

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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June 23, 2021
Start: 1:09 P. M.
Recess: 3:30 P. M.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING (VIRTUAL ROOM 1)

B E F O R E: Peter A. Koo,
Chairperson for Committee on Parks
and Recreation

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Joseph C. Borelli
Justin L. Brannan
James G. Van Bramer
Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
Fernando Cabrera
Darma V. Diaz
Eric Dinowitz
James F. Gennaro
Mark Gjonaj
Robert F. Holden
Mark Levine
Francisco P. Moya
Kevin C. Riley
Carlina Rivera
Eric A. Ulrich

A P P E A R A N C E S

Anthony Sama
NYC Department of Parks & Recreation
Director of Citywide Special Events

Venus Melo
Deputy Director of Citywide Special Events

Matt Drury
Director of Director of Government Relations

Heather Lubov
Executive Director of City Parks Foundation

Joe Puleo
President of Local 983

Jessica Saab
Advocacy and Communications Project Manager, New
Yorkers for Parks.

Carlos Castell Croke
Associate for NYC Programs at The New York League
of Conservation Voters

Helen Forgione -- Reading Testimony for
Sarah Charlop-Powers
Natural Areas Conservancy

Kathryn Heintz
Executive Director of NYC Audubon

Roxanne Delgado
Friends of Pelham Parkway

Lucy Sexton
New Yorkers for Culture & Arts

Stacy Papas
Executive Director Friends of the East River
Esplanade

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

Eileen Myles

Resident of the east village and representative
for East River Park Action.

Josephine Scalia

The Forest Park Trust

1 SERGEANT KOTOSKI: You can go ahead. Yep.

2 SERGEANT LUGO: Pc recording done.

3 SERGEANT LEONARDO: The cloud is rolling.

4 SERGEANT UNKNOWN: Back up is rolling.

5 SERGEANT LUGO: Sergeant Leonardo, with the
6 opening statement, please?

7 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Good afternoon, and welcome to
8 today's remote New York City Council hearing for the
9 Committee on Parks and Recreation.
10

11 At this time we ask that all council members and
12 council staff, please turn on their video for
13 verification purposes. To minimize disruption,
14 please place cell phone and electronic devices to
15 vibrate or silent.

16 If you have testimony that you wish to submit,
17 you may do so by email by sending it to

18 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that is

19 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

20 Thank you for your cooperation. Mr. Chair, we
21 are ready to begin.

22 SERGEANT LUGO: Chair you are on mute.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, can you hear me now?

24 SERGEANT LUGO: Yep, we can hear you now.

25 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, (BACKGROUND NOISE 1:15)

1
2 Thank you for joining our virtual hearing today
3 before the council's committee on Parks and
4 Recreation. I would like to acknowledge my fellow
5 council members who are present. Council Member
6 Gjonaj, Council Member Holden, Moya, Council Member
7 Diaz, Council Member Riley, Gennaro, Council Member
8 Brooks-Powers, Council Member Dinowitz, Council
9 Member Borelli, and we will acknowledge other council
10 members when they are present.

11 Good afternoon, I am Peter Koo, chair of the
12 committee on Parks and Recreation. Today's hearing
13 will focus on the events permitting process for
14 special events at parks and what the cost is and
15 benefits are to the park system, especially when it
16 comes to the staging of very large events.

17 We will (BACKGROUND NOISE 2:22) also examine how
18 COVID-19 has affected their process and what the
19 future implications are for holding events at parks.

20 Various recreational programs such as art shows,
21 films, concerts, and special events have always been
22 part of the city's park system. The majority of
23 these events are free, and sometimes... (BACKGROUND
24 NOISE 2:49) and often times, I'm sorry, and often
25 times conducted by a park itself and through its many

1
2 public party partners. However, some of this events
3 are very... are also quote "paid for" unquote,
4 events that include thousands of participants.
5 They're often run by even promoters that have a
6 permit with Parks.

7 Parks has a multi-faceted process for approving
8 these various events. For any event with more than
9 20 participants, a Special Event Permit is required
10 for a non-refundable 25 dollar fee.

11 (BACKGROUND NOISE 3:38) For large scale events
12 that will involve more than 500 participants or may
13 be commercial in nature, Parks Citywide Marketing and
14 Special Events office work for the event promoter and
15 other city agencies if necessary to coordinate the
16 planning of the event.

17 For these events, Parks imposes additional
18 requirements that must fulfilled before a final
19 permit is issued. That is often based on the parks
20 concession fee schedule. Insurance and a Damage Bond
21 may be required. If an event is particularly large
22 and complex, permits from agencies, such as from the
23 Department of Buildings or Police Department, may
24 also be required. Further, if the event also
25

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2 proposes to sell food or merchandise, a temporary use
3 authorization TUA contract is required.

4 A fee for this permit is calculated based on
5 several factors including the number of vendors at
6 the event, estimated attendance, and the prices of
7 the items being sold at the event.

8 Once all of the requirements have been met by
9 event applicant, Parks will issue a Special Event
10 Permit.

11 Before COVID-19 hit the city, there was an upward
12 trend for events occurring on Parks property with
13 about 14 thousand Special Events Permits issued in
14 2017, 16 thousand in 2018, and 17 thousand in 2019.

15 Due to COVID-19 2020 officially saw a drop to
16 about 5 thousand permits issued. We're close to 4
17 thousand being issued thus far in 2021.

18 When the pandemic fully hit the city last year in
19 March, Parks canceled all events and stopped issuing
20 permits, but eventually opened the NYC Parks Special
21 Event request portal and started to consider permits
22 for applications with an expected attendance of more
23 than 200 people for an event.

24 Permit applicants had to complete COVID-19 Safety
25 Plan and Affirmation which included physical

1 distancing requirements, face coverings, hygiene
2 guidelines, good communication and signage for guests
3 reminding them to adhere to physical distancing rules
4 and ensure that the event organizer and its'
5 employees comply with requirements set by the State
6 Department of Health.

