for us. Sustainability has
11 become somewhat of a buzz word. But we're making
12 a lot of inroads in greening and energy
13 efficiency, and as you'll soon hear, we are at the
14 forefront of practical environmental education.

15 As this fiscal crisis has shown us,
16 we must work to make New York more sustainable not
17 only to improve the local environment, but to help
18 our pocketbooks and checkbooks as well. If we
19 make small smart investments in the environment
20 now, even in this economy, they will payoff for us
21 the next time we have to make these difficult
22 choices.

23 In prior testimony, we have told
24 you about the green roof that our Five Borough
25 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. It has 18 systems where we test different soils, soil depths and plant life, covering almost 17,000 square feet of the roof.

We plan to expand this program in 2010, adding 11 more systems, and covering as much as an acre of the facility. If you haven't been out there, and it's right in the middle of your district, Council Member Mark-Viverito, I encourage you and the other members of the committee to take a tour of this roof. You'll find it quite enlightening.

We're 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 emerging field. That is why we are going to expand our green roof campaign to ten recreation centers, in partnership with staff members from

1 Columbia University. These ten locations will
2 give us a test area of more than 10,000 square
3 feet, where the native plants, growth medium and
4 maintenance conditions will be the same. The only
5 variables will be the various roof locations in
6 the city and any local micro-climate conditions.
7 Green roofs, as you know, are very important for
8 reducing ambient temperature and saving energy in
9 buildings.
10

11 In 2010, we also plan to begin
12 expanding our in-park recycling program. I know
13 this is something the committee has asked about in
14 the past and it's something that people in the
15 environmental field in New York often ask us
16 about.

17 We have been working closely with
18 our partners in the Department of Sanitation, who
19 will provide us with metal decorative recycling
20 bins that we will then place at up to 50
21 additional park sites. In addition, our own
22 Operations division is planning to ramp up our
23 bottle recycling program as well, which we hope to
24 roll out to more than 100 locations throughout the
25 city. Outdoor recycling in parks will always be a

challenge, but it is one that we hope to meet.

I'm going to tell you more about why we need to do more bottle recycling.

Talking about the green fleet for a second, it will be getting even greener. We recently received an award as having the greenest municipal fleet in the country. Already, 64% of the Parks-operated vehicles are green, but by the end of the year, that number will rise to 72%.

Just to give one example, we have purchased 17 new medium duty hybrid electric rack trucks. A rack truck is like a big truck for putting supplies on. These are really cutting edge. These are the first diesel-electric units, as opposed to the gasoline electric light duty hybrids like the Toyota Prius and the Ford Escape. We are the second biggest purchaser of these units in the nation. The idea being if we want to have clean parks, we should not have vehicles that befoul the air working in them.

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

see if the solar panels can help us save money on battery costs by increasing their life.

In the same way that we're studying the effects of solar panels on our energy usage, we're using our urban tree canopy as a setting for natural science experiments. Last year, we finished converting an old officers' building into the first Urban Field Station at Fort Totten, Queens. This is really a scientific research center, an extension of our partnership with the United States Forest Service's Northern Research Station. It will be a base of operations for local and visiting scientists studying the healthful effects of trees on the city and in terms of reducing pollution and reducing storm water runoff into sewers and so on. .

Additionally, we have received millions of dollars in grant funding to do research on the city's environment. Thanks to grants from the Forest Service, National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council, we have partnered with major universities to study the relationship between trees, air quality, and respiratory health.

As you know, Council Member, we have been concentrating our tree planting efforts in neighborhoods that suffer from a low canopy cover and high asthma rates.

Last year, we also partnered with the Forest Service the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to collect urban forest data in 150 locations throughout the city, as part of the 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.

I think it's safe to say that no city in the country is at as advanced a stage as we are in terms of tree planting and also doing scientific research about the benefit of trees in the urban environments.

Additional grants, including a \$2 million grant through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, known as ARRA, Clean Water funding, will allow us to build Greenstreets that capture storm water, and study the effects of these Greenstreets. This is one part of our

program to design greener parks, and greener facilities, and better 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 and force sewage to go into the waters of the harbor.

We're also implementing grey water systems that will re-use spray shower run off to irrigate planting beds. We are also ensuring that any new building costing more than \$2 million is Silver LEED certified. So the first LEED-certified building, which is the Carmine Carro Community Center in Marine Park, Brooklyn, is already under construction. And 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.

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

1 through ARRA so far, for a total of 553 full-time
2 equivalent jobs. We are offering these jobs
3 through our Parks Opportunity Program, which is
4 our landmark transitional employment program that
5 has already successfully transitioned more than
6 11,000 New Yorkers from public assistance into the
7 workforce.
8

9 Among these new initiatives is
10 something called POP Connect, a year-long program
11 that will give 100 potentially disconnected young
12 people between the ages of 18 and 24 the chance to
13 gain education and employment. We have got our
14 POP education horticulture program that trains POP
15 participants in horticultural skills, which will
16 be expanded by 14 positions.

17 But there's no program I think that
18 demonstrates our commitment to sustainable growth
19 as much as our landmark MillionTreesNYC Training
20 Program which gives young adults, many of whom
21 have previously struggled to find educational and
22 employment opportunities, a chance to take a
23 position-and develop a career a career-in the
24 green jobs sector.

25 For seven months, these

1 participants take courses in botany and biology,
2 learn about the urban environment. They meet with
3 leaders in their future field of employ. These
4 young people, many of whom once may have had no
5 connection to the natural New York, today can hack
6 through invasive vines or scale a tree to scary
7 heights without thinking twice. Well, they think
8 twice and do it in a smart way.
9

10 They develop the skills they need
11 to get hired, such as how to prepare a resume, or
12 to write a cover letter, and their talents are in
13 demand. I'm please to report, of the first
14 graduating class of 25 members, 20 have already
15 found green jobs in the not-for-profit or
16 government sectors. Next month, 31 more trainees
17 are expected to graduate, and we have funding for
18 an additional 15 trainees to enter this green jobs
19 training program in October.

20 I'm going to wrap up now because I
21 know you'll probably have a lot of questions. We
22 have enjoyed working with the City Council during
23 this whole budget process. In the past, the
24 Council has helped us hire and deploy more
25 playground associates, to provide leadership in

the playgrounds in the summer, to hire Parks Enforcement Patrol officers and Urban Park Rangers, and field staff to help the public.

Now that times are tight, we will to continue to work productively to keep our city's green spaces and our great programs running as smoothly as possible.

In closing, and I know we talked about this Council Member the other week; I 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 either with large organizations or small organizations. They donate their time through the Partnerships for Parks program.

We're looking 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. They would travel through their park, offering directions and information.

They may also give out local and citywide park information, help advertise events, report emergencies and issues to 911 or 311, conduct surveys and remind park users of our rules.

In particular, the greeters will encourage park visitors to throw away their litter in garbage bins and promote recycling at areas where we have them. It's really an interesting phenomenon. Our jobs would be a lot easier and we could sustain these cuts a lot better if people simply walked with their litter over to a litter basket. These greeters will help get them to do that.

We need their help and we need your help. I was talking with a Council Member about a program that I believe was launched in Puerto Rico to encourage people to reduce litter and make a cleaner environment. We're looking to start something like that. It sounds like a great program. We're looking to do that.

Our litter conditions would be drastically reduced if New Yorkers would simply walk over to the litter basket and throw their trash into bins. So this spring we're going to

focus on making sure that ball fields and picnic areas and barbeque areas are treated as litter-free zones. We're going to work with permit holders to ensure that they are cleaning up after their games or their picnics are over, and our Parks Enforcement Patrol officers will be on-site to educate permit holders and enforce litter compliance when necessary.

But the volunteer Greeters will be a friendly face at these locations and throughout the park system handing out garbage bags and encouraging people to help keep our parks clean. It's really crucial at this time when we're not going to have the kind of staff we'd like to have to have people pitch in and help keep the parks clean and green.

We really welcome your support and I thank you Council Member Mark-Viverito for your suggestions about this program that was done in Puerto Rico that we might try to emulate.

We also hope that you can help us find those New Yorkers, the ones who have some time on their hands, or maybe they don't but they'll do it anyway to join our Park Greet Corps.

We thank you for your continuing undying support and love for parks. We'll take any question you have.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you, Commissioner. I want to just recognize that we've been joined by Council Member Gentile, Council Member Ferreras and Council Member James was here earlier. I really want to thank you. I think you've provided a real good context of a lot of the wonderful work that is happening in our parks.

I know my colleagues have questions but we have many people in this room and I ask for your patience as well because we are going to be asking questions of the commissioner and I know that's going to take some time. I know many of you want to speak. I will ask some questions regarding the pool closings since a lot of people in this room are concerned about that in particular.

In your testimony you indicate that you're looking to save \$1.4 million with the closing of four pools and the reduction of the hours and shortening the pool season. You

indicated in your testimony you don't know yet which pools you're identifying for that. Could you give us a sense of the usage? What has for the past maybe two years, if you could give us the sense of the number of New York City residents that are using and accessing the pools during a typical season?

ADRIAN BENEPE: I'll ask Commissioner Kavanaugh to come join me. I can tell you what I know off the top of my head and then if we're looking for details we'll see if we can come up with it. If there's anything we can't answer, we'll answer later.

Generally speaking, the pools are open from the beginning of July or the very end of June to Labor Day. There are about 63 total pools, with 54 being outdoor pools. Sometimes one or two are down for renovation.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Do you include in those numbers, the mini pools?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So that includes those.

ADRIAN BENEPE: The pools include

the Olympic sized pools like the Crotona pool or the Betsy Head pool or the Red Hook pool. Then you have the intermediate pools like the Claremont pool and then some mini pools and we have a number of indoor pools.

The pool usage varies depending on the density of the neighborhood population and also obviously depending on the weather. It's highly weather dependent. Generally speaking, though, we do find that the usership tails way off in the month of August, particularly the last two weeks. I myself go out to visit the pools and often I'll come to a pool in the middle of the day and there might be one or two people in the pool.

So in making those tough decisions, we'll probably look at the pools which have the least usership, and in particular some neighborhoods are blessed with a relative abundance of pools.

For example, Harlem has four or five pools when you go from lower Harlem up to Washington Heights. Staten Island has very few pools. But on the other hand, Harlem has a fairly dense use. So we're going to have to look at all

1
2 of those factors. We're probably not going to
3 close any of the very large pools. It'll probably
4 be the small or intermediate ones. We'll look for
5 the ones that are the most lightly used and then
6 make sure that there are alternatives within a
7 close district, a close proximity.

8 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I
9 understand the difficulties that we face, but when
10 we're looking at the situation and a lot of youth
11 programs that are maybe not going to be available,
12 et cetera, a lot of things that are being cut,
13 open space and our public open space and our
14 public facilities I think become all the more
15 important and people rely on them to make up for
16 losses in programming in other areas.

17 So that's where the concern really
18 lies about the maximum impact that this is going
19 to have. It's a large number of people that use
20 the pools and maybe in these difficult times may
21 opt to go more to the public facilities and
22 recreational areas because our options are limited
23 in our communities.

24 So that's of serious concern. But
25 it would be good to get some sort of a number of

the usage within at least the past two seasons of total amongst all the pools.

ADRIAN BENEPE: If it's okay I'll ask Commissioner Kavanagh. He sort of knows off the top of his head.

LIAM KAVANAGH: Liam Kavanagh, First Deputy Parks Commissioner. We typically average about 1.5 million visitors to the pools in a normal year. Last year, however, we saw a fairly significant jump. We had almost 1.9 million visitors last summer.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: What would you attribute that to?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Part of it had to do with the lateness of Labor Day. The latest possible date last year was September 7th. So we had almost a full extra week of the season compared to the prior year. We had nicer weather throughout August than we had experienced the prior year, which I think encouraged more attendance. I think those are the two primary factors.

We did expand the free lunch program and offered breakfast at our pools for the

first time last summer. They proved to be very popular. I think that may have also contributed to the increase in attendance.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Despite the decision of looking at the closing of the pools, is that something that you were still planning to implement this year, the breakfast program?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Absolutely. We hope to continue other things that increase the usership. We have early morning and late evening adult lap swim. And then every morning at many of the pools we expanded rather dramatically our learn to swim program with some of that support coming from our friends at the City Parks Foundation. So from early in the morning until late in the evening until it got dark, swimming seven days a week at all the pools. So that may also account for some of the increase.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Looking at 1.4 million to me is really something that we need to look at other areas where we can maybe make decisions and not impact the closing of the pools considering the increase in the usage which

I believe is only going to rise this season, based on what you're saying.

For instance, in the budget you indicate that you're choosing to spend \$635,000 for moving and docking a floating pool from Brooklyn to I don't know where. For instance, why not forego that and allow that money to be used to close this gap and to allow pools to remain open? That's something that came to mind as we were reading the budget. We didn't understand why that decision was being made.

So maybe you can talk to that a little bit. Then I also have questions about the number of people that would be impacted, meaning lifeguards, not to take into account obviously the community that would be impacted. You have \$635,000 that you're choosing to spend on moving and docking the floating pool to another location. What's that about?

ADRIAN BENEPE: The floating pool which has been in the south Bronx, anchored off of Hunts Point has become a very popular amenity. In fact, the reason we put it in Hunts Point was that you can't find another public pool for about two

1 miles in any direction. So it is a very
2 underserved area. It's the first floating pool of
3 its kind in the country. It's very important. It
4 was very popular; there were often lines of people
5 waiting to get into it.
6

7 We're required unfortunately by
8 state environmental laws; we can't simply leave it
9 in place. After the pool season, we're required
10 to move it away and then move it back. That's
11 apparently for some kind of environmental reasons
12 which I don't fully understand. That's what that
13 money is in the budget for.

14 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So
15 where is it right now?

16 LIAM KAVANAGH: It's in storage at
17 a marine station in Long Island.

18 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So it
19 has to be moved at the end of the season to there
20 and then bring it back out.

21 LIAM KAVANAGH: Let me just add
22 that the \$600,000 includes the operation of the
23 pool for the entire season which is approximately
24 \$400,000. I think we did negotiate a lower cost
25 for moving the pool and whatever savings we

receive from that obviously we'll use someplace else that needs it.

The floating pool is one of the most popular intermediate pools in the entire system. As the Commissioner mentioned, there is no other pool anywhere near that area. So we think it's important to keep that open.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Just going then to how many lifeguards and supervisors are going to be impacted by this decision of the season being shortened and the closing of pools?