7
8 I am curious to a (INAUDIBLE 7:14) were Parks
9 plan is to allow more events programming. Now that
10 mandatory social distance and mask wearing rules have
11 all basically ended, will we see an immediate
12 restarting of the permitting process to what it was
13 like before COVID-19?

14 Will COVID offer Parks any lessons on whether any
15 permitting practices should change for the long term?

16 Also, what will the rest of this year look like
17 when it comes to events occurring and the
18 enforcements of Parks rules during these events?

19 Aside from the COVID (INAUDIBLE 8:03) I would
20 like to explore how we can ensure that events
21 permitting process equitably benefits the parks
22 system and the public.

23 Historically, there have been concerns about the
24 size of some of these events, the amount of park land
25 being used for the ticketed events, and the amount of

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2 revenue being generated for the event, and the
3 condition the park is left in after the event.

4 Often times, damage from large crowds, trucks,
5 vendors, and bad weather during some of these events
6 has left sections of the park land unusable for
7 extended periods of time. This has sometimes left
8 many community members concerned that large scale and
9 commercial events can deprive some New Yorkers of
10 quality access to green space.

11 I hope that this hearing results in us
12 understanding how Parks and its partners in the Parks
13 system go about approving special events -- what the
14 overall cost is and benefits are to the city's open
15 space, and whether are ways we can improve the
16 process to ensure that the events occurring in parks
17 are accessible to all respective to the parks and
18 local communities.

19 I would like to welcome the administration and
20 the advocates who have come here to testify. Thank
21 you once again.

22 I will now turn over to our moderator, Committee
23 Counsel, Kris Sartori to go over some procedural
24 items.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair Koo. I am Kris Sartori, Senior Counsel to the Committee on Parks and Recreation, and I'll be moderating this hearing.

Before we begin, I'd like to remind everyone that you'll be on mute until you are called to testify, and which point, you will be unmuted by the host.

During the hearing, I will be calling on panelist to testify, so please listen for your name to be called, as I will periodically be announcing who the following panelists will be.

We will first be hearing testimony from the administration, followed by testimony from members of the public.

During the hearing, if council members would like to ask a question of the administration or of a specific panelist, please use the (BACKGROUND NOISE 10:49) the Zoom Hand Raise Function, and I will call on you in order.

We'll be limiting council member questions to five minutes, which includes the time it takes to answer those questions.

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2 Additionally, for members of the public, we will
3 be limiting speaking time to three minutes so that we
4 may accommodate all who wish to speak today.

5 Once you are called on testify, please begin my
6 stating your name and the organization you represent,
7 if any.

8 We will now call on representatives of the
9 administration to testify.

10 Appearing today from the Department of Parks and
11 Recreation, will be Anthony Sama, Director of
12 Citywide Special Events. Venus Melo Deputy Director
13 of Citywide Special Events, and Director of Director
14 of Government Relations.

15 At this time, I will administer the affirmation
16 to each representative of the Parks Department.

17 I will call on each of you individually for a
18 response. So, please raise your right hands at this
19 time.

20 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth
21 and nothing but the truth, before this committee and
22 to respond honestly to council member questions?

23 Director Sama?

24 ANTHONY SAMA: I do.

25 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

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2
3 Deputy Director Melo?

4 (BACKGROUND NOISE 12:05)

5 VENUS MELO: I do, thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. And, Director
7 Drury?

8 MATT DRURY: I do.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. And, at
10 this time, I would like to invite Director Sama to
11 present his testimony.

12 ANTHONY SAMA: Thank you. Good afternoon, Chair
13 Koo, members of the Parks Committee, and other
14 members of the council.

15 I'm Anthony Sama, Director of the Citywide
16 Special Events Office and New York City Parks.

17 I am joined virtually today by Venus Melo, our
18 Deputy Director, and Matt Drury, our Director of
19 Government Relations.

20 Thank you for this opportunity to testify today
21 about Special Event Permitting in city parks.

22 From birthday parties and picnics to holiday
23 markets, and music festivals, special events take
24 place every day in New York City parks. Above and
25 beyond the free and low-cost programming offered to

1
2 the public by our agency, our parks are also popular
3 locations for groups and organizations looking to
4 host special events.

5 NYC Parks is pleased to work with event
6 organizers to make this a reality, as we feel that
7 activating our parks with a wide range of
8 recreational and cultural activity helps make them
9 more robust and dynamic public spaces for everyone to
10 enjoy.

11 We recognize that these special events provide
12 tremendous added value to our parks system. Still we
13 offer a simple and efficient permitting process to
14 make sure that proposed events are appropriate and
15 avoid negative impacts on our beloved open spaces.

16 Though you may already be familiar, I would like
17 to quickly outline NYC Parks' process for Special
18 Event permitting.

19 Special Event Permits are required for events or
20 activities in city parks where 20 or more people will
21 be present, though permits can be secured for anyone
22 looking to reserve a specific area of the park.

23 This could include events like larger family
24 gatherings and picnics, as well as school picnics,
25 fairs, or festivals.

1 The permit application fee cost 25 dollars, and
2 we ask that applicants submit their request at least
3 three weeks in advance of the proposed event date.
4 This provides the agency the necessary time to
5 properly review the request, verify the availability
6 of the space, and consult with park staff and others
7 to confirm that the proposed event will not cause any
8 problematic conflicts with other events or
9 conventional park usage.
10

11 For most permit applicants, the processing fee is
12 the sole cost, unless the event is large enough to
13 require additional permitting costs, such as
14 buildings permits, generator permits, department of
15 health permits, or the event qualifies as a special
16 events concession, which is administered in
17 accordance with park rules via a separate fee
18 schedule.

19 Permit applications can be submitted online, or
20 you can visit the appropriate park's borough
21 headquarters for your selected event site to process
22 your Event Permit Application.

23 Since our agency's primary responsibility is to
24 maintain parks and open space access to New Yorkers,
25 the agency Borough Permit offices, and our Citywide

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2 Special Event staff, work closely with these permit
3 teams to ensure that every special event is properly
4 administered with appropriate resources dedicated to
5 set up the event in a way that minimizes disruption
6 to the parks -- and cleanup after the event -- and
7 restore it to its previous condition.

8 For larger events, we often require the applicant
9 to provide a Maintenance Bond, or make other similar
10 arrangements to protect our parks and keep them in
11 the best condition possible. Special Event Permits
12 are generally not approved for federal holiday to
13 ensure that our parks can remain available for
14 conventional use by the general public at busy times
15 of the year.

16 For obvious reasons, we did implement some very
17 significant changes to our Special Event protocols
18 during the COVID-19 pandemic. In accordance with
19 state and local guidance, larger gatherings were
20 prohibited during much of 2020 and early 2021. And,
21 our permit teams worked closely with the mayor's
22 office, and others, to update our processes as health
23 guidance evolved.

24 Limits on overall attendance and limitations on
25 amplified sound, were significantly restrictions.

1
2 But, we did everything we could to facilitate public
3 events whenever possible, always prioritizing the
4 health and safety of New Yorkers.

5 We also partnered with The Department of
6 Education to facilitate outdoor learning at parks
7 close to schools, so that students could have access
8 to space for socially distanced education and
9 recreation when alternate... alternative spaces were
10 otherwise unavailable.

11 As conditions related to COVID-19 continued to
12 improve New York City, (BACKGROUND NOISE 16:54) we
13 are beginning to see something a return to quote -
14 unquote "normalcy". And, we are seeing increased
15 interest in the return of outdoor public events. We
16 look forward to working with groups and organizers to
17 allow them to host fun community events that are safe
18 for the public.

19 Some of these exciting upcoming events include
20 the Macy's 4th of July fireworks and the homecoming
21 concert as announced recently by the mayor.

22 (BACKGROUND NOISE 17:20) As well as the New York City
23 Triathlon, Global Citizen's Festival, and New York
24 City Marathon.

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2 In conclusion, at New York City parks, we value
3 our role in helping facilitate diverse events and
4 programs for local communities to enjoy across the
5 city, which maximizes New Yorkers' enjoyment of our
6 shared open spaces. But, we all understand that some
7 New Yorkers turn to their local parks as a place of
8 quiet and solitude. So, we value the importance of
9 preserving access to parks to be passively and
10 quietly enjoyed as well. We feel that our approach
11 to facilitating special events successfully seeks to
12 strike that balance. As New York City recovers from
13 a very dark and difficult period, we anticipate that
14 the months ahead will offer new and exciting
15 opportunities for New Yorkers to get out to their
16 local parks. And, we will work closely with
17 organizers to make sure that each special event can
18 be enjoyed safely and appropriately.

19 Thank you for offering the opportunity for us to
20 testify (BACKGROUND NOISE 18:17) today. And, for our
21 agency staff to view testimony from the public via
22 the council hearing livestream.

23 We will now be happy to answer any questions you
24 may have.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you... (CROSS-TALK
3 18:30)

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: (INAUDIBLE 18:31)... (CROSS-
5 TALK)

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now... Oh, sorry,
7 Chair. I will now turn it over to Chair Koo for
8 questions, and I'd ask that each of the Parks'
9 Panelist please stay muted if possible during the Q&A
10 period. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you Mr. Sama, for your
12 testimony. I have a (BACKGROUND NOISE 18:53) few
13 questions. And, my first question is Park's
14 designates different categories off parks as level A,
15 B, C, and D for the purpose of determining fees for
16 the proposed events occurring on the parkland. How
17 does Park determine what park properties are
18 categorized as A, B, C, and D?

19 ANTHONY SAMA: Thank you for that question,
20 Chair. The schedule that you're referring to is our
21 Concession Fees Schedule, which exist as part of the
22 Parks' rules and regulations. That fee schedule is
23 use when calculating fees for any events that reach
24 the threshold of 500 people or more, or promotional
25 or commercial in nature. As you described, the fee

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2 schedule breaks parks out in to four levels -- A, B,
3 C, and D. These levels are determined based on mainly
4 park popularity to effectively attempt to quantify an
5 impact that events have at these locations given
6 their tremendous usage. And, for promotion or
7 commercial events, potentially the number of people
8 who are exposed to marketing and commercial events at
9 these locations.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Do you have any data on the
11 number of events that are permitted for fiscal 2020
12 and for each of the last five fiscal or calendar
13 years?

14 ANTHONY SAMA: Thank you for that question, Chair
15 Koo. I do not have specific data with me at the
16 moment on the fiscal calendar, nor for the past five
17 years. I do have data on the calendar year of 2019,
18 and what we are experiencing here currently in 20 and
19 21. I would be happy to go through that data if you
20 have any specific questions related to that, and
21 would be happy to provide data on those other years
22 as requested at a later time.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, so, you do have data on
24 fiscal 2020, right? (BACKGROUND NOISE 21:25)

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2 ANTHONY SAMA: Excuse me, yes, it's... (INAUDIBLE
3 21.28)... (CROSS-TALK)

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, how many... how many...
5 What's the number of events that have been permitted
6 for the current year? Hold on, for the last... for
7 fiscal 2020 and this year?

8 ANTHONY SAMA: So, excuse me again, I do not have
9 fisc... I do not have data on the fiscal calendar.
10 The data... (CROSS-TALK 21:46)

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: (INAUDIBLE 21:46)

12 ANTHONY SAMA: that I have is based on the
13 calendar year overall... (CROSS-TALK 21:49)

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, calendar year is fine,
15 yeah, yeah,

16 ANTHONY SAMA: Okay... (CROSS-TALK 21:51)

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So...