LIAM KAVANAGH: The number of lifeguards impacted by the closing of the pools depends on which pools get closed obviously. Intermediate pools have staffing between 12 and 15, based on the size of the pool. An Olympic pool might have as many as 30 lifeguards assigned to it, again, given the size of the pool.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: We're talking about lifeguards, supervisors, I'm assuming we're also talking maintenance personnel for the pools.

LIAM KAVANAGH: Well, you had asked about lifeguards.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

Understood. Now I'm going to add, anybody related to the operation of a pool, taking into account the four that you're closing and the shortening of the season, how many people are going to be impact? Understanding that based on the size, it might be different. Give me a sense of what we're talking about here.

LIAM KAVANAGH: If it were four intermediate pools that we close it would be approximately 100-120 people who would be impacted by it. If it were larger pools, the Olympic pools, it's probably in the neighborhood of 200-240 total people impacted, including everyone who is part of the operation of the pool.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Also taking into account the shortening of the season.

LIAM KAVANAGH: The shortening of the season, calculating off the top of my head, but we normally have about 600 lifeguards at the pools. So obviously if you subtracted some number, whether it's 60 or 100, you're left with 500 or so lifeguards who would be impact and probably a similar number of maintenance staff,

filter plant operators and park enforcement patrol officers.

ADRIAN BENEPE: They would still be hired, they'd just work for a shorter period of time.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So you're saying 600 lifeguards and supervisors and how many maintenance personnel?

LIAM KAVANAGH: Probably in that range of about 500.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I have many other questions, but I know that some colleagues have questions. So I'm going to hold off a minute and I'll come back. Council Member Vacca wanted to ask some questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Thank you, Madame Chair. I wanted to speak about the tree program and how are we doing when it come to getting a tree pruned or planted. One of the biggest complaints I get in my office is when will Parks come and prune my tree, when will Parks come to remove a dead tree, how long does it take to remove a tree stump.

Now, let me start with this, how

long does it now take to get a tree pruned in the city of New York?

ADRIAN BENEPE: I'll again ask Commissioner Kavanagh to come up. The tree pruning cycle has varied according to the budget. So when we have a healthy budget, the cycle reduces. When the budget's not so healthy, it expands. For a while, while the economy was healthy and the mayor and the City Council were able to add more money to our tree pruning budget, particularly for hiring contracting companies to do it, we were able to reduce the tree pruning. I think we approached once every seven years. Then in previous rounds of budget cuts, that was one of the areas where we took a cut. So I think it went down to once every ten years and maybe worse than that now.

LIAM KAVANAGH: We still haven't reached that yet. But if the funding continues at the same rate, it will be in the one per ten or perhaps even less. Just to fully answer your question, we relied on the block pruning program to perform the bulk of the street tree pruning over the last 10 or 15 years. It's the most cost

effective and efficient way to manage that resource. However, we do prune trees outside of the block pruning program. We had a service that we call commitment pruning. It's based on the condition of the tree however.

We send a trained forester out to make an evaluation of the tree. If there is significant deadwood, it if it affecting a nearby structure, if it's blocking a traffic device or something like that, we will prune it as soon as we possibly can and that usually means within a matter of weeks. So if those conditions exist, you can let us know. We'll look at them and we'll make a professional evaluation and we dill address that.

ADRIAN BENEPE: I'll also add that you asked about dead trees. We have established a protocol whereby all dead trees get removed and there should be no more than 30 day from when we get notice of that tree to when it gets removed. How many street trees?

LIAM KAVANAGH: 600,000.

ADRIAN BENEPE: With 600,000 street trees but 6 million trees in the city, it's

possible there might be a standing dead tree more than 30 days but we are pretty good on keeping a 30 day limit to removing dead trees. There shouldn't be a big problem of standing dead trees in the city.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: I wanted to state on behalf of my constituents and many people in the city that even before we get to budget cuts, which I know are coming and we all know budget cuts will be likely, we're talking that a tree is not pruned more than once every ten years at minimum.

We've tried to be supportive here at the Council. I think you know that, Commissioner, and I want to support you. For a homeowner or a property owner to have to wait ten years for a tree to be pruned and in light of the fact that we're talking of planting 700,000 more because you've planted only 315,000 of the one million, I'm concerned. Are we planting trees when we cannot even take care of the stock of trees we have when it comes to pruning? Ten years is a very long time for a tree not to be pruned.

People complain about branches

1
2 hanging on their roofs, on their gates, touching
3 cable wires. Con Edison used to come if it was
4 touching one of their wires. Now Con Edison is
5 saying that that's the Parks Department
6 responsibility.

7 So I think we have to look at
8 shortening that ten year period. In some cases,
9 and I do acknowledge, you do address emergencies.
10 You've indicated that. When there is an emergency
11 like a stop sign being blocked and all, you've
12 been responsive. But I think that the tree
13 pruning program in our city has to be looked at.
14 The tree program has to be looked at.

15 When I'm talking about tree roots
16 in the ground, the tree roots in the ground that
17 often pull up sidewalks. You call 311; they give
18 you a priority number. My understanding is that
19 if you're not a very high priority, if they go out
20 and inspect and they don't find that that sidewalk
21 is really high and causing a major trip hazard,
22 you go on a list which could be years before the
23 roots from the sidewalk are pruned.

24 Yet, we're proceeding to plant
25 trees in front of people's homes where they

specifically ask that they not be planted. People are asking that trees not be planted in front of their homes. We used to honor their requests. We no longer honor their request. We're planting trees in front of people's homes who do not want them.

But they don't want them because they can't get them pruned. When the tree roots get into their sewers, or when the tree roots cause a sidewalk hazard that they could be sued for, they can't get any help.

We have to look at tree policy in this city. I know part of it is budgetary, but I throw it out to you as something that's been bothering my constituents for a while.

ADRIAN BENEPE: I appreciate the concern. It's great to know that you and the other Council Members care about trees and you want to do more for them and you have over the course of years. You've added more money to our budget, which has been terrific.

We have to think of trees beyond the idea that trees are pretty or they're nice. Simply put, if you had a city of New York without

1
2 trees, it's very likely you'd have a lot worse
3 problems with pollution and pollution related
4 diseases. Trees perform incredibly important
5 functions as part of the natural infrastructure of
6 the city. Just as water lines and sewer lines and
7 electric lines that powers the streets, those are
8 all part of the city's infrastructure.

9 A tree is part of the city's
10 infrastructure. It's growing, it's important but
11 it is playing a very vital role. They are taking
12 carbon dioxide and turning it into oxygen. They
13 are absorbing particulate matter on the leaf
14 surface. They are reducing the ambient
15 temperatures. If you didn't have street trees in
16 New York City the average temperature would
17 probably go up several degrees. All of this is
18 being documented in our scientific research.

19 I hear you about the issues of
20 sidewalks being affected by tree roots. That's
21 why, with Mayor Bloomberg's leadership for the
22 very time in this city's history, after decades of
23 not doing this the city took responsibility for
24 sidewalks damaged by tree roots through the trees
25 and sidewalks program.

Since the program started, we've had 27,000 homeowners call us about this. We have inspected almost all of them and we have already done almost 6,700 repairs to those sidewalks. So we're absolutely committed to making sure that when the city plants a tree which is part of the city's infrastructure, just like a fire hydrant, just like a stop sign, that it's not going to have an adverse impact on the homeowner.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA:

Commissioner, I agree with you. I want more trees planted. I know the environmentally positive effect they have. My only concern I bring to your attention is that we're planting all these trees but we want maintenance of these trees once they're planted. We have to have maintenance of the old stock of trees that we have.

ADRIAN BENEPE: I agree with you.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: We're in the same church, but maybe a different pew at this point.

ADRIAN BENEPE: No, we're in the same pew. We both believe that trees should be taken care of.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: The same
pew?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes, absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: PEP, you
mentioned Parks Enforcement Personnel. How many
people are now in PEP? Can you respond to a
report that most of the PEP people are assigned to
Manhattan as opposed to other boroughs? How many
do we have citywide and how many are assigned are
Manhattan, or how many were assigned last year,
which would be the most recent year we could go
to?

ADRIAN BENEPE: In FY 10, we had
approximately 196 PEP officers. That's more than
FY 05 when we had 147, but it's down from FY 07.
As you recall, I believe it was FY 06 or FY 07
that we had a boost in the PEP numbers thanks the
mayor and the City Council. They raised the
numbers. Unfortunately, since then there has been
hiring freezings and attrition. Our PEP officers
are terrific and they leave to go on to other
jobs. So we've gone down in some headcount. It's
approximately 196.

We have slightly more in Manhattan

1
2 than in some of the other boroughs. For example,
3 in FY 10 there were 44 in Manhattan compared with
4 17 in the Bronx, 16 in Brooklyn, 13 in Staten
5 Island, but we have to remember that the parks of
6 Manhattan are much more heavily used, particularly
7 on a seven day a week basis, so we're basically
8 responding to where the users and events are.

9 The PEP officers are often assigned
10 to handle large events. Again, their job is to do
11 quality of life issues. The primary
12 responsibility for protecting life and limb and
13 public safety in parks, just as it is on the
14 streets and in the subways and in the homes and on
15 the ferries, is with the Department of Police. So
16 PEP are there to do primarily quality of life
17 enforcement.

18 We do have a couple of situations
19 where PEP officers are hired on a contractual
20 basis by other quasi-governmental agencies. For
21 example, Hudson River Park, which is a city/state
22 hybrid organization, hired PEP officers. They
23 could just as easily hire private security guards
24 or state police officers, but they choose to hire
25 the city PEP officers. We provide as a contracted

1 service. They pay every penny of it. They pay
2 for the salaries and the uniforms and the fringe
3 benefits. We have a similar situation now in
4 Brooklyn Bridge Park.
5

6 But in general, with the non-
7 contract officers, we deploy them based on how
8 busy the parks are. Staten Island has a lot of
9 parkland, but it's relatively during the week.
10 It's primarily used on the weekends. If you look
11 at a park like Central Park or Battery Park where
12 literally tens of thousands of people are going to
13 the park on a given day, you probably have to
14 deploy to where you're going to have the most
15 activity.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: I thank you
17 Commissioner. I did want to point out that the
18 largest park in the City of New York is Pelham Bay
19 Park. So please do not forget us when it comes to
20 PEP.

21 ADRIAN BENEPE: No, and
22 particularly in the summer where they're helping.
23 Pelham Bay Park is a little bit quiet during the
24 weekdays and the winter and very busy during the
25 summer.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: I thank you for your work and I thank everyone in Parks. Your agency is well respected over the course of many, many years. I look forward one day to play golf at the Ferry Point Golf Course with you.

ADRIAN BENEPE: It's under construction.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: I hope before my lifetime that we see it. I've never played golf in my life but I'm willing to learn if only this golf course becomes a reality.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Well I've never played either, so maybe the two of us will go out.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: We can take lessons together.

ADRIAN BENEPE: We'll just make sure everybody is wearing a helmet.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you, Council Member Vacca. I wanted to ask two quick follow-up questions to issues that were raised by him. I first want to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council Member Elizabeth Crowley.

You keep mentioning about usership of parks and that you determine where to put PEP officers and resources based on usership, which also will take me to the pool issue again. Do you have some sort of census data? Is there information that you can share with us? How do you track usership and determine how many people are using the parks or the pools? Can you share that with us?

ADRIAN BENEPE: The pools are really easy because we count every person that goes in with a clicker. So that way we know absolutely which are the busiest pools.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Can you share that data with us?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Absolutely. We can give you day by day counts, even morning versus afternoon for every pool.

The thing that is much more difficult and we've worked with our friends at New Yorkers for Parks on this issue. It's a bedeviling issue. I've often wondered on a beautiful day in June or July on a Saturday, how many people are out in the parks, the beaches, the

1
2 pools and so on? That's a number that's very hard
3 to get. We did a one-day census on our
4 playgrounds. The day we had all the people out
5 there, it turned out to be a rainy day so it was
6 pretty hard to get numbers.

7 In some situations where people
8 have done some scientific counts, we have some
9 pretty good numbers. But in terms of who's
10 actually in the parks it has to be a lot more
11 anecdotal. So at the beaches, our beach
12 supervisors will do counts. If you have the same
13 supervisor year after year you can more or less
14 know that that number is a good guesstimate but
15 it's not really a count.

16 So only in a very few places do we
17 have real counts. We know for example if you look
18 at a park like Battery Park, every day, more or
19 less, 15-20,000 people will pass through Battery
20 Park which is a tiny park. Why? Because they're
21 all going to the ferries to Liberty Island and
22 Ellis Island. But they're still in the park and
23 they're sitting on the benches and eating their
24 hot dogs.

25 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Taking

that into account, how are you determining where to deploy PEP officers?

ADRIAN BENEPE: By seeing where the big events with the big crowds. You have to do it based on a sort of anecdotal as opposed to scientific. We have yet to figure out, and we'd love to have your advice, is there some easy, relatively cost free or not too expensive way to count people in parks. We'd love to figure that out. We have our own sort of best guesses as to which are the busiest parks. You can just sort of look around and see what's generating a lot of garbage, where can you sort of look and say this park is really crowded and this park is really empty.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I appreciate that. I guess it's something to look into further. You also mentioned the sidewalk program for homeowners and the calls that people have made and you being able to address that. When it comes to dealing with the issues, what budget is it coming out of? Is it DOT?

ADRIAN BENEPE: It's the Parks Department capital budget.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: In terms of the fixing the sidewalks, that's coming out of your capital budget?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes. Money was specifically allocated for this program.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Is also part of that money coming out of the tree pruning?

ADRIAN BENEPE: No. It's coming out of special budget just for trees and sidewalks. By that I mean the program called Trees and Sidewalks. I don't mean for trees.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So that's what the program is called, Trees and Sidewalks?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Trees and Sidewalks. In FY 10, we had almost \$6 million for the program. It started out at \$3.4 million. It's averaged around \$3 million until FY 10 when it went up to almost \$6 million. Some of that money comes from the mayor. Some of it comes from the City Council. We've been fortunate to have state legislators and Council Members allocate money specifically within their districts, which you're all able to do if you like. You can say

you want this money to go just for fixing
sidewalks around trees in my neighborhood.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I think
the issue that might cause--

ADRIAN BENEPE: [interposing] We
also got ARRA funding for that. That's why it
went up this year. We got \$3.3 million in federal
funding this year, ARRA funding. That's why it
jumped up.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Taking
into account what my colleague is raising which I
think is valid, we understand and we all value
trees. We all do, which is why I was so hurt when
so many hundreds of trees were destroyed in
Randall's Island but that's a whole other issue.