18 ANTHONY SAMA: So, for the... The... Is there
19 any specific data that you would like me to review?
20 I have data in front of me regarding the number of
21 applications requested, approved, and denied for
22 calendar year 2019 as well as what is currently in
23 our system for the calendar year of 2021. I'd be
24 happy to review those... (CROSS-TALK 22:14)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, can you review those?

Yeah, please... (CROSS-TALK 22:16)

ANTHONY SAMA: Yes, of... of course. The calendar year of 2019, NYC Parks received 20,183 applications. Again, this data comes from our Citywide Event Management System, which is how our digital system, which houses all applications submitted via the Parks Department Portal, which exists on the Parks website.

So, 20,183 is the total number of applications submitted for calendar year 2019. Of that (BACKGROUND NOISE 22:48) 16,366, that's 13... That's 16,366 applications were approved. That is an approval rate of 81.1 percent.

Of the 20,183 applications submitted, only 50 or so applications were denied. That is a 0.2 percent denial rate.

For the current calendar year, 2021, we have in our system currently 13,211 applications that have been submitted. Of the 13,211 applications 5,613 have been approved. That's five - six one three have been approved.

I do not have an approval rating (BACKGROUND NOISE 23:55) available on that, only because I would

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2 make it clear that many of these applications are for
3 months that are ahead of us. And, so, I think
4 describing an approval rating would be somewhat
5 misleading based on these figures, and the fact that
6 there are still six months left of the calendar year.

7 In terms of denials, of the 13,211 that have been
8 submitted for calendar year 2021, only 19 have been
9 denied.

10 As I stated, that is the data that I have
11 available in front of me and the moment. But, again,
12 if requested, we are happy to make further data
13 available to the council at a later time.

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, so we are... Hold on,
15 before ask you additional questions, I want to say
16 that we are also joined by Council Member Brannan,
17 Council Member Van Bramer, and Council Member Rivera.

18 So, you mentioned that 20,183 applications
19 submitted, 16,366 approved, and 50 denied. So, what
20 happened to the rest of it? It doesn't add up.

21 ANTHONY SAMA: Yes, thank you for that question,
22 uh, Council Member. The remaining applications were
23 moved to what is deemed a withdraw status.

24 Withdraw happens when an application doesn't come
25 to fruition for a variety of reasons. It is possible

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2 that applicants submitted multiple applications
3 requesting multiple sites, and one site was approved,
4 and there were only... You know, in many cases these
5 applicants are only looking for one site, so upon
6 receiving approval of that site, the other
7 applications were withdrawn.

8 It is also possible that an applicant submitted
9 an application for a site that was unavailable;
10 however, you know, our borough directors work very
11 closely to try to reschedule or find alternative
12 locations when that happens. It's likely that in
13 many of these cases, the applicant was not
14 accepting... Or did not want to accept, excuse me,
15 the other alternatives that were made available to
16 them, and just determined that they would withdraw
17 their application request.

18 And, in... And, there were also cases where
19 applications... Where event applicants just
20 determined not to host their events. And, that could
21 be for a variety of reasons. And, when we are
22 notified of that, once again, the application is
23 moved to withdraw.

24 It is very rare, as you can see if reflected by
25 our 2019 numbers, and I would venture that the other

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2 fiscal year data and calendar year data we have would
3 represent similar numbers.

4 We work very hard not to deny applications, but
5 work with organizers and applicants to ensure that
6 their request is accommodated in whatever way
7 possible.

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, what was the number of
9 ticketed events in parks? Ticketed means paid for,
10 right... Uh, event, for each of the last five fiscal
11 or calendar years?

12 ANTHONY SAMA: Thank you for that question, Chair.
13 I (BACKGROUND NOISE 27:20) again, do not have the
14 exact data in front of me. I'd be happy to get you
15 that data on exact numbers. If I were to speculate
16 just having been part of this Citywide Special Events
17 Office for twelve years, and, you know, being able to
18 essentially count on one or two hands the number of
19 those events that occur, I would venture that perhaps
20 ten or so events have carried a ticket to access
21 them. Of those ten events, there are fewer I would
22 venture, potentially only two or three that were 100
23 percent a paid ticket for access. Maybe... maybe a
24 bit... Maybe a few more. Excuse me, maybe closer to
25 five were for a 100 percent paid ticket. Even in the

1 cases that were that the ticket affiliated with them,
2 that was not a 100 percent paid, we work with
3 organizers to strike a balance of majority or tickets
4 be made available to the public.
5

6 In many cases, instituting a ticket is important
7 for crowd control purposes. (BACKGROUND NOISE 28:40)

8 And, so, while, yes, a ticket is required to access
9 some of these events, as I said, we work with
10 organizers to try to make as many of the tickets
11 available to the public for free via lottery or other
12 ticket system.

13 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Going back to the previous
14 question that I asked, what are some reasons why a
15 group not host an event?

16 ANTHONY SAMA: Thank you for that question, Chair
17 Koo. Some of the reasons why an event... Or why,
18 excuse me, why a promoter or producer may not host
19 their event, or why a person may decide they don't
20 want to pursue their application, consists of a few
21 things. One, they've determined that they just are
22 not interested. Perhaps they've found a site that is
23 more appropriate for their event, or an indoor site
24 in some cases. In some cases, applicants go to the
25 state property like along the Hudson River or along

1
2 the Brooklyn waterfront. In some cases,
3 applicants... The dates that applicants have
4 requested of the location that applicant has
5 requested was not available, and they were not
6 interested in the alternatives that were offered to
7 them.

8 And, in other cases it's possible that the, uhm,
9 the, uhm... Excuse me, that the con... A conflict
10 couldn't be resolved. And, again, we've worked with
11 them to try to find our figure out or resolve those
12 conflicts, but they were not accepting of
13 alternatives being offered to them.