Taking that into account in terms
of the policies that we're implementing now and
thinking long term about the implications and the
budgetary needs down the line and whether that was
factored in with this whole initiative, whether
that's something that was factored into your
budget moving forward as you were implementing
this program. Because I think those are valid and
I know there have been some articles written on

the issue.

ADRIAN BENEPE: I think we're fortunate in proposing PlaNYC and figuring out its impact. The mayor and the people involved said not only are we going to put in money to build the facilities but we're also going to put in money to maintain them. In this case not only was money put in the budget to plant the trees but also to maintain them. I think Commissioner Kavanagh could talk about the extent to which we're able to expand our tree care.

LIAM KAVANAGH: When PlaNYC was implemented we received a significant increase in staffing and contracting abilities within the forestry division. We hired probably more than 75 new staff, both climbers and pruners and foresters to supervise the urban forest and to maintain the trees. We received contract money for stump removal and for tree pruning.

Unfortunately, as the economy collapsed and the budget situation worsened, we had to give back some of those gains over the past three years. But even compared to where we were before PlaNYC, we're still ahead in terms of

staffing.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you. Council Member Gentile has a question.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: Thank you, Madame Chair. Thank you very much. Commissioner, as I've often said, your good work with the parks I think that opinion is shared by many of us. But I would be remiss if I didn't at least mention the stellar work of the Brooklyn Parks Commissioner Julius Spiegel and his staff. I see his chief of staff here with us, Martin Maher, in the back. I do want to do a shout out to him and to the Brooklyn Parks Commissioner too. Marty brought his fan club.

Commissioner, I do want to bring up the issue that I've brought up before. It goes around the statements you've made about despite the budget we'll keep our parks open. We're keeping our parks and facilities safe and will continue to maintain them. In that spirit, I bring up, again, the issue of the restroom facilities and the issue of keeping those restroom facilities open, clean and functional.

It really is an issue, particularly

over the warmer months where restroom facilities are closed at times before dusk, maybe as early as 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon. As a result, you create very embarrassing, if not impossible situations for people would otherwise use the park. Having to go behind trees or actually leaving the park because they have no restroom facilities available to them.

It is an issue as if you were to close the gates on the park. Because for those people who need those restroom facilities and they're not available because a Parks person is gone, the park in effect is closed. I know you're going to say it's a budget issue and I understand that. I'm not asking you to come up with a magic wand program that would solve this issue.

But I guess I'm asking you if there is some creative way we can come up with a compromise so that restroom facilities stay open in the parks that people use?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Thank you for that bottom line question. We joke about this and we have a joke that we say and my staff hates when I say it, but we actually mean it seriously. We're

1
2 the only agency in the entire city that maintains
3 any kind of large inventory of open free public
4 toilets. There used to be public toilets in the
5 subway system and they were all shut down. It's
6 almost impossible to find a bathroom many places
7 in New York City and in other cities too.

8 We have reversed the trend of
9 closing public toilets and we have opened a great
10 many. We have been in a new era of designing new
11 high end comfort stations. Therese Braddock has
12 become the sort of genius of beautiful new public
13 bathrooms. We have the finest architects in the
14 world designing them. We have an informal saying
15 that it's our business to help New Yorkers do
16 theirs. It's a basic public service. You're in a
17 park and you don't want to have to run home when
18 you have to go.

19 So we work very hard to keep the
20 toilets open. It doesn't mean they'll be open all
21 the time when they want them to be. But we do
22 monitor it. It's part of our park inspection
23 program. In fiscal year 2010, year to date,
24 inspectors found public toilets open 92% of the
25 time. We try to keep them well stocked and clean.

A toilet is no good if there is no toilet paper. You need to have soap and hand dryers. We're working hard to make sure there are hand dryers in almost every public toilet.

We have about 650 public toilet buildings all across the city. It's a really huge and serious responsibility that we take very seriously. We have no plans to close any toilets. We try to, and when the budget was a little bit better, we tried to have a second shift in most of the parks and leave the toilets open. In some cases where there haven't been problems of vandalism or inappropriate uses, we'll leave it open even if there is no staff at the site so it can be serviced remotely by people that come by.

So it's our full intent to keep the public toilets open, to keep them staffed, to keep them supplied, to put the soap and the toilet paper and the hand towels and the hand dryers in them. I'm absolutely share your concern for it. I think it's very important and we have no intention of retreating from that very important public service.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: It's been

my experience in my district that that restroom facilities close down as early as 3 p.m. Are you telling me that that's not generally the case?

ADRIAN BENEPE: That could be the case in the winter time. It shouldn't be the case in the summer when they're busy. If you tell me the specific ones where they're closing early, let me know and we'll see what we can do to make sure they stay open. In the summertime we try to keep them open during daylight hours.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: I will follow up with you on that.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Please follow up because if it's a busy park or playground and there isn't a problem with severe vandalism it should just stay open.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: That brings me to my next and my final point. I want to just underscore the issue of the Park Enforcement officers. You've heard it from the Bronx and now you'll hear it from Brooklyn. The paltry number of Park Enforcement Officers we have, if people do not feel safe to be in the park, they will not use it despite how beautiful a

park might be.

We've had this discussion again before. I don't begrudge the additional number of officers in Manhattan or the members here in Manhattan. But when I hear and read things about the High Line being peppered with Park Enforcement Officers and we have three or four in the entire borough of Brooklyn, that's outrageous.

Is there a way to equalize those numbers?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Again, the staffing is largely based on the kinds of usage that we get. In some parks, like Brooklyn Bridge Park, those are contracted services. The city isn't paying for it. In addition, by the way, to the PEP officers, we have a number of other security staff. We have park rangers. We have seasonal PEP officers and Job Training participants who are in uniform who provide security functions at recreation centers and at beaches and pools.

So in the summertime we end up having closer to 500-600 people doing security related work. We have to keep in mind a little bit of context. Unfortunately, I'm old enough to

1
2 provide the context. The PEP officers did not
3 exist prior to 1981. In fact, park rangers didn't
4 exist prior to 1979. In fact, as you know, Kevin
5 and I started in 1979 as the first class of park
6 rangers hired. Prior to that there was nobody in
7 the parks other than the police officers who might
8 happen to be there looking out for quality of life
9 issues.

10 So the notion that if we've had
11 some reduction in PEP numbers there is going to be
12 some big park security is simply not true. We've
13 had the luxury of having PEP or rangers really
14 only for the last three decades. Before that they
15 simply didn't exist.

16 As you can imagine, as a graduate
17 of this program I think it's a very important one.
18 I would love nothing more than to have a couple
19 hundred extra PEP officers. Unfortunately, it's
20 just unlikely given the current budget
21 circumstance. And I've done a lot. We actually
22 increased the number of PEP officers. We worked
23 together on that. So we'll certainly do
24 everything we can to encourage, if the budget
25 turns around, hiring more PEP officers and we will

try to keep it as intact as possible.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: I certainly can't answer for what happened three decades ago, but when I have bocci ball players who are harassed by groups of marauding teenagers and we can't get any enforcement by the parks enforcement because they aren't there, that's a problem.

ADRIAN BENEPE: And that's why, again, the park enforcement patrol is in the parks primarily to address quality of life issues. If you have serious crimes taking place, if someone is harassing or threatening, that's where you call 911 and all the police. The police take the parks issues very seriously.

I meet and talk with the top brass in the police department. Our borough commissioners meet with the borough commanders. Our park managers meet with the precinct commanders. They have operations meetings to look at issues. As you know, they track crime in parks and the parks are part of Comstat.

So the parks have all benefited from the same dramatic reduction in crime that

we've seen in the streets and in the housing projects and in the subways.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you, Council Member. Commissioner, I know we did pass a local law about trying to get the statistics of incidents in the park and we still have not seen that information.

ADRIAN BENEPE: That information has been published. We can provide it.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I mean, we're still waiting on it. We have a couple of colleagues and I would ask maybe if we could each do two questions so we can move it along because I know we do have a lot of people here to testify. Council Member Ferreras, Crowley, Brewer and then Dromm. I'm sorry, I want to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council Members Danny Dromm, Brad Lander and Gale Brewer. Council Member Ferreras.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Good afternoon. I had several questions but maybe I'll wait for the second round. As you know, my district is the home to Flushing Meadows Park. Flushing Meadows Park is the home of City Field,

1
2 US Open, the new recreational center which has
3 proved to have increased our numbers by 9.6% I
4 believe it is, a brand new state of the art pool,
5 several festivals, the Hall of Science, the Queens
6 Museum, Queens Theater in the Park and a whole
7 host of other wonderful things that go on.

8 My question is the institutions
9 that provide a home for City Field and the U.S.
10 Open and other entities, what I've seen is when
11 people come to visit all over the parkland, is
12 there anything that they give back for the
13 replacement of the grass? Is there any monies
14 that are contributed directly to parks?

15 ADRIAN BENEPE: In some rare
16 circumstances, particular when the U.S. Open and
17 the Mets are playing at the same time, we do have
18 some parking on the grass. The USTA does fund
19 lawn restoration after that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: So it's
21 not required of them?

22 ADRIAN BENEPE: I'm not sure if
23 it's contractual or not, but they do it, whether
24 it's contractual or not, I'm not sure. Either
25 way, it's our responsibilities to do it because

the USTA is a lease holder in the park and pays the city a substantial amount of money to hold the events there.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I just want you to kind of understand where I'm coming from. The Parks Department does a fantastic job at setting up the park for the summer. Right when there's a game between both the Mets and the USTA which I love very much, the grass is ripped up again. Then I see your staff have to come back and replace it. It just seems like if this is something that would cost or help save at least one pool, if not all four, then I'm just trying to see if there's any savings or if there's a contribution that can be made.

ADRIAN BENEPE: That's a good question and we can look into that. The cost of reseeding a lawn is much less than the cost of operating a pool, so I don't think you'd get that kind of a balance, but we could certainly look to see if the USTA can help us a little bit more on that end. Really after you've parked cars on grass what you do is you reseed it and let it sit for a few weeks. There isn't a huge amount of

labor required to do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: And then my other question is could you speak to the change in policy for the Park Enforcement Officers? They no longer provide coverage at the stadium parking lots. That was the decrease in your summonses.

KEVIN JEFFREY: My name is Kevin Jeffrey. I'm a Deputy Commissioner of Public Programs. The main drive for the decrease in the ECBs, these are environment control board summonses were the lack of summonses that had been written the year before in Yankee Stadium parking lot that have not been written this year. So these are primarily unauthorized alcohol and possession of alcohol.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: And there was nothing there for City Field?

KEVIN JEFFREY: No. What had been the Shay Stadium parking lot, the majority of those summonses were actually PVBs, parking violation summonses and not the ECBs that I think you're referring to there.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Am I correct in saying that the lifeguard program is

something that we advertise a lot in the district. It's a job that young people tend to apply for. You send out all the information and we post it. Is it an 85 person lifeguard reduction? Last year you hired the most, which was 1,285 and you're looking to hire this year 1,200. Is that correct?

ADRIAN BENEPE: That's the goal. If the budget cuts go through as envisioned, as Commissioner Kavanagh was mentioning, there might be perhaps 60 fewer lifeguards than last year working during the summer.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I just want to say that the pools, clearly in all of our districts, very important. In my community that I represent we have the new larger pool which is in the middle of Flushing Meadow Park, but we have a smaller pool which is Fisher Pool, which is a local pool. That's the pool that most community residents that don't have a car, that's the one that they use.

But if you look at the size of it, it's a smaller pool. It may be even considered a mini pool. It's where I learned how to swim and it's where a lot of my constituents have learned

1
2 how to swim. Some families have an opportunity to
3 go on vacation and go away. These cities are
4 vacation for a lot of our urban youth. We can't
5 have our young people have just nowhere to go.
6 It's like we're closing every door possible. I
7 would rather have a young person at a city pool
8 than at a fire hydrant. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
10 you. Council Member Crowley.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you,
12 Madame Chair. Good afternoon, Commissioner. I
13 have a question about these small day schools or
14 play schools that cater to preschool population.
15 I have one in Forest Park. I believe there are
16 about 20 throughout the city. They're scheduled
17 to close. We wrote a letter to the Parks
18 Department requesting what type of cost savings
19 there would be. We want to see the schools stay
20 open.

21 ADRIAN BENEPE: Thank you. Again,
22 we're dealing with a difficult budget situation.
23 In fact, there are eight play schools located in
24 small park houses across the city. Five of them
25 are in Queens. It's something that we used to do

a lot more of. With the advent of universal pre-k and a lot of other services, it's really somewhat of a program that's tough for us to pull off.

It costs us about \$1.2 million to take care of about 140 kids for a few hours a week. We bring in, in terms of fees, about \$400,000. So there's a net cost to the city of \$800,000 to run this very small number of preschools with a very small number of participants.

Given all of the other cuts we're taking, I'd rather use that staff to help keep our recreation centers open where we can serve thousands of people with a much greater efficiency for the budget.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: So it's approximately \$100,000 per school if there are 8 schools?

ADRIAN BENEPE: There are eight schools. Some are bigger than others. But it's \$1.2 million for those eight schools.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: But they generate \$400,000.

ADRIAN BENEPE: They generate

\$400,000 in fees. So it doesn't pay for itself. What we are looking at, by the way, and Commissioner Jeffrey is also working on this program. We've been talking to the Administration for Children's Services and we'd be happy to offer those facilities for use by a nonprofit.

There may often be instances where a nonprofit, a preschool provider doesn't have space or is paying a very high rent. We'll allow them to move into our facility and offer those same services. So it's not that we're looking to not have children do preschool it's just that it's something that's done better by more professional organizations. It's something that you do have universal pre-k and other programs.

So we'd be willing to work with any sort of official preschool provider and let them come in and use our facility.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: I'm happy to hear that because there are about 25 families that were counting on this particular preschool for next year. I'm sure over 100 in Queens. It could be an opportunity to generate funds. So who should I speak to in your department about that?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Commissioner

Jeffrey. Commissioner Jeffery will be happy to work with you. Council Member Koo and Council Member Halloran have already been talking to us. They are looking into whether there might be some nonprofits that could come in and use these facilities and provide that service.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: My follow up, my second question is about the Ridgewood Reservoir, where you are right now within the capital project and how much is currently available for the whole renovation project and how that compares to the other planned projects.