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, yeah. So, (BACKGROUND
15 NOISE 30:25) Can you tell us how is the fee that will
16 be paid by the event promoter determined? Is a fee
17 attached to the TUA or other type of contracts?

18 ANTHONY SAMA: Thank you for that question, Chair
19 Koo. The fee is determined based off of the
20 concession fee schedule that I referenced earlier,
21 and you were referencing in your first question as
22 well.

23 That is Section 2-10 of Parks Rules and
24 Regulations. It is available to be viewed on the
25 Parks website. Anybody can see what those fees

1
2 equate to. And, we work with applicants based on the
3 event elements that they are presenting at their
4 event when calculating what those fees will be.

5 In some instances where there are very large
6 events taking place, primarily concerts over 8,000
7 people, or private events over 8,000 people, there is
8 an opportunity to negotiate pricing based off of...
9 Or separate -- aside from the fee schedule.

10 I will say further, that negotiation of those
11 fees is really meant to help recoup money for the
12 city for resources that may be expended related to
13 the event operations and preparation.

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Going back to the previous
15 question again, I'm just thinking. So, I'm wondering
16 if some groups cancel because they don't hear back
17 from Parks with enough time to the event. Because, I
18 heard some times, you know, you... You don't give
19 them notice soon enough, like, uh, before the event,
20 so they cancel it there.

21 ANTHONY SAMA: There may be... Uh, and thank you
22 for that question, and... and raising that issue.
23 Uhm, there may be instances where producers have
24 decided to make alternate plans based on a, you know,
25 a perceived lack of response. You know, I would be

1
2 happy to work... If... If there's a specific
3 instance or constituent who has experienced this
4 issue, I'd be happy to work with them and work with
5 our borough, you know, respective borough offices to
6 rectify any delay in communication. But, I would
7 venture that the percentage of producers and
8 promoters who cancel for that reason or withdraw
9 their application for that reason, is quite small.

10 And, you know, I will also say, that our borough
11 offices are readily available. Contact information
12 for our borough offices is readily available on The
13 Parks' website. And, we always urge applicants if
14 they are having trouble contact... (BACKGROUND NOISE
15 33:26) you know, if... if they are waiting for a
16 response to feel free to be proactive and reach out
17 to the borough offices for a response -- including
18 The Citywide Special Events Office.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, so, is there a time limit
20 Parks Department will respond to an application? I
21 mean, like, how many days before the event? You give
22 them how many... How many days before to approve it?
23 You know?

24 ANTHONY SAMA: And, thank you for that question,
25 uh, Council Member. It... It... It can... It

1 really can vary. There was... I will not say there
2 was a standard amount of days prior to the event
3 where an approval is necessary required from the
4 agency. Obviously, separate from our 21-day request
5 for the event to be submitted prior to the event
6 date, you know, we work diligently to... to try to
7 approve requests as quickly as possible. The
8 variances in that communication and the amount of
9 time it takes to get to an approval, really varies
10 depending on how sophisticated and complicated the
11 event infrastructure or event elements may be.

12
13 For something as large as a... as a... as a
14 (BACKGROUND NOISE 34:41) Global Citizens Festival,
15 for example, you know, those... Those, uh, events
16 take literally months of planning to... To execute.
17 And, so, you know, we are working in good faith with
18 many of these producers, regardless of whether or not
19 they received their permit, you know, far out from
20 the event. We are working in good faith and working
21 towards an approval, uhm, to... to, you know, ensure
22 them that these events are... are prepared and
23 scheduled to move forward.

24 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, yeah, I... I... I just
25 want to make sure, you know, you get the event

1
2 organizer, especially smaller ones, enough time, you
3 know to prepare for this event. Like, if I want to
4 hold an event a month later, you just tell me two
5 days before the event, to approve it, then I don't
6 have enough time to prepare for it. You know, so, we
7 don't want that to happen.

8 ANTHONY SAMA: Yes, thank you for pointing that
9 out, Chair. And... And... And, we don't either.
10 We certainly (BACKGROUND NOISE 35:38) want to work
11 diligently with... with every producer, regardless
12 of sizes of their event, to make sure the events are
13 happening (BACKGROUND NOISE 35:47) safely, and that
14 everybody who needs to be involved, uhm, in terms of
15 other stakeholders and agency partners... Uhm, and
16 especially if there are other permits that are gonna
17 need be required, uhm, that there's ample time to
18 secure those permits, uh, and ensure the event is
19 happening in a... In a... In a safe and appropriate
20 fashion. But... (CROSS-TALK 36:04)

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

22 ANTHONY SAMA: Yes, thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, the... Going back to the
24 fee schedule again, is there entire fee paid before
25 the event, or are there different payment plans that

1
2 are depending on the event? So, does that... Pay
3 everything up front?

4 ANTHONY SAMA: Yes, thank you for that question,
5 Chair Koo. Uh, yes, we, uh, within the contracts
6 that we execute for these events, there are deadlines
7 for the payments to be made. Typically payments are
8 requested fully upfront. I can't... I can't recall
9 any kind of payment schedule, so to speak, for these
10 events, uh, that... that we've worked with
11 applicants on. Typically payment is due prior to
12 their beginning to load in for an event. Meaning,
13 before they take ownership of the site, before any
14 infrastructure or staffing begins entering the park,
15 uh, related to that event, uh, payment is due. As is
16 the proper insurance requirements, uh, and any
17 security bond that might be required for these events
18 as well.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, uh, can you tell us, what
20 was the largest fee that was charged for a TUA for
21 the most recent year?