ADRIAN BENEPE: The Ridgewood Reservoir, we are funded for a first phase which we hope to go into construction. I just have to find my notes for this.

We currently have about \$19 million in this project. It's one of the PlaNYC projects. The phase one design is complete. We have bid the construction documents and we hope to start construction, pending all the permits by July of this year.

Basically that's to provide access

to the path that goes around the reservoir, to provide ADA access to make it safe and secure, to bring back lighting.

Then phase two we're currently in the design phase. We're in a community review process. There are all kinds of permitting issues with the DEC. We have to do a lot of hydrological studies. As you know, these are old reservoir basins. One of the basins currently has a lot of water coming into it and we're not sure why and if it's something that will continue to stay that way. Does that make it a wetland or no? So there are a lot of issues to look at.

So we're going to go ahead with the phase one while we do a lot of talking to the community and looking at the hydrological and other biological and natural resource aspects of the area.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY:

Commissioner, how does that compare to the other destination style parks that were in the 2030 plan?

ADRIAN BENEPE: We have eight of the regional park projects in PlaNYC. Two of them

are in Queens. One is the Rockaway Park in Far Rockaway, which is approximately \$27 million. Highland Park is \$19 million. Fort Washington Park is \$29 million. Soundview Park is \$20 million. The High Bridge is \$62 million. So it's in the sort of lower rank, but it's still a very large project and it's a project that wouldn't have happened absent the PlaNYC funding.

As you know, there was a lot of debate as to what should happen there. Some people were enthusiastic about having some very active uses. Others wanted to just leave it alone and just have the birds go there. We trying to map somewhat of an in between thing by increasing access and yet recognizing the value of the place as habitat for birds and other wildlife. But generally making it safe and accessible and seeing what we can do about improving the fields elsewhere in Highland Park.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: I think that's a great idea. There is definitely \$20 million you could spend in the Highland Park area and the Ridgewood Reservoir area. You're in the first stage?

ADRIAN BENEPE: We're about to go into construction on the first phase which is to improve the access and the paths around the reservoir, lighting, enhanced access and safety.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: That's along the same type of a timeline that the other regional parks are moving along?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes. In fact, it might be slightly ahead of some. Slightly behind some and slightly ahead of others.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you Council Member. Council Member Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. My question is about the parks schoolyards and where are you at in terms of funding and in terms of the number of parks? I think 69 were done quite easily. I know the balance that you committed to need more work. So where are we at with all of those?

One question somebody asked me, because those are schoolyards and they're part of the PlaNYC. But at the same time, we all love the JOPs, which is the joint operating parks. So is

it something that we could more JOPs or are we going to continue on the playground/schoolyard route?

ADRIAN BENEPE: That's an interesting question, Council Member Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Gale is fine, go ahead.

ADRIAN BENEPE: I'm extending you the same courtesy I'm extending your colleagues.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know. I like Gale better.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Okay, Gale. There are approximately 260 or so schoolyard to playground sites. That's a reduction. We originally were looking to do about 290. But as with the rest of the capital program, we took about a 30% hit. So we're down to about 254 sites that we're going to do. Of the 254 sites, 69 were just opened. We just opened the doors because they're ready to go.

That's not we, that's the Department of Education. These are Department of Education schoolyards. They simply opened the doors. Of those remaining, 143 schoolyard sites,

the Parks Department has responsibility for renovating those.

So under Jonna Carmona-Graf's leadership we've been doing the design and bidding them out. Of those 143, 23 that had to be reconstructed have been completed and are now open to the public. Twelve of them did not, in fact, require those upgrades and we're in negotiation with DOE on the opening of them.

Forty-six additional sites are currently in construction and we think another 20 sites will be open to the public this spring and the other 26 will be open by the spring of 2011. Twenty-five have completed designs and are currently going through our procurement process. Fifteen sites have been bid and are being revised to meet budget. So we may be re-bidding those. Then we have about 22 sites that we're looking to get some additional funding for that were cut during the April 2009 budget cuts. So we're moving along quite well. It's a relatively quick way to add sort of permanent recreational facilities to the city's network of recreation spaces.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So is the JOP program, I don't know if that exists elsewhere. I have quite a few of them. Is that something that could complement this program? Or is something that costs too much? Because some people are saying why can't you use some of the money for the JOPs if it's easier?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Gale that's somewhat of a semantics issue. The jointly operated playgrounds program was done in the 1950s by then Commissioner Robert Moses. Under that model, it's really very similar to what we're doing now.

A park is created next to a school. It's used by the school from 9 to 3 on weekdays and when school is in session and then operated by the Parks Department and used by the general public weekends, after school, summers and holidays.

I think it's just a matter of where you'd like to put the money. In this particular case these are existing Department of Education playgrounds. Money was added to the Department of Education budget to have the custodians maintain

those.

The big difference is the JOPs are technology mapped as parkland. So it's a slightly different legal construct. I would have no objection in theory to enlarging the JOP program. Of course that would be dependent on funding for the maintenance which doesn't look like it'll be coming along soon.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The 79 Street Rotunda, when I asked DOT they said they have the money but Parks doesn't. It's millions and millions and millions.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes. The Rotunda is at 79 Street and it's the exit ramps from the Henry Hudson Parkway and it also includes our underground facilities. As you know, it's an old structure and it needs a lot of work. There had been some federal funding in place but it was moved to another project. Who knows, maybe we could get some stimulus funding for that, but currently we don't have funding to restore it, which is a shame.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So we can work on the stimulus money?

ADRIAN BENEPE: It would certainly be a good prospect for that because it's very transportation related.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The 59 Street rec center, the money is there. Can you just update me on how the construction is going?

ADRIAN BENEPE: It's moving right along, 38% complete and will open in January 2011.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: There are no issues, no cost overruns, we're okay?

ADRIAN BENEPE: We're doing very well. The two dynamic women in charge of this are nodding their heads and smiling. If it were doing badly, they wouldn't do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Then finally Verdi Park. We had talked with the borough commissioner about getting somebody more permanently there because there are millions of people who come and go all day long to their subway and it needs more attention. Do you know if that's happened?

ADRIAN BENEPE: I recall seeing some correspondence where the commissioner was promising to do it. It is a very busy place.

People unfortunately drop their litter.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Every minute.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Eighty percent of our job would be done if people simply put their litter in a litter basket.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But if you had somebody there telling them maybe they would do it. That was my thought.

ADRIAN BENEPE: A greeter? Maybe we can get a greeter there.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We need somebody.

ADRIAN BENEPE: We'll do what we can.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you, Madame Chair.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you, Council Member. I have just two quick follow up questions on questions that have been raised by my colleagues. What is the total number of PEP officers?

ADRIAN BENEPE: 196. When you include the rangers it's 230. The park rangers by

the way have all the legal powers of a PEP officer. They are fully shielded. They're deputized peace officers in New York State. They can make arrests and issue summonses. So there's 230 shielded enforcement officers working for the New York City Parks Department.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: That number is going to change to what in fiscal year 2011?

ADRIAN BENEPE: We're not planning a reduction.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: It's going to stay?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Whatever happens through attrition. We hope that they won't leave, but if they leave, we're averaging about a 5% attrition these days.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: That may not be the case.

ADRIAN BENEPE: We hope that they'll stay in place. We also hire seasonal rangers. As I mentioned, lots and lots of seasonal PEPs. So we add hundreds of people during the summer to help us with security.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: That's another question I'll ask once my colleagues are done. Then with regards to the playgrounds that was discussed. It was part of the PlaNYC plan. Once they're fixed and ready to go, are they just open to the public. Are there staffing issues there? Is there additional monies for operating?

ADRIAN BENEPE: The schoolyards to playground program comes with additional funding through the Department of Education for the custodian to clean and maintain the property. It remains Department of Education property.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Understood. But I'm saying the custodians are responsible for cleaning and maintaining, but basically the hours are the hours. It's open to the community. Nobody is there to kind of monitor.

ADRIAN BENEPE: They don't have somebody there but the custodian is responsible for cleaning.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Does that take into account overtime for the custodian?

ADRIAN BENEPE: I'm not sure how

they do it.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: That's a question for the Department of Education.

ADRIAN BENEPE: My sense has been, and again we don't own it, we simply building it and then turn it over to them. I've gone around and looked at them and I've heard anecdotally that they seem to be working pretty well.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Just curious to know if that's cost, but we can raise that at the Department of Education.

ADRIAN BENEPE: They get an extra \$50,000. I don't know if they use it for overtime. It's used for overtime. Commissioner Donoghue says that money is used for overtime so they can do the additional cleaning necessary.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you. Council Member Dromm?

COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you very much Madame Chair. Commissioner, it's good to see you again. Thank you for meeting with us about a week or so ago up at the arsenal. I also want to thank you for your commitment to helping me green up my district and for your awareness

1
2 that the 25th Council District perhaps has the
3 least amount of park space of any district in the
4 city. I'm appreciative of that.

5 The one park that we have is
6 actually Travers Park and it's actually more like
7 a playground than it is a park. Right now it's
8 undergoing renovations.

9 I don't know if you're aware, but
10 since the good weather has come and the
11 construction is going on still and I think it's
12 going to go through until the end of October,
13 people have been using the park, which we
14 expected.

15 They're jumping over the
16 construction fences. They're having soccer games
17 where the construction is going on. Kids are
18 actually on the monkey bars and the swings or
19 whatever. So there is a tremendous need to get
20 that park opened as soon as possible. So I just
21 wanted to call your attention to that because for
22 safety concerns it's a problem. And two, to see
23 if there is any way that we could actually speed
24 up that process in the park. My district relies
25 very, very heavily on Travers Park.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Just by coincidence, Council Member, I was reading a letter this morning from one of your constituents, a very angry letter about Travers Park.

COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: I got about ten of them.

ADRIAN BENEPE: So I'm going to check with Commissioner Braddock about speeding that up. Is it going slow for some reason, what can we do, can we increase the site security? People should not go onto construction sites, it can be dangerous, and the contractor has an affirmative obligation to keep people out of the site and keep the site secure, so we'll make sure they're doing that. I will do what I can to see about speeding it up.

I know Travers Park is an enormously important park. I've been there. I've worked with the Friends of Travers Park. It's the one park you have in your whole district. You might want to trade with Council Member Vacca. He has Pelham Bay Park and Ferry Point. He's probably got about 3,500 acres of parks.

COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: We'll trade

the park but keep the district or something like that. I think most of the problems are happening with the construction stuff on the weekends. So I think that's what really needs to be looked at. That's when they're unsupervised if I'm not mistaken and that's when the activity seems to be going on there.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Thank you for alerting us to that. That's not a good thing. We'll try to fix that.

COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: It could be very dangerous actually. I saw them playing soccer there in between the bulldozer.

I understand that the maintenance work, and I don't know if that's the exact title for the worker who is there, but I saw that he's retiring and is going to move on. I noticed in your testimony today that with the plans for attrition you're going to replace people who are retiring with part time staff. Is that what's going to happen there at Travers Park? Do you know what's going to happen with that worker who is in there?

ADRIAN BENEPE: I'll have to find

1
2 out and get back to you. In the ideal world we'd
3 staff every playground but we don't have the
4 luxury of being able to do that and in fact
5 probably haven't been able to do that since the
6 1930s.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: I think we
8 had a full time person there in the summer.

9 ADRIAN BENEPE: We'll see what we
10 can do. It's a very busy park. Again, we're in a
11 hiring freeze, so if we can't hire a full time
12 person, we might have some room in the seasonal
13 budget and we could put some other kind of staff
14 there. It's a really busy park and we try to put
15 staff where the patrons are.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: I would very
17 much appreciate that. Thank you.

18 ADRIAN BENEPE: We'll do what we
19 can and I'll let you know.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank
22 you, Council Member. Council Member Van Bramer.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank
24 you very much, Madame Chair. Commissioner, I
25 would love to get a sense from you on where we're

at with the Queensbridge Park seawall project.

ADRIAN BENEPE: The Queensbridge Park seawall project is something that I care about deeply. It's a difficult project. We thought we had funding for it with some mitigation. There were some other agencies who were required to do some wetland mitigation in exchange for what they had done with some highway construction.

The problem, however, is that there may be some issues with toxins in the ground that need to be addressed. There is not enough money in those project budgets to pay for site mitigation. So we have to identify some capital funding to mitigate the site and then to reconstruct it.

We were just meeting about this very topic. Commissioner Kavanagh, do you have some ideas on that? We have ideas but the thing we lack is the capital funding.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: How much are we talking?

ADRIAN BENEPE: We're talking in excess of \$5 million.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Just for the remediation?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Not for the remediation. The remediation is probably in the neighborhood of \$2 million. But what we really need to do and what we're actually working on now is getting a true handle on what needs to be mitigated and what those costs would be. There are a number of factors involved. The bridge is adjacent to the park and the seawall, which may have contributed to lead in the soil over the years.

But the real problem is some underground petroleum which may be connected to the MTA. That's the area where we don't really know what's there. We don't know if it's a problem in fact. But we have to answer that question before we can move forward.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So it's the MTA's fault?

ADRIAN BENEPE: We don't know that yet, but we suspect there may be some petroleum on the site.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: I know

that you know how important that park is to the folks.

ADRIAN BENEPE: We do. It's important to us, it's important to you and your constituents, it's important to the City Parks Foundation. There has been no bigger champion at least coming into my office once a week than David Rivel, the head of the City Parks Foundation. So our feet are definitely being kept to the fire.

It's one of these things where we'd like to do this, we just need to have the money allocated. Some of it could be federal money. Maybe there's a chance of having a congress member get some money for that or senate money or stimulus money. We're eager to get this done but unfortunately we lack the money printing machine in our basement.

I just want to add that we have completed a recent round of soil tests and we're just waiting for the results. So we may have more information soon.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: I know you know that there is great commitment towards this project from the elected officials. I know

1
2 Congresswoman Malone and Assemblywoman Nolan have
3 both been very engaged in the project. I look
4 forward to working with them and you so that the
5 project is completed and the people can enjoy the
6 entire park as soon as possible.

7 I also wanted to ask you, I think
8 you might be aware that there is a group in
9 Woodside. There is a triangle that is privately
10 owned and possibly going to be developed but they
11 would love to see it transformed into a park at
12 60th Street and 34th Avenue. I was just wondering
13 your thoughts on that. I think that we're all in
14 support of it as long as we can possibly find the
15 funds for that as well.

16 ADRIAN BENEPE: Again, particularly
17 we've been looking at some of the neighborhoods
18 that might be lacking in parkland and looking for
19 opportunities just like this. If the money were
20 to become available, we'd like to acquire this
21 land and develop it as parks. It's just simply a
22 matter of getting capital allocation for that.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Parks
24 would be supportive of transforming this triangle
25 into a park?

ADRIAN BENEPE: I'd have to double check that, but generally speaking, we can look at it and see. We tend to like to create new parkland, particularly in neighborhoods that are lacking. Interestingly, western Queens is really lacking in parkland.

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I know some of my colleagues want to do a second round. Let me just ask one quick question in here. We've talked about attrition as one way of obviously closing this gap or saving money. You're proposing to reduce 173 headcount through managed retirements and layoffs, which you are projecting to save \$1 million in fiscal 2010 and \$10.7 in fiscal 2011.

This preliminary budget you include \$4.5 million to cover a PS deficit from lower than expected attrition last year. So what are your expectations that you're going to meet your attrition rate this year in fiscal year 2011?

ADRIAN BENEPE: We're hoping that the package that we've put together which would

all full time staff who leave now to come back on a two month seasonal basis each year for say at least the next three years. That will be enough incentive. We have a number of people who are retirement eligible and this might be enough incentive to get them to take the retirement package.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: That wasn't provided last year?

ADRIAN BENEPE: It was not provided last year. As with other agencies, our attrition projections were higher than the actuality. I think that also has to do with the economy. Normally you have a certain attrition rate because people leave for other perhaps better jobs. That wasn't happening. We lost probably 50 people compared to the 200 we thought we would lose through attrition.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: You're saying that it's based on where people maybe are eligible for retirement and the incentive package might incentivize them to do this. What departments will be affected? If you already have an idea of where these individuals are, what

programs will be most impacted?

ADRIAN BENEPE: The majority of Parks employees, the largest percentage would be in maintenance and operations. So city park workers, park supervisors, associate park service workers. That's where we have the most titles. We probably have some of the greater seniority in those titles. The average age of our park supervisors has gone down a little bit but it used to be around 25 years of experience, you know in their 50s and close to being retirement eligible.

It's most likely in our full time maintenance workforce but I expect to have some in the senior management ranks as well.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I think Council Member Crowley has another question.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you, Madame Chair. Commissioner, before the chair asked the question, we were on western Queens. I happen to share an area, Maspeth with Council Member Van Bramer. One area in particular is a site called St. Xavier's. It's on Rush Street and 58th Road. Across the street is Van Bramer's district. It's an area of the city that has very

little parkland.

I understand that there was an opportunity that your department had to visit the site and assess the value. Do you know about this visit? Are you able to inform me of what the Parks Department feels is the value of that particular site?

ADRIAN BENEPE: I know that we've been talking about and we've had people look at it. I'd like to ask Joshua Laird, our Assistant Commissioner for Planning and Parkland to talk about that.

JOSHUA LAIRD: Hi, good afternoon. We have looked at this site and we think it does have some potential as open space. It, again, comes down to a funding issue. We as a parks agency don't conduct appraisals of property, only the City's Department of Administrative Services, DCAS does that. They are reluctant to advance any sort of discussions even with a willing seller unless has money in the bank to back it up which we don't have at this point. We think it's probably a \$3-\$4 million acquisition.

Our concern would be on top of the

1
2 acquisition the site has now been totally cleared
3 of the former church building and its landscape.
4 We would need development money and of course
5 there would be a maintenance impact to calculate.
6 So I think probably we need to think about more
7 than just the cost of purchasing the land.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Also, near
9 this site is the New Town Creek which has been
10 victim to spills and I think that there's been
11 some settlement, multimillion dollars that maybe
12 there's a possibility that we could work together
13 to try to get some funds because it's so close to
14 that superfund site.

15 ADRIAN BENEPE: We'll try to speak
16 to the organization that will be dispersing those
17 settlement funds and suggest that as a
18 possibility.

19 JOSHUA LAIRD: I'm told Borough
20 President Marshall may have also allocated some
21 funds towards the acquisition. So if we can
22 cobble together the resources, it doesn't have to
23 be from one entity.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: My office
25 is also willing to work you on that.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you. I'm going to try to go quickly through some additional questions. Then we obviously would like to hear from the public, but I think these are important questions.

I would assume that this is the same answer, but touching on what I was asking before about attrition that you have a full hiring freeze projected for 2011. You're expecting to save about \$3.5 million in fiscal year 2011. It's about 105 vacancies. So would you say that that majority of that would be also in maintenance and operations?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes. That's more than likely. But again, it could be somewhat random. It's just who decides to leave. What we'll do is if we have any sort of disproportionate losses, say if 25 people decided to retire in Queens, we'll move from other places to cover it. We're not going to let a random pattern of attrition adversely impact the operations.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I want

to talk a little bit about the Job Training participants in the POP program which you're saying that you're going to project that you're going to save \$4.6 million in funding in 2010 and \$10.4 million in 2011 and the out years.

Now, my understanding, and I think we're all clear that the JTP program is a successful way of transitioning people off public assistance and helping them become self-sufficient. Would you agree with that?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: You believe it's been a great program?

ADRIAN BENEPE: A terrific program.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I had a meeting recently with HRA with regards to stimulus money. It is my understanding that some stimulus money is being directed to Parks for the POP program. Is that correct?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes. We've been able to add almost 1,000 JTP positions through the stimulus funding.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: This is where I'm trying to get some clarity. So you're

1
2 saying that you've been able to add some through
3 the stimulus money. I'm just going back to my
4 notes a second. There was another area we were
5 talking about. In terms of the Greenstreets and
6 the ARRA funding, you're talking about 553 full
7 time equivalent jobs. Some JTP program job I
8 guess. Some additions there.

9 I'm just trying to find out what
10 the net loss is. What is the total number and the
11 net loss that you're losing?

12 ADRIAN BENEPE: If I try to do
13 this, I'll get it all wrong. I'm going to ask
14 Commissioner Garafola who has all the answers to
15 come up. Basically what happens is we take a loss
16 through sort of a basic budget cut and then we're
17 able to fill it with other programs. So we're
18 doing a constant balancing.

19 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So then
20 what's the net loss?

21 ADRIAN BENEPE: We've been able to
22 stay pretty steady this year. We thought we'd go
23 way down and we actually stayed pretty steady.
24 What are we projecting for next year, Commissioner
25 Garafola?

ROBERT L. GARAFOLA: For next year we're projected a loss of 720 positions. We're hoping we have some ARRA funding that's going to be coming in for July, August and September. So we will be able to mitigate some of that, not all of it obviously at this point. We're hoping there are going to be other jobs bills. A number of job bills are going through in Washington. We're hoping something gets passed.

As we've done this year, we've really mitigated most of the cuts that we've had with the increases in our JTP program with the ARRA funding that we got from HRA and from the state. We've done pretty well this year. We're hoping next year that we can somehow make up that difference.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Is that 720 full time equivalent positions?

ROBERT L. GARAFOLA: Yes, it is.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So taking into account the ARRA, how many will be replaced, all the other money. So you saying after all of that?

ROBERT L. GARAFOLA: 720 without

the ARRA for next year.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Without the ARRA?

ROBERT L. GARAFOLA: Without the ARRA. That's the base.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Then if you get ARRA, what are you looking at then?

ROBERT L. GARAFOLA: With ARRA we think it's going to be around maybe 575. At this point the reduction would be 575. Then we're looking to build back. We'll be working very closely with HRA and with the state to see if we can build that number and get that number down. We can work in terms of our staffing during the main part of the year.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So then the ARRA funding, some of it is coming through HRA.

ROBERT L. GARAFOLA: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Some of it is coming for the Greenstreets or the green jobs. Where is that coming through?

ROBERT L. GARAFOLA: It's coming

from the state and it's going through HRA. We work through HRA on it. There's an agency called OTDA, Office of Temporary Disability Assistance. So a lot of the money is filtered through them, especially the green money is coming through them to HRA. So that's what we've been doing working with our programs. They've been looking to us to take the lead on that.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I'm sorry, go back to the total number of job training participants.

ROBERT L. GARAFOLA: Job training participants is 2315 and we'll be going down to 1595, hopefully with the ARRA money that will be a higher number.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So 2315 potential without taking into account stimulus money, 720 is what you're looking at losing. Then with stimulus that goes down to 575.

ROBERT L. GARAFOLA: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Just wanted clarification. Now it's my understanding that some of the people who are part of the POPO

program are enrolled in some type of a work fare program through other agencies. These are primarily agencies that are helping people transition to full time jobs and basically out of homelessness as well. Are you communicating with other agencies on what you're working on? Is there some coordination that's going on?

ROBERT L. GARAFOLA: We're working right now with SBS on a program we call the POP spark program where we have a number of people. It's being funded through SBS and we're working with the MTA in order to get people into electrical assistance positions. It's a one-year program. They're doing that.

We also work with CUNY. We do a lot of training through CUNY. For instance, in our weatherization program, we're going to be doing that. Also, our Million Tree training program, we're working with the Bronx Botanical Gardens. So we're working with a lot of different institutions. We're also looking for a number of the nonprofits to basically help us hire some of these people after they graduate. We've had success in doing that. We look to continue to do

that as well.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: The POP Connect I'm assuming is a CEO, correct?

ROBERT L. GARAFOLA: POP Connect is a CEO program. We started this a while ago and it was for 18-24 year olds. We've connected it up with this. But actually it's ARRA funding that we're getting on that as well.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Will this cut affect any other programs in any other agencies? Do you think it would?

ROBERT L. GARAFOLA: On other agencies, HRA I know came in here. I assume they're getting a similar cut, a 7% cut. I don't know if it's going to have an impact on our program. We really haven't talked to them about it. They're still at a preliminary stage obviously.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Now POP participants are primarily and heavily involved in the maintenance and security in parks. How are you projecting that to impact? Is it going to impact the scorecards?

ROBERT L. GARAFOLA: We haven't

really made decisions in terms of what programs are going to be hit. I know in terms of the PEP program along in the summer we had about 150 in the PEP program. They were trained in the academy of the PEP and actually worked out in the various boroughs. Also many in the maintenance fields, also some are in some of the administrative programs as well. And many in the horticulture programs assisting and helping with the gardeners as well.

ADRIAN BENEPE: One of the things we can try to do is try to take our losses more in the winter than in the summer and sort of ramp up during the busy season so that during the busy season when we need people doing security at pools and beaches and all the other things, we can try to ramp up and have fewer in the winter and more in the summer.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I think that would be a more effective use of the resources.

ADRIAN BENEPE: This year we're going to have about 3,000 participants this summer. So we definitely maximize when it's busy.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

Speaking of the seasonal positions. It says you will delay the hiring of selected seasonal positions for fiscal year 2011, projected savings, \$470,000. What positions are going to be affected by this PEG? Maintenance and operations again?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes, primarily city park workers, APSW and park supervisors. A total of about 65 or 70 positions.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Then also with regards to the delay in hiring of 88 new full time and 11 seasonal employees for the PlaNYC related projects. They are saying that it's a savings of \$4.5 million. Do you know what positions there and what parks will be affected?

ADRIAN BENEPE: There won't be any parks affected because the parks haven't been built yet. So the delay in the hiring ties into the construction schedule for the parks. We won't need them for maintaining the parks in most cases for a year or two.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I just have a couple more questions. It indicates in the budget that there was personnel services surplus

of \$158,000 in the recreation center budgets.

What was the surplus due to?

ADRIAN BENEPE: That was a one-time only delay in hiring for the after school program at the rec centers.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: That was citywide?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Also mentioned in the budget about the Central Park Conservancy that you're going to reduce your payment to the Central Park Conservancy by 8%, saving the agency \$460,000. Has the Central Park Conservancy indicated how this is going to impact their activities? How much in general of Department of Park's budget is allocated to conservancies?

ADRIAN BENEPE: The Central Park Conservancy has a contractual relationship with the city where they receive a fee for essentially maintaining the park on behalf of the city. The vast majority of the money spent to maintain and operate the park is raised privately. It's at least 85% and maybe more.

The reduction that they're getting in their fee, which is effectively a management fee, is coming because the income from revenue and concessions in the park also went down. Part of their fee is based on the income in the park. Their fee averages from \$4-\$6 million a year. They spend annually about \$25 million a year to maintain and operate the park. They also raise anywhere from a couple of million to \$20 million a year for capital improvements to the park.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Then what's the total in terms of your line item as a Department of Parks, how much is allocated to conservancies?

ADRIAN BENEPE: To conservancies in general?

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Yes.

ADRIAN BENEPE: Central Park is the only one that has a management fee.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: It's the only one?

ADRIAN BENEPE: They are the only one to have a contract to provide the entire maintenance of the park.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I want to just go back because I just want to reiterate and I just have a couple of questions on capital and then I think we can move on. Looking at your information, talking about the increase in the usage in the pools, it was pretty dramatic. It's great that you're bringing in additional services to the pools and that's attracting people to obviously utilize them. I think that's great.

Also that we saw attendance and membership at recreation centers growing as well, correct?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: What would you attribute that to?

ADRIAN BENEPE: The growth in membership at the recreation centers, over the last couple of years we opened, as Council Member Ferreras noted, we opened two brand new recreation centers, one in Flushing and one in Staten Island. Just by itself, the Al Oerter Recreation Center added tens of thousands of new members along with the opening of the pool across the street.

We've also had strong performance

in the Bronx. The Roy Wilkins Recreation Center has seen a lot of increase in the Bronx. We've seen growth across the board, particularly with strong senior membership gains at Hunts Point, at St. James, at St. Mary's. It's been a little bit flat in Brooklyn and Manhattan but solid performance in Brooklyn at Sunset and St. Johns.

The big spike really is the new centers. Just tens of thousands of new members almost overnight between the new pool and the two new recreation centers.

The Al Oerter Recreation Center in Flushing, the Flushing Meadows pool and rink account for much of the growth.