22 ANTHONY SAMA: Uh, thank you for that question.
23 So, a TUA, just to... To clarify is slightly
24 different from the Special Event concessions that get
25 issued by the Citywide Special Events Office. A TUA

1 stands for a "Temporary Use Authorization". Uh,
2 it... it is a vending contract effect...
3 effectively, uhm, to run, uh, a temporary concession
4 uhm, on... on parkland. Meaning, you know, the
5 vending of any type whether it be dry goods or food.
6 Our agreements, a Special Event Agreements, are
7 specifically related to use and rental of the space
8 for special events. It is... it is possible, and in
9 many cases, there... there are instances where an
10 event would require, uh, a site fee be paid for
11 rental of the space, as well as a TUA, uhm, to... to
12 authorize the vending as part of that event. But,
13 just to be clear, those are two separate operations.
14 A TUA is managed by the agency's revenue division.
15 If you have more questions about that, you know,
16 the... We'd be happy to follow up with any questions
17 you may have related to TUA's.

19 As it pertains to Citywide Special Events, I can
20 say that the largest contract that we've executed for
21 a special event was probably... you know, at...
22 at... In 2019 (BACKGROUND NOISE 38:50) was for the
23 Global Citizens Festival, which carried a fee of 1.1
24 million dollars.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Oh, so, that's the largest fee,
3 right?

4 ANTHONY SAMA: That is the largest fee, yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: One point 1 million? Okay, once
6 a special permit applicant properly submits the
7 application to Parks, what is the typical... What is
8 the typical time of... I'm sorry, yeah, what is the
9 typical timeline as to when Parks... When Parks will
10 reply to the applicant.

11 ANTONY SAMA: Thank you for that question, Chair
12 Koo. There is typically an automated response that
13 applicants receive initially just so that they can
14 be, uh... Uh... In... Just so that it's confirmed
15 that the agency has received their application.

16 From the time it gets submitted to the time the
17 office reaches out, again, may vary based on the size
18 and scope of the event. Typically our Citywide
19 Special Events office, when it comes to large scale
20 events, will, uh, uh, will work to contact applicants
21 almost immediately or within a few short weeks of...
22 of applying. Keep in mind, many of the applications
23 we receive for larger events are submitted far before
24 the event dates are expected.

1
2 Just kind to give people a further general idea
3 of our application process, application... Uh, our
4 application system opens on the first Monday of the
5 prior year for the coming calendar year. So, we do
6 not begin accepting applications for the following
7 calendar year until the first Monday of the preceding
8 year. And, so, that is when the majority of the
9 applications do come in from our annually occurring
10 events. But, again, on a rolling basis, we are
11 contacting applications for these larger events you
12 know, I would say, you know, within... within two
13 weeks at the most, perhaps maybe up to a month if
14 it's... If it's something that's happening very far
15 out in terms of making first contact.

16 And, many of these applicants are applicants who
17 we've also worked with year over year. They're great
18 stewards of our parks. They're great... They're
19 great producers and promoters and know what is
20 expected of them. And, so, in many cases, those
21 conversations and approval processes are... are
22 somewhat truncated, because of their, you know,
23 historical standing with the agency. And... And,
24 our... Our confidence in their ability to... To
25 continue producing their events at a high level.

1
2 For the smaller applications that come in, our
3 borough offices work to make contact, I believe,
4 within a week or two of applications being submitted
5 as well. However, again, there may be more of a lag
6 when events are submitted far in advance. Of course,
7 you know, we're always... In... In the world of
8 events, we're always working on deadlines. We're
9 always looking forward to, you know, the next month
10 and making sure that everything is prepared for
11 what's coming next month. And, so, there might be
12 priorities given obviously to things that are
13 happening sooner in the calendar year than later, but
14 it's always our efforts to make contact as soon as
15 possible after an application has been submitted.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. So, how will the recent
17 relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions affect how Parks
18 regulates events permitting? Does Parks have any
19 COVID restrictions in place for the... For the
20 proposed events?

21 ANTHONY SAMA: Thank you for that question, Chair
22 Koo. Pursuant to the governor's recent announcement,
23 uhm, the... The Parks Department, as many other city
24 permitting agencies are doing, are expecting to begin
25 permitting our events under the same guidelines we

1
2 were pre-pandemic. Certainly asking applicants to
3 continue to follow CDC guidelines as it relates to
4 any necessary social distancing or face coverings.
5 However, we are currently in state where we are
6 awaiting further guidance from the city on that
7 interpretation. Obviously, the... The city had
8 executive orders in place that need to be dismissed,
9 uh, in order for us to begin progressing, you know,
10 without guidance. Our... Our expectations is that
11 that will happen shortly. But, we have already begun
12 working on events that (BACKGROUND NOISE 43:55) that
13 we expect to happen over the next six months, and the
14 rest of the remainder of this calendar year that will
15 not be mandated by the agency to employ COVID
16 parameters for the people attending. Obviously, we
17 are still asking to message that people follow CDC
18 guidelines for those who are unvaccinated -- be sure
19 they are wearing masks -- and things of that nature.
20 But, in terms of agency requirements, no, there is
21 not going to be mandate very shortly for any kind of
22 other restrictions or parameters to be put in place.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, right now, you still keep
24 the... You follow the CDC rules or follow the
25 governor's rules?

1
2 ANTHONY SAMA: So, the city has... And, perhaps,
3 I... I should defer to my colleague Matt Drury,
4 who's a bit more involved with the government's
5 workings, but speaking from my (BACKGROUND NOISE
6 44:50) in working in the pandemic, when the
7 Governor's office has made an announcement there has
8 been collaboration with City Hall on the
9 interpretation of those announcements. Obviously,
10 alongside the state's Department of Health and the
11 city's Department of Health as well, so that we can
12 properly interpret those guidelines and act in a way
13 that is appropriate based on the city's standing at
14 the time.