They're very popular. They're a very good deal. It's free for kids. It's \$10 if you're a senior. We have a very generous definition of senior. Starting at age 55 you pay \$10 a year for a full service rec center including a pool. For adults it's \$75 if you want to use it at any center with a pool or \$50 for a year for centers without pools. So it's by far the very best deal in town.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I

1
2 agree. I think we're only going to see a rise in
3 the use of our parks, our pools, and our
4 recreation centers. I think in light of cuts that
5 we're seeing in other areas. I believe we have a
6 good partnership but I think that we want to see
7 in what ways we can minimize that and keep as many
8 of the pools open as possible. We're willing to
9 provide suggestions and recommendations and see
10 what we can do to minimize that.

11 Again, I only see in our
12 communities the usage rising. A lot of the young
13 people that are lifeguards, these are great jobs
14 also for community residents, people from the
15 community that are providing those services, so
16 that's a critical aspect of it as well.

17 Just on the capital side quickly,
18 you talked a little bit about it in terms of the
19 PlaNYC projects. This whole discussion on
20 Brooklyn Bridge Park, first of all, I just wanted
21 to know are there any projected allocations from
22 the Parks budget that you're expecting for fiscal
23 year 2011?

24 ADRIAN BENEPE: There are no
25 allocations from the City Parks Department budget,

1 from the expense budget at all for Brooklyn Bridge
2 Park and none are anticipated. All of the
3 operating money from Brooklyn Bridge Park comes
4 from the development parcels, from pilot payments
5 and from rental and from concession that might be
6 built there. That's according to the general
7 project plan that was adopted eight years ago.

8
9 There are several parcels the fate
10 of which is yet to be determined. There will be a
11 special study group set up to figure out what's
12 really necessary and what are the ways that income
13 can be brought in to support the park's operations
14 that might not involve building residential
15 housing. But there are no city expense dollars
16 slated to go to Brooklyn Bridge Park's operations.
17 There will be city capital dollars depending on an
18 agreement and the success of finding funding
19 sources to pay for the ongoing operations.

20 CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: What is
21 the total revenue that you're projecting from
22 concession in parks?

23 ADRIAN BENEPE: I could tell you
24 from my recent memory we've averaged somewhere
25 between \$90 and \$100 million a year in revenue

from concessions. Last year was a fairly big year. We expect some of that to go down. Our revenue estimate for 2010 is \$83.6 million. I'll ask Assistant Commissioner Betsy Smith to join us. The total revenue projected for FY 10 is \$83.7 million, for FY 11 \$71 million.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: What's the drop due to?

ADRIAN BENEPE: We used to get income from Yankee Stadium and Shea Stadium. We no longer do because we didn't build them and we don't maintain them. We had a big boost in the revenue in FY 09 through the sale of memorabilia from the stadium where the city got money from that. It was \$15 million. So it was artificially high in 09.

We had been building up to about \$90 million total concessions and revenue. Concessions include things like cafes and restaurants and revenue would include the money from recreation centers and from ball field permits and from golf courses and so on. So a combination of concession and revenues added to around \$90 million but that's gone down. It's

gone down due to the recession.

It's going to go down rather dramatically due to the fact that we will no longer be collecting from the stadiums. So we do not expect to hit those high numbers again.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Two more quick questions and then we're going to go to the public. What's the status of the Tavern on the Green concession?

ADRIAN BENEPE: The Tavern on the Green Concession, we selected a potential operator. We're negotiating with that operator on a license agreement and the operator is negotiating with the Restaurant and Hotel workers union on a labor agreement.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Has there been any progress on that? I hear that things have stalled.

ADRIAN BENEPE: They work every day toward it. As we speak discussions are going on.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Really?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Maybe the city has but I don't know, does the operator

show up to those negotiating meetings?

ADRIAN BENEPE: The operator has a very strong interest in showing up to those meetings because he wants to open the restaurant.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: The last issue about the capital projects that you have in terms of the completion rate, in fiscal year 2010, the department completed 51 capital projects during the first four months of fiscal year 2010 compared to 45 a year ago. While the percent completed within budget remained better than the 85% target, the percent of projects completed on time fell to 63% which is significantly lower than both the prior year and the performance goal of 80%. What would you attribute that lower than on time completion rate?

ADRIAN BENEPE: I'm going to ask our deputy commissioner Therese Braddock to come talk about that.

THERESE BRADDOCK: Thank you. For a very short period of time we had a shortage of what we call our resident engineers. Those are the folks that actually supervise the construction projects in the field. We were able to staff up

and we're back online now.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: What period of time was that? How long were you short?

THERESE BRADDOCK: I would say we were probably short for about five or six months.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: So you're fully staffed up. Do you expect to get back on track?

THERESE BRADDOCK: We hope to. Hopefully we won't lose anymore through attrition or for any other reasons.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I know that in every contract that there's a percentage in terms of if there are overruns on projects. I think you allocate maybe 15% in case there are overruns. Has your budget on the capital side in terms of overruns, is it a consistent problem, overrun on projects and what is that amount?

THERESE BRADDOCK: The overruns really vary on a project by project basis, depending on the kind of field conditions and what you're seeing in the field. So there isn't a set percentage that's set up for overruns on any specific project.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I know it's project by project but I'm sure overall in your budget you project whether overall you're going to have to dip into the extra. Have you ever gone beyond what you've projected? Does that consistently happen?

ADRIAN BENEPE: Generally on a parks construct project we have 10% for contingency, we have 10% for design, and 10% for construct and design supervision. We usually don't go beyond the 10%. The 10% will account for design change orders. It will account for field conditions. Say you're digging up a park and you find a fuel tank that was left there by the pervious property owner that was not accounted for on any maps. But I think we're staying more or less on track.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: It hasn't impacted your budget significantly in any way.

ADRIAN BENEPE: You budget money, you anticipate field conditions that you'll have to spend more money on or change orders. They might come in and say we want a new fence or a new

gate. We try to avoid those change orders but sometimes they're unavoidable.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Unless my colleagues have a very quick question, we're going to go to the public. Council Member Ferreras?

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I didn't say this when I was asking questions before but I believe that we have to give credit where credit is due. I've had a lot of very positive response from parents, children and teachers on your schoolyards to playgrounds. It's a project that is very, very positively received in my community. I believe we have three of them and one of them is actually under planning now. The participation of parent and school children and the staff is just amazing. So this partnership really makes sense with the Parks Department and DOE and the Trust for Public Land so I wanted to commend you on that one.

ADRIAN BENEPE: You just made my day. Thanks.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Good. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

Commissioner, I want to thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I just want to thank Commissioner Casto and Steve Simon. Just to throw that in. Thank you.

ADRIAN BENEPE: I'll pass that on.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I want to thank you for coming before us. In your testimony there are some very exiting projects that are happening throughout the park system. I understand it's challenging times and definitely we want to extend our hand and have a continued strong partnership with you to try to minimize the impact in our communities and our constituents.

ADRIAN BENEPE: The Council has not just talked the talk, it's walked the walk. Very consistently you've provided funding for capital projects, for PEP officers, for pools and for everything else. I thank you for your incredible consistent support for everything that we do.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you very much. Have a great afternoon. We're going to take a moment just to regroup and we'll be calling on the public testimony in a minute.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

Commissioner, can you make sure that somebody does stay back to hear testimony? Thank you.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you all for your patience. We'll make sure that we allow everyone to have their say. We'd like to call the first panel: David Rivel, Lee Stuart and Geoffrey Croft. Do you want to go ahead and start?

DAVID RIVEL: Thank you. I'm David Rivel. I'm the executive director of the City Parks Foundation. I just wanted to take a moment to tell you a little bit about who we are and why we're here today. City Parks Foundation believes every park needs three things to be successful. It needs capital improvements, it needs maintenance money to keep it clean, but it needs people. It needs free programs in parks so people can use the park. It needs an engaged community.

Our research shows that the biggest single predictor of whether a park is successful or not is whether the community is productively

involved in the park. That's what we do as an organization. I won't read all of my testimony, I'll just mention a couple of things that we do to help improve parks all across the city.

The City Parks Foundation works in 800 in all five boroughs. We work in every City Council district all across the city. We do free sports programs for kids. We do free education programs for kids. We run the Partnerships for Parks program along with the Parks Department that helps 65,000 people volunteer in their parks every year.

One of the big projects that we're working on is in Council Member Ferreras' district, as she knows. We had great success building a junior golf center in Brooklyn that's free and open for kids. There are 3,500 kids that use that center now. We are now interested in building a junior tennis center near the entrance of the U.S. Tennis Center in Flushing.

Last year the City Council gave us half of the money needed to build it and we're looking for the other half this year so we can build it. If not this fall, then certainly by the

fall after that.

Our programming not only keeps parks alive and active, but we also hire 350 people every summer with paying jobs, good jobs, to run programs in parks and we make a strong economic impact across the city.

I think Madame Chairwoman, that as you said before, not everybody in the city gets to go away during the summer. These parks are important for people. We need to make sure that free programming in parks continues. We need to make sure there is a reason for people to come visit parks and use them productively.

I'll also just lastly mention that we've just launched a project to reinvigorate three waterfront parks across the city. SoundView park in the south Bronx, East River Park in Manhattan and Kaiser Parks in Brooklyn. This is a project known as Catalyst for Neighborhood parks. It's been a very successful project over the years. We're looking to revitalize these three parks. These three parks have capital funding allocated through the PlaNYC program. But we're going to make sure that the money gets spent with

community input, that the parks are built the way the communities want them built and that they remain active and well used.

We are very grateful for the City Council's support. We generally receive a leadership grant from the Speaker's Office and we're hoping that you can support that again this year. Thank you.

LEE STUART: Good afternoon Madame Chair and Council Members. My name is Lee Stuart and I'm the executive director of New Yorkers for Parks. We're the only independent citywide advocate for all of New York City's parks, beaches and playgrounds.

The mission of New Yorkers for Parks is to ensure that all New Yorkers enjoy a world class parks system. Our signature programs are the report cards on parks and beaches, the daffodil project which is beautified with about 3.5 million daffodil bulbs and counting now, the public spaces of New York, detailed maps of council districts and we create tools for local neighborhood groups to better advocate for parks in their particular neighborhood.

Not since 1992 has the Parks Department's budget seen such drastic cuts as those proposed for fiscal year 2011. In addition, as Commissioner Benepe said, if the city does not receive the expected support from Albany, the situation will be even more dire.

We're here today to really stress with the Council the gravity of this situation and to implore the City Council to act so that our parks get the funding that they deserve. Our parks are the city's back yards, front yards, our access to open space and fresh air. Some people call them our lungs.

They are as essential to our quality of life as other major infrastructure systems, although they're often not considered such. Some of our parks are world renown, others are known only to their immediate neighbors, but all are deeply loved and we would be a very poorer city without them.

In a time, as others have said, when New Yorkers are staying local for their vacations, clean, safe and well maintained parks and beaches are in high demand. The Trust for

Public Land did a recent study that showed that indeed userships has been up, particular among families with small children. And it really is the Council's and New York City's obligation to ensure that parks are sufficiently funded to ensure safe recreational opportunities. Now more than ever since so many of the opportunities for our citizens are reduced.

Clearly, in these dire economic times, we're aware that agencies will have to do more with less but we're actually here to fight for parks. At a minimum, our priorities for restoring the Park's budget \$16 million of the proposed \$20 million cuts.

We divide that \$16 million this way, these are our priorities. Specifically, restore the \$2 Million for the swimming pools which will keep the pools open and keep the regular swimming season. Another priority of ours is to restore the nearly \$500,000 for Seasonal Staff. Any delay in hiring of seasonal staff does have negative impact on the readiness of our parks and the way in which people can use during the summer months.

We will add our voice to the call for tree pruning and ask for restoration of about \$3.5 million for additional tree pruning. Considering the goal to plant one million trees and the recent passage of Local Law 4, this is all the more important. And our fourth priority for restoring the budget to the Parks Department is \$10 million for the Job Training program.

We've heard about that but these essential staff positions provide year-round daily maintenance, supervision, and eyes on the park for parks in all five boroughs. It is one of the nation's largest transitional employment programs, although often unsung. The proposed cuts to this program will have significant adverse effect on the maintenance of our 29,000 acres of parks, beaches, and playgrounds.

I'm skipping a lot here but on behalf of all New Yorkers in all five boroughs whose quality of life is improved because of the recreational opportunities, open space, and sheer beauty of our parks, New Yorkers for Parks really calls on the City Council and urges you to restore the essential funding so that a truly world class

park system for a truly world class city. Thanks.

GEOFFREY CROFT: Good afternoon.

I'd just like to talk a little bit about some of the historical context of this.

This is a quote. "The budget isn't a true budget. It is a sham. It does not reflect the demands of the department." That was Parks Commissioner Robert Moses testifying in 1935.

Good afternoon, my name is Geoffrey Croft. I am the president and founder of New York City Park Advocates.

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 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.

As a percentage of the City's

1 budget, this would represent only a 0.37%
2 allocation in tax levy funds which would represent
3 a historic low for an agency that's responsible
4 for 14% of the City's land.
5

6 These cuts would be devastating to
7 an already decimated city agency. You've heard a
8 lot about the cuts in specifics, but I just wanted
9 to add one thing about one particular segment,
10 which are the pools.

11 Madame Chair, you talked about the
12 importance of the pools. New York City already
13 ranks dead last in the provision of public
14 swimming pools. Just the thought of cutting any
15 pools or beach is outrageous and that should not
16 be going forward in any way, shape or form. We
17 desperately need those services.

18 For more than four decades, the
19 city, state and federal governments have allocated
20 a fraction of the funds needed to maintain our
21 vast park system. The city's parks, once the most
22 celebrated and unprecedented public work program
23 in the nation have become dumping grounds and
24 havens for drug use, prostitution and the homeless
25 and criminal activity.

1
2 Their maintenance and safety have
3 plummeted under the weight of crippling budget
4 cuts over the years. Despite being in violation
5 of the City Charter for decades, the City has been
6 able to get away with this with virtual impunity.
7 The question is, how much longer will the city's
8 elected officials collectively be able to ignore
9 this public health crisis.

10 The Parks Department is in dire
11 need of thousands of additional workers and
12 hundreds of millions of dollars of additional
13 expense funding. Funding and personnel many say
14 the agency will never receive. This is shameful.
15 The city routinely allocates one third of what the
16 Parks Department actually needs. It is imperative
17 the city allocate a budget that reflects the true
18 needs of the Parks Department. Unfortunately this
19 one does not come remotely close as usual.

20 That's one of the issues here.
21 Every year people come to talk about restoring
22 these budget cuts but we are so in the hole
23 already. I think the Parks Department in many
24 ways does an outstanding job for the budget that
25 they are given. We need to turn this around.

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. This has to be a priority. The political will necessary to provide funding for safe, well maintained parks, and public recreation programs that every neighborhood deserves, simply does not exist. Work that David Rivel does and many other so-called public/private partnerships, they are addressing some of the needs but they're not coming anywhere close.

Land under the jurisdiction of the City's Parks Department occupies more than 14% 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% or 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.

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. Your colleagues were asking about park enforcement. This is creating an enormous disparity. So our private funded parks, the ones that have dedicated maintenance and funding

streams are able to basically buy these services.

So when Commissioner Benepe was asked how many park enforcement officers there are in Manhattan, he answered 44. That's not accurate. There are over 810. He went on to explain that some of these are in a few privately maintained parks. But the numbers are just so over the top compared to the rest of the system.

So by entering into these so-called public/private partnerships we've created, again, a two tier park system.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO:

Geoffrey Croft, we are running late and there are a lot of people.

GEOFFREY CROFT: Sure. I just want to say one thing.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: thank you.

GEOFFREY CROFT: 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.

The last thing I just want to say on that is that the 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.

We need to carefully consider not just the cuts that are on the table now but the historic cuts because when I got out there the last few weeks, if I could describe some of the images, they're not what a world class city should be experiencing. Unfortunately it impacts neighborhoods, people of color predominately, and people that are poor. That has to change.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you very much for your testimony. The next panel we have Javier Rodriguez, Franklyn Paige, Peter Stein and Giuliana Pellegrini.

PETER STEIN: Good afternoon,

Chairperson Mark-Viverito and the rest of the Council Members. I'm going to dispense with what I prepared and just be as blunt and brief as I know how to be.

First I want to tell you that I am here not just as a partisan president of Local 508 who represents supervisory lifeguards, but I am here also as an advocate for water safety and for the community at large that generally uses the swimming pools that are earmarked to be closed completely for the summer and those that are earmarked to be closed two weeks early.

I want to correct a certain misapprehension. The pools are not chronologically utilized based on the calendar. If anything else, they're utilized based on the weather. I will submit to you tomorrow the weather for the last eight years, the temperature for the last two weeks of August and you'll see quite candidly, it's hot and neither the Parks Department nor anyone else can predict whether it's going to be hot or cold this coming summer during those last two weeks.

If it's hot, I would suggest to you

that there are an awful lot of inner city young people who utilize these pools on a daily basis. They don't go to the Hamptons. Their recreation is primarily in the pools during the summer.

Where are those pools? Those pools are pretty much in the inner city of New York City. They're WPA pools that were built 30 years ago. I'll just name a few.

In Brooklyn there's Betsy Head pool in Bedford-Stuyvesant. In Manhattan there's Thomas Jefferson pool uptown which is also a very big pool. There is Harbridge pool on the other side of Manhattan. In Queens there is Astoria Pool which can put as many as 3,500 people in that pool on a hot day, maybe more. In the Bronx you have Cortland Park. You have pools that if closed will result in open fire hydrants, in numerous incidents of places where young people have nowhere to go and they will wind up on the streets.

So I would suggest after sitting here and listening to \$29 million for this, \$34 million for that, a million trees, what is \$1.4 million? I mean, in my house it's a lot of money.

1 But in terms of a \$300 million plus budget, I
2 believe it's a pittance. I believe that the
3 Council needs to restore that money. I listen to
4 Commissioner Benepe who I've known for years and
5 who is an advocate of swimming pools and water
6 safety say how important he believes this program
7 is. He also said life is about priorities. Well
8 that's true. In a budget of \$300 million, I find
9 it difficult that somebody can't find \$1.5 million
10 to keep the swimming pools open.
11

12 I know it's late and I want to
13 commend you people. I don't know where you get
14 the stamina to do this. It's just quite a day.
15 But quite frankly, I don't know who really knows
16 what goes on in the pools. The park's pools to
17 the compliment of the park's department are open
18 from dawn until dusk.

19 At dawn there is lap swimming,
20 followed by a learn to swim program, followed by
21 day camps that come in and utilize these pools,
22 followed by general swimming, followed by a lunch
23 program where children eat. I was unaware of a
24 breakfast program until today. This is what's
25 going to be closed? This is an administration

that talks about the quality of life? I don't get it. I'm involved for 40 years with water safety. In 40 years we have never seen anything happen of this nature. One point it got close but never occurred.

I am asking you on behalf of the young men and women who by the way where do these people come from that are here today. Are they the staff of these pools? They come from the very neighborhoods where these pools are located. You want to talk about a jobs program for young people. The Parks Department is a jobs program for young people from the neighborhood.

I'll introduce Javier Rodriguez who learned to swim and spent his time. It's now called Ham Fish. I'll introduce you to Giuliani Pellegrini who works at Sunset pool in her old career and is a school psychologist. My colleague and good friend Franklyn Paige who worked at Kay pool in Brooklyn and learned to swim at Bushwick High School as a result of one of my colleague's endeavors. We are asking you not for ourselves but for the 2 million people who utilize these pools. Help us get this money back. Help us get

the Parks Department to prioritize this.

One other thing I want to conclude with and I don't know who else here wants to speak but I want to conclude with the fact that last year was a record number of lifeguards. There were more than 1,300 lifeguards employed by the city of New York. It has taken a decade to get to that point. Not easy to find, train, recruit lifeguards. The agency was able to do this.

This is going to have the most deleterious effect on the recruitment and retention of lifeguards. People are not going to be drawn here to work if their entire work won't last longer than six weeks. So for these reasons I would ask for your help. I hope the Parks Department will get your support and restoration.

I know we probably have the worst timing in the world having looked at the newspapers today to be coming here and asking for money, but once again, it is \$1.4 million. I heard about the barge, I heard about this, I heard about that. I don't understand it. If there's no money for staff and there's no money to operate these places, why build them.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you. Any of the panelists that would like to say something? Identify yourself please.

JAVIER RODRIGUEZ: Good afternoon, Madame Chair. My name is Javier Rodriguez. I started in parks in 1979 when I first learned to swim. The swimming has provided for me the opportunity to supplement my parent's income back then and it also provided me the opportunity to help pay for school. It's also helped me recruit kids from the neighborhood in which I grew up in.

I grew up not far from here on the Lower East Side on Avenue D. I was one of those kids that used to open up a hydrant to cool off when I was a lot younger. I didn't realize the effect that it could have if there was ever a fire.

The pools was a place where many of my friends and I hung out. That was the place to go. Ham Fish was the pool. Every now and then we went to 10 Street pool on Avenue D. It's called Dry Dock pool. But for the most part Ham Fish was the pool where we all went. They had different things that we could do there. It's still a place

that is heavily utilized. My sister still lives in that neighborhood and her children go to that pool. Now her grandchildren attend that pool.

To close the season or to reduce the season by two weeks is going to have a double impact. The impact to the young people that we try to help recruit expecting that they would be able to earn money to pay for their tuitions because many of our lifeguards go to school and they depend on this money. To the community, what do they do during the two weeks that these pools will be closed? Where will they go? I don't know that many of them have the transportation to go to certain beaches. The effect is two-fold. One it will be economic and two, it will be the impact to the community.

PETER STEIN: I just want to add one thing if I might. Javier Rodriguez was a poor kid who lived in the projects who wound up learning to swim at Ham Fish, who wound up becoming a lifeguard at Ham Fish, who wound up working his way through school and is a member of the Bar Association and still works in the lifeguard program. I don't believe without that

opportunity we would be sitting here together. So I'd like you to know that.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you.

GIULIANA PELLEGRINI: Good afternoon. My name is Giuliana Pellegrini. And as previous stated, I am also a school psychologist. I just feel that we're continuously cutting the budget based on children's needs. I mean, the DOE has tremendous amounts of cuts on the children's backs. Now to eliminate the pool season, as previously stated many times today, it would be a disservice to the community.

I'm also a product of having the opportunity to have my education because of seasonal employment. This is my 20th season with them. The money that I did make, I put myself through college and grad school. Many of the lifeguards who work for me or are a part of my staff, that is what motivates them to continuously come back and also to be role models for a lot of kids in the community.

Our programs run the whole entire day. On any given day, including a rainy or

cloudy day, we have documented attendance of over 900 people. If the pools are open, they will be there. There will be a line regardless of the climate. We've serviced the public. They're used to their seven days a week they're open and I cannot imagine the number of 311 calls that would be made if we did cut the schedule.

So not only do we impact the community and the children, but you're also impacting the very fiber of what keeps the lifeguards coming back and that's the opportunity to continue to work in an environment that's very challenging and giving.

I also invite any member of the City Council or anyone for that matter to come down and enjoy the city pools. We have many officials that come down and do the early morning swim or the night owl swim. I just can't imagine that this budget should be on the backs of the lifeguards when there are so many other programs that you could look into that are not viable during this time of year. Thank you very much.

FRANKLYN PAIGE: Good afternoon, Madame Chair. Good afternoon, fellow lifeguards.

1
2 Thank you for coming out. Madame Chair, I'm a
3 product of the so-called hood or ghetto, as it's
4 known. I grew up in Bedford-Stuyvesant and the
5 only place I had to go back then was Marcy Pool,
6 also known as Kosciusko pool. It was three or
7 four blocks away from my house. That's where we
8 all gathered to cool off in the summertime.

9 A kid who lives in a poor area who
10 doesn't have anywhere to go, the Hamptons, as Mr.
11 Stein said or New Jersey, the only thing we used
12 to do was walk around and throw rocks, became
13 mischievous and did other things that got us into
14 trouble. So we went to Marcy Pool to cool off.
15 That really helped us in our neighborhood to stay
16 out of trouble.

17 Back then they didn't have
18 breakfast or free lunch, but we met up there and
19 we snuck a hero through the fence but we stayed
20 there all day while our parents were at work. So
21 it became like a babysitting forum. Let me tell
22 you, until this day, the same things are
23 happening. People come, they drop their kids off
24 and they'll stay there all day. It was a
25 gathering place, it was a social place. Let me

tell you, \$1.4 million, there's going to be less rent, food, tuition for some of these kids and it will really, really hurt them badly.

Let me tell you something, a lot of these kids sitting here, some of them are my former students and some of them are my present students. I started out in 1986 because of someone named Richard Share, the young guy sitting back there with the white hair. Went to Bushwick High School, he really helped us and he took us off the street. A lot of guys sitting here was under his wing. He did a lot for us.

Through that positive enforcement I was able and others were able to bring kids along the way. My testimony is I have about six, seven or eight kids presently who are lifeguards who go to my high school where I teach also and others from over the years.

Let me tell you, the money does come in handy for school because I went to school. I didn't have money to take the train. I didn't have money to eat after school. I used to stretch my money back in the days. I used to spend \$10 a day and it went a long way. So you can imagine

how things are expensive today. So please, I'm begging you, not on my behalf, because I made it through the rain, but others haven't. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Mr. Paige, you identified yourself at the beginning. If you could just say your name again for the record.

FRANKLYN PAIGE: My name is Franklyn Paige. I'm a friend of everyone who is sitting here.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I can see that.

FRANKLYN PAIGE: I'm also the president of the lifeguard union 461.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I want to thank all of you for testifying and speaking about your experience and how having access to the pools has been beneficial to your life. Obviously we understand that very clearly in the City Council. I know that we're going to fight very strongly and work collaboratively to try to really make sure that they stay open. We understand the importance that they play. Thank you.

Let me just speak, Mr. Stein talked

about us having the stamina to do this. We are elected officials and it's our responsibility to represent you. But having you come and really demonstrate that you are interested in these issues and speaking out gives us the strength and the stamina to continue to do the work that we do. I know that I feed off of it. So thank you.

The next panel is Darryl Pleasant, Lothar Krause, and Suzanne Lavington.

I forgot to mention that since the launching of our revised website, if people cannot be here that you can always submit your testimony in writing and it will be put up on our website. It'll be scanned and put up on the website. So it's good that if you cannot physically be here in the future at any hearings, you can always submit it and it will be made public. That's a good thing to do.

Now, having said that, if we could just start with the panel. Please be silent as you leave so that we can have the others testify.

LOTHAR KRAUSE: Good afternoon. My name is Lothar Krause. I'm a resident of the St. Andrew's Village community and Community Board 9

in the Bronx. I'm here today because I would like to ask you to dismiss all budget cuts for the Parks Department. I believe that the Parks Department is in bad shape.

If you look at parks in Manhattan, maybe if you look outside here or in Central Park, you would say parks are beautiful. To show you the real state of parks, I would like to invite you to come to my neighborhood. If you would join on a walk though the park, you would see the beauty that we have in the Bronx. You would see wild pheasants, you would see hawks that live there.

But then you would notice that there are a lot of fences here in the parks. I would have to explain to you that the Parks Department unfortunately cannot afford to clean up the contamination that's in the ground. Where we live it used to be a garbage dump site. Instead of cleaning up the contamination, the Parks Department is putting a fence around it and forgets about it. We continue to live in garbage.

You would then see household litter that never gets picked up by any Parks Department

1 maintenance crew because there is no maintenance
2 crew in our park. On our walk we certainly
3 wouldn't be bothered by any parks enforcement
4 because there is never a parks enforcement person
5 there.
6

7 You would probably stand on a
8 platform that was built to look over the creek and
9 we could count the tires that are in the creek.
10 When we walk my dog would probably ask you why
11 there is no dog run for him to have some fun with
12 his friends.

13 You would probably meet some of my
14 neighbors who work with me in opposing the Parks
15 Department of building yet another passive park.
16 Because of the lack of funds they chose instead of
17 remediating a baseball field to build a smaller
18 passive park against the wishes of the community.

19 You would learn that in Community
20 Board 9 there is a pattern that the Parks
21 Department ignores the wishes of the community and
22 just unilaterally implements what they want, even
23 though the community board and the residents are
24 opposed to it.

25 It's very telling when you see that

the Parks Department employees were sitting here for two hours basically doing nothing. Jumped up once the boss left instead of listening to their constituents.

You would continue our walk and you would see that the Parks Department took over a park that was developed by a local developer which is completely out of compliance and basically terribly broken. They took it over and it's now their responsibility and it's their burden.

You would continue to walk and you would see old sewage pipes that are unmarked and you would see concrete structures that are in bad disrepair and are a danger to the community.