15 MATT DRURY: Yeah, I... (CROSS-TALK 45:19)

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: And, also the... Yeah, yeah,
17 okay, I wasn't asking for (INAUDIBLE 45:25) answer.
18 Since the different neighborhoods in New York City
19 have different vaccination rates... Now some are
20 high, some are really low, does Parks envision enact
21 different, special event requirements in different
22 neighborhoods?

23 ANTHONY SAMA: Thank you for that question, Chair
24 Koo. That is not our current expectation. We are
25 intending on following the state's guidelines, I

1
2 believe. And, again, I am not the one who is going
3 to be interpreting those... Those... Those, uh,
4 executive orders. However, it is my understanding
5 that we will not be regulating event size or type
6 based on vaccinations rates within neighborhoods.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, so, Mr... Matt, did you
8 want to say something?

9 MATT DRURY: Not particularly, I think Director
10 Sama spoke to it really well. I think what you're
11 referring to, you know, as regulations at... were...
12 were tightening, and ,you know, you saw, I think you
13 might have recall there was a color coded system ,you
14 know, red, yellow, uh, orange. I might be getting
15 that... You know what I mean? But, as... As... In
16 terms of the sort of, you know, standing down, uh,
17 you know, those sort of contemplations are not so
18 much quite a part of the picture any longer.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. So... So, uh, Mr. Sama,
20 uh, how common is it for un-permitted events to
21 occur. And, what is the enforcement practice this is
22 implemented when one is taking place?

23 ANTHONY SAMA: Thank you for that question, Chair
24 Koo. It is not very common that events happen un-
25 permitted in our parks. We take pride in being a

1 fair and equitable process and give everybody the
2 opportunity to use our space. We... In times where
3 they may be an un-permitted event, we find that it
4 happens because perhaps the applicant was just
5 unaware of the process. Uh, so, we always take the
6 route of educating people on what the proper... The
7 proper practices are, uhm, in... To ensure that, you
8 know, proper protocols and... and... and
9 applications processes are followed. We go so far if
10 we see something being announced on social media, uh,
11 to even reach out to those applicants. If know an
12 application has not been submitted, to say, you know,
13 we are aware that you... you would like to use our
14 parks, please, you know, work with us to... To
15 properly secure a permit for your event. And, in
16 many cases, people are... Are more than happy to do
17 so. They're apologetic and they understand that
18 there this a process that must be followed. In cases
19 where events happen un-permitted, ,you know, or we
20 are expecting an event to happen un-permitted, we
21 have close coordination with our Parks Enforcement
22 Patrol to be on site at potentially problematic, un-
23 permitted events to, again, provide education should
24 the event be moving forward at... and happen. And,

1
2 uh, and ensure that if the event does continue, it's
3 happening in a way that is not terribly impactful to
4 the park space and the surrounding usage.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, so, can you tell us the...
6 Do you have any data on the number of unpermitted
7 events taking place in any recent year?

8 ANTHONY SAMA: I do not have data on that, and,
9 frankly, I do not believe Parks tracks... At least
10 not in the Special Events Office, we do not track
11 data on unpermitted events. I think it would be
12 somewhat unrepresentative, because we obviously will
13 only hear about the large permitted events... un-
14 permitted events that are happening. Right? There
15 are, I'm sure are many people who use our parks and
16 do not get permits to do so, and may have more than
17 20 people at their events. But, those are, again,
18 very small gatherings. They're not impactful to the
19 parks. In most cases, you know, our park staff or
20 enforcement are on ... If they're on sight and they
21 notice it, they may just say, hey, you know, this is
22 what the process is. But, they'll let them continue.
23 And, it's not really tracked in a real way.
24 Certainly the larger events that are un-permitted,

1
2 you know, we do hear about. But, again, I...
3 they're not tracked in a qualitative way.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, you are saying that, I...
5 And, I... You find (INAUDIBLE 50:18) officer asks
6 some... There... A group of 20 people barbecue in
7 the park if they don't have permit (BACKGROUND NOISE
8 50:26) the officer will just let them continue?

9 ANTHONY SAMA: Yes, there might be a case in
10 the... And, it depends on the type of event they're
11 having. And, there might be a case where someone
12 else who is a permit holder, comes to utilize the
13 space, in which case, a park worker or a Parks
14 Enforcement Officer will approach the group and help
15 to resolve any conflict. You know, most of these
16 conflicts are resolved by the people themselves.
17 And, again, most people understand our system. And,
18 so when presented with a permit, they will, you know,
19 move to an alternate location and continue their
20 event. But, I... I don't want to speak to Parks
21 Enforcement practices, but it's... In my
22 understanding is it's... It's always our goal to
23 educate, not enforce or write summonses. That...
24 That is not our first recourse here. It is to ensure

1
2 that people understand what the process is and... and
3 our... enjoying our parks safely.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, the... They don't give any
5 ticket or some... or ask them to pay a fee? You...
6 They don't have a... If they didn't apply, can they
7 apply... the, uh, afterwards?

8 ANTHONY SAMA: So, uhm, again, I... I don't want
9 to speak to Parks Enforcement practices. I do not
10 have data on rates of summonses and things like that.
11 I know that they... They do again, try to educate
12 people first, uh, rather than go right to writing a
13 summons. Uhm, I will say when there are large events
14 that are happening uh, un-permitted, we have taken
15 efforts and written formal violations to those
16 producers and organizers, and, you know, so, there is
17 some record of that applicant acting outside of the
18 proper protocols.

19 And, in extreme cases, there might be a situation
20 where Parks takes extra action and prohibits that
21 applicant from getting permits in the future for a
22 period of time.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, so, does the Park
24 Department... Parks Department keep track of

1
2 where... Or keep track of event promoters that have
3 some sort of negative history?