You would probably ask me what all the debris on the shore is and I would have to explain to you that we have people coming from outside of our community and they have religious rituals on the water. This religious ritual unfortunately means that they have to dump part of their belongings in the water. So where we live you see debris, different fabrics, and food in the water and on the shore. Unless volunteers clean it up, the Parks Department certainly will not

clean up.

The Parks Department doesn't clean up after itself. They leave debris in the park. We don't need storms for trees to fall over. The Parks Department cuts them down and doesn't pick them up.

If we would then take a short trip to another park, Ferry Point Park, I would save you the trip to Louisiana, because we have a bayou there. A third of park is under water permanently where 60-year-old trees are standing in ankle deep water. It is certain that over time they will die from that.

If we would then continue down the road, which is an unmarked road. It's probably maintained by the Parks Department. It's not clear whether they actually do it. It's partially flooded. You would then see this beautiful golf course that's being built. I heard it cost around \$100 million. If you're looking for stuff to cut in the budget, you might want to start there. There are not a lot of golf players in the Bronx. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank

you, Mr. Krause. Clearly you've very familiar with your neighborhood and all the parks and the condition of the parks.

LOTHAR KRAUSE: And my invitation is standing if you want to take a little walk with me.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you.

DARRYL PLEASANT: Hi, my name is Darryl Pleasant. I'm a leader at Community Voices Heard. The dates on this is wrong. I worked for the Parks Department program in 2003 and 2004.

The good part about the program was I 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 thought 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 for.

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. 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.

SUZANNE LAVINGTON: My name is Suzanne Lavington. I'm going to go off my testimony for a minute. I'm a member of Community Voices Heard.

As far as the pools are concerned, they should not be closed because I know my granddaughters, they live in Connecticut. They don't have that in Connecticut. When I have them for the summer they take the swimming lessons. They took swimming lessons at Jefferson Park Pool in East Harlem. That's all I have to say as far as the pools are concerned.

I've been a native New Yorker. I worked for the POPs Program in 2004 and 2007. I worked at PS 155 playground in Manhattan between 118th and 117th Street, which is District 11. I am well known in the community. I was trusted to watch people's children while ran errands.

Long story short, the reason I was not extended which I do not know why. I know I was a good worker. There is favoritism within the Parks Department, which is probably in a lot of city agencies. It is not clear why certain people are chosen and others are not. This should be looked into.

You can advance in POPs. You can take training classes. The Parks Department does help you do your resume. But sending your resume out, you do not feedback stating that your resume was received for certain positions which are the positions that might open up within the Parks Department. You don't get a feedback on that.

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. Because they interfere a lot.

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 and create alternative jobs programs like POPS. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you to the panel. Community Voices Heard is in my district. I represent you.

SUZANNE LAVINGTON: I know.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I have a great working relationship and I respect the work that you all do. Thank you for taking the time to come here to testify. The next panel is Jay Sanders, Joe Poleo and Brad Taylor.

JOE POLEO: Good afternoon. My name is Joe Poleo. I'm vice president of District Council 37 Local 983. I represent the urban park rangers, the PEP officers, the city seasonal aides that are in parks throughout the city. I represent all the associate park service workers in the Parks Department.

I'm urging the City Council to restore any funding that's subject to this budget. In the past you've been very instrumental. When we had difficulties with PEP officers diminishing, you have restored \$3 million to the budget which enabled us to have 17 new officers.

Now as time went on, these officers through attrition have trickled down. And as you probably read in the papers and discussed earlier, these numbers are at critical mass. There's only 15 officers in Brooklyn to cover the whole entire borough. Queens I believe only has 14 officers for the whole borough. We're talking about 15 officers in the Bronx.

Now these are deployable officers. When they mention 200 in the borough of Manhattan, these are primarily for the authorities. You have the Hudson River Authority. You have Battery Park City Authority. You have the new High Line Park. You have NYU. These officers cannot be removed from that location. They are there specifically for these locations. When something happens outside that jurisdiction they are not allowed to respond to these places.

So basically I'm urging that the pools be opened, the PEP officers cover these pools, our city seasonal aides, our plant operators that operate the pool system are employed by us. To cut these services is a real detriment to an agency that's already devastated. Not only do these cuts need to stop, but you need to put more money into the parks.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you.

BRAD TAYLOR: Good afternoon. My name is Brad Taylor. I'm chair of the Parks and Recreation Committee at Community Board 9 Manhattan and chair of the Historic Harlem Parks Coalition and a board member of the Friends of Morningside Park. It's great to be here and great to see the chair. Congratulations on this role. It's great to have someone who's so familiar with uptown parks.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you.

BRAD TAYLOR: I'm happy that you're having this hearing. I just wanted to say that parks are being hit from all sides. I mean CB 9

1
2 Manhattan, you know we've got Riverbank State
3 Park. We've just had huge rallies and huge fights
4 over that park because of the proposed cuts. In
5 the last 24 hours I understand there might be some
6 relief there.

7 But we were looking at 50%
8 reduction in hour there. This is the third most
9 heavily visited state park. There are 870,000
10 visitors from all over Manhattan and all over the
11 city. They were going to be cutting the outdoor
12 pool. So where are those people going to go?
13 They're going to go to the city parks and now
14 we're talking about cutting the city pools. It
15 makes absolutely no sense. We're being hit from
16 all sides.

17 As you well know, I mean people
18 have talked about a two tier park system. You
19 know, the Harlem parks have struggled for years.
20 We're working hard. The Parks Department is
21 working hard. There's kind of a renaissance going
22 on there. But it can't stop. The maintenance
23 dollars have to be there. You stop and the parks
24 are going to go back to where they were 20 years
25 ago with the drugs and all the problems that we

had. It's not like you can just say you've brought them this far and they're just going to revert to the way they were.

Maintenance and operations are so key in our districts. The commissioner, with all due respect, I think he's done a great job, but he talked about the problem is that people don't put their trash in the receptacles. Well you're out there in the summers, I'm out there in the summers. There is such a tremendous amount of use in these parks. There's no way you could put all your trash in the receptacles because there aren't enough receptacles and there aren't the people there to clean up. The staff will come through maybe the next morning to clean up if you're lucky or maybe by mid day.

So maintenance and operations is absolutely critical. One thing I really would like to see is some sort of an allocation of parks budget based on the number of users that use parks. I think you'd find that the parks that I'm talking about where people can't go to other places are incredibly under funded and always have been. So I urge you to rescind all of these cuts.

Thank you very much.

JAY O. SANDERS: Good afternoon.

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've become second homes to me.

I was honored to be asked to offer testimony today on their behalf and thank Chairwoman 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 this 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 New York City 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, which is my favorite, 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 Delacorte Theater, 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 New York City 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" with 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

1
2 in the fifth act. Tom Aldredge from "Sticks and
3 Bones" and Charles Durning from "That Championship
4 Season," came up to play the two gravediggers, and
5 Raul Julia raced over from the rock musical
6 version "Two Gentlemen of Verona" just in time to
7 slide into costume and onstage for a showy turn as
8 Osric.

9 But what I remember most, the
10 moment that sealed my fate, making me realize I
11 had to find a way to get myself up onto that stage
12 one day, was a moment in the very opening scene.
13 As the last remnants of the day's sun made the
14 skyline glow in the distance, handing off the
15 duties of illumination to the stage lights,
16 Bernardo and Marcellus raced up Ming Cho Lee's
17 circular staircases into the heavens, calling out
18 in pursuit of the Ghost of Hamlet's father, when
19 suddenly, out of nowhere, a strong gust of wind
20 came up and whipped their capes behind them as
21 though they might lift off and I could feel the
22 whole audience, as one, take a breath.

23 Mother Nature had made her
24 entrance, taking her rightful place among the
25 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.

Now, 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 FY 10 funding of \$16 million and FY 11 proposed PEG of \$8.7 million. In addition, we are asking for an additional \$2 million that was not restored in FY 10, for a total request of \$26.7 million.

Oh, 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.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you. Thank you very much for the testimony. I want to just recognize my colleague Council Member Robert Jackson sitting off on the side. Again, thank you for taking the time. Mr. Poleo, I have a question with regards to the PEP officers.

I asked the Parks Department and they said it was about 196 and 230 with the rangers. When these independent entities contract for these officers to be in the parks, does that

take away from that number, or is it more?

JOE POLEO: No, those are included in those numbers. That's just it.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Right. The dedicated PEP officers in Brooklyn Bridge Park for instance. Subtracted from that total?

JOE POLEO: No, there's 9 from that 15.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: It's just not counted towards.

JOE POLEO: So there's going to be 15 in Brooklyn, for all of Brooklyn and 9 people just for nine acres. So you could see the disparity. What has happened in the past is that the numbers have dwindled to just about nothing. During Gifford Miller's time, as Speaker, he had restored \$3 million at that time which gave us 70 additional officers. If it wasn't for that effort there would probably be no PEP today aside from these contract parks. It was City Council that restored that funding.

What's happened since the is through attrition the numbers have been dwindling. At one time we had 450 PEP officers and rangers.

We had 24 hour coverage in the parks. We had coverage in Queens. We had coverage in Brooklyn throughout the night. Now we're limited to two tours and about five people per tour because you have to account for days off and times that people take off. So you actually only have like two mobile patrol units for the entire borough during the daylight times.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you. Mr. Sanders, thank you for coming down. I go to the Public Theater quite a bit. I enjoy it a lot. I've been to Shakespeare in the Park and I appreciate the value that it brings to our city. Thank you for your services as well.

JAY O. SANDERS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you all for testifying. The last panel is Maria Roca and Aresh Javadi. I always pronounce your name wrong Aresh, but there it is.

MARIA ROCA: Heavens to Betsy, how do you follow that? That's the challenge. Good afternoon. Thank you for all that are here at the dais and in the audience. Their loss for missing that wonderful presentation. They're going to be

so sorry if they ever get to see the video. I am Maria Roca. I am the founder of the Friends of Sunset Park. For those of you who might not know this, the most beautifully sited park in the City of New York in a traditionally working class neighborhood of Sunset Park in the great Borough of Brooklyn.

We have benefited greatly from the always enthusiastic support of the City Parks Foundation, the advocacy of New Yorkers for Parks and the interest of the City Council in our parks as best they have done.

I echo the words of David Rivel and Lee Stuart. The reinstatement of the monies that are proposed to be cut, I think everyone agrees that is the minimum that we can do. We are a volunteer organization. Volunteers are essential to running of the park, particularly at times where money is short. But it's very difficult for us to lobby for people's free time when many are working even longer days and weekends to make ends meet.

Funding for maintenance, repairs and reconstruction projects comes from the hours

of hard labor of the working class, from their taxes, from their contributions. Folks need to see a return on their taxes and their hard work. They deserve at minimum a clean and safe park. Then we can ask them for their time, their dwindling free time.

In collaborating with the NYPD 77th Precinct in our neighborhood in locking up the playground at a reasonable time so it will be clean for the young families in the morning. Something that we did. Nobody gets paid. We raised the money for the locks, for the keys. Everybody and their mother in Sunset Park has a key to that playground to make sure that it's locked if the police are called to a more serious emergency. The Parks Department opens it up in the morning. It has cut easily two and a half hours ever single morning of clean up time by maintenance staff.

When we call them to conduct targeted cleanups, not the day-to-day but when the bushes seem to need it. It's not a big park but it's on a slant. It's not flat. It's hard to keep it clean so that people would come out and

invest their time. For them to clean and plant bulbs in the children's native plants garden. This is just a few of the things that we ask people who really don't have that much time and who certainly would love to lie down on the hill in Sunset Park, take a nap, stare at the view and refresh their minds.

Our parks are not a luxury. They're an integral part of keeping this city balanced, safe, calm, particularly in the summertime. So I bring you to please reinstate this money because for every dollar that we cut from parks, we're going to end up paying at least \$3-\$4 in police time, the lives of the children, the young people who will have nowhere to go if the pool closed and we do need to take care of them. So the social services that will have to come from that, the harm that will come to them. So it's not a savings. If you cut a dollar for parks, we're going to have to spend it at least four times in the many other services that this community needs. I thank you for your time and please listen to us.

ARESH JAVADI: Hello. My name is

Aresh Javadi. I'm represent the New York City Community Garden Coalition. I work with community gardens citywide. I'm so very glad to have the new chair Melissa Mark-Viverito. Not that I didn't love Ms. Foster as well. But it is wonderful to have a strong advocate that knows what it's like for everyday people to be in community gardens and in parks.

Part of what I just read in the newspaper was this shift in how to change the priority of getting the rich richer and the poor poorer. In the not so perfect health plan, however it is starting to shift where the monies that are being taxed are being taken back so that it's shared more evenly. To me the parks and gardens are one of the places where anyone, no matter who you are, can share those spaces.

It's a huge one, especially for New York City which has changed nature into huge structures. It's so key for humans to be able to once again be able to touch earth, see the seasons, take care of each other and be human that's balanced with nature. It's huge. I think that priority needs to shift back more and more as

1
2 food, as different types of needs are going to
3 shift from the oil industry into more of local
4 production.

5 So I think being able to feed
6 ourselves, take care of each other and have a
7 space where oxygen is replete is going to be a
8 huge shift. Peter Seeger, an awesome activist and
9 folk singer, said that he believes that community
10 gardens and open green spaces will be the savior
11 of mankind. I really truly believe in that
12 because we as this big city with so many people
13 need to find ways to be able to recycle, take
14 care, feed ourselves and not deplete and produce
15 so much waste in the world.

16 So I believe that we need to plant
17 the seeds today and from now on to not just
18 restore but to really increase the budget, double,
19 triple as needs are going to be needed for our
20 earth, for our taking care of each other and to
21 become sustainable and not just sustainable but
22 abundant and able to take care of each other. I
23 think that's what really needs to happen, not just
24 a little change but a huge change where we
25 increase and make this a huge priority for

ourselves and for our survival. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: Thank you. Thank you all and thank you for volunteering in our parks. I thank you all for that. Aresh, we've worked really closely together on community gardens in my district and I thank you for your advocacy, not only in my district but citywide.

I think it's all agreed, we would love to see more money for our parks. Hearing that 14% of our city's land is occupied by parks and we are giving less than 2% of our budget, you know it's pretty startling.

ARESH JAVADI: Less than half a percent.

CHAIRPERSON MARK-VIVERITO: I'm sorry, so even less. So it's actually even worse. So thank you all and I guess with that, this meeting is adjourned.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Donna Hintze certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature 

Date April 9, 2010