4 ANTHONY SAMA: Yes, thank you for that question...
5 (CROSS-TALK 52:48)

6 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, how... Yeah... (CROSS-TALK
7 52:50)

8 ANTHONY SAMA: We do, uhm, we have regular
9 (BACKGROUND NOISE 52:53) communication with our
10 borough directors and their staff. And, so, when
11 there are problematic promoters, and I want to be
12 clear, this is not a rampant issue that we deal with,
13 uh, ,you know, many, if... if not ,you know, most of
14 our applicants and... and event producers are
15 upstanding users of our parks, and... and, want to
16 follow the rules, and are... are generally
17 apologetic if something happens out of, uh, out of
18 order, uh, out of, uh, process. But, in the cases
19 where we do have a bad actor or are witnessing bad
20 behavior in a more consistent way, we will
21 communicate with our borough staff that if
22 applications come in from this particular applicant,
23 they should be flagged, because that applicant has
24 presumably received violations in the past and is not
25 allowed to secure a permit for a period.

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2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, they are... If a promoter
3 has a negative history you will stop issuing permits
4 to them?

5 ANTHONY SAMA: That is correct (INAUDIBLE 54:08)
6 (CROSS-TALK)

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: (INAUDIBLE 54:08) for a period
8 of time or what?

9 ANTHONY SAMA: For a period of time. Parks has
10 the ability to basically put applicants on probation
11 for a period of up to two years. Again, that's up to
12 two years. I, again, cannot remember a situation
13 where we've put an application on probation for long
14 a period. We have experienced cases where applicants
15 were denied permits because of a violation history.
16 But, it happens very infrequently. And, again, is
17 communicated to our borough staff when necessary.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. So, how do Parks
19 Department and N. Y. P. D. determine the security
20 needs for a certain event? How often park officers
21 or park rangers assigned to work an event?

22 ANTHONY SAMA: Thank you for that question, Chair
23 Koo. As a matter of practice each year the Citywide
24 Special Events Office will with our parks enforcement
25 officers, they Assistant Commissioner, of the Parks

1 Enforcement Patrol, as well as inspectors to the
2 calendar of events for the year. The calendar of
3 large scale events for the year. Our parks
4 enforcement patrol does have a special event detail,
5 seasonally, that they employ and send out to these
6 large events. Primarily to serve as public safety
7 officers, and stand by in the case of any emergency.
8 But, they are not there, I want to make it clear,
9 they are not there to police the events so to speak
10 or to employ security for the event purposes. They
11 are there as, again, a pub... in... in the case of
12 an emergency and for public safety purposes. And, so
13 they do try to attend as many of the largescale
14 events as they can. Certainly, the larger parades,
15 larger concerts and festivals that happen throughout
16 the city, they are typically on site to have some
17 oversight on. In terms of N. Y. P. D., you know,
18 again, we work very closely with N. Y. P. D.
19 operations and with local precincts, community
20 affairs officers, to ensure that if additional
21 security is needed at an event, ,you know, certainly
22 the larger scaled events are where N. Y. P. D.'s
23 expertise is requested. And, they will determine,
24
25

1
2 you know, within their agency, what is appropriate in
3 terms of a detail if necessary for those events.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Mr. Sartori, are
5 there any members of the... On our committee who
6 want to ask questions?

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: At this point, I will ask any
8 members, we will potentially call on other
9 (BACKGROUND NOISE 57:27) to ask their questions in
10 the order they have raised... Used the Zoom or raise
11 hand functions. Council Members, if any of you would
12 like to ask any questions of The Parks Department,
13 please use the Zoom raise hand function now. And,
14 I'd ask that all of you please keep your questions to
15 five minutes. The Sergeant at Arms will keep a timer
16 and will let you know once your time is up. You
17 should begin once the sergeant has announced you and
18 given the cue to begin. At this point I, oh, I do
19 see Council Member Dinowitz has raised his hand for a
20 question.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you. I'll be
23 quick, five minutes. Two main questions: First, I
24 just want to say how excited I am that our parks are
25 reopening as we come out of this pandemic. You know,

1
2 the parks were place where all went to enjoy time
3 with our friends, time with our families. In your
4 opening statement, Director, you stated you want to
5 avoid negative impacts on our beloved spaces. These
6 spaces that so many of us... so many of us went to
7 during this pandemic, and I hope we continue to
8 utilize after. Larger, you said, larger events have
9 bonds to facilitate... Help facilitate cleanup.
10 I'm, you know, with, in... In a short amount of
11 time, one, how do... How... And, you use these
12 words larger and smaller a number of times. I'm,
13 one, wondering, one, how you define larger events?
14 And, for these events, I guess, festivals or
15 concerts, I'm assuming, but is there a number of
16 people... Who ends up paying for the cleanup? And,
17 is there an impact on things like the soil in the
18 grass... And, the grass, uh, sprinkler system? Who
19 ends up pay... bears the cost of that sort of
20 cleanup and impact on our parks?

21 ANTHONY SAMA: Thank you for that question,
22 Council Member, we are... Let me share... Let me
23 just first say, we share in our excitement. So,
24 thank you for that.

25

1 We... There's a lot to unpack there, so let me
2 start by saying, smaller and larger events, the...
3 The... The defining mark is the 500 number
4 typically. You know, events over that 500 number
5 are... are... are deemed to require more
6 administrative oversight, insurance obligations.
7 But, that said, there are events that are smaller
8 than 500 that also may need to provide those types of
9 elements as well -- insurance or bonds.

11 We typically make that determination based on
12 what the event encompasses. What type of
13 infrastructure if coming in, how many people they
14 realistically expect? And, you know, again, the
15 impact it's gonna have to the sight. Are we talking
16 about an event that everybody's gonna have the
17 opportunity to engage in and pass through? Or, are
18 we talking about something that's a little more
19 restrictive for one reason or another. And, so, you
20 know, those are the things we take in to account to
21 determine if a bond is appropriate.

22 But, once a bond is deemed appropriate, it is the
23 applicant's responsibility to maintain the site
24 during their event and restore the site after their
25 event -- whether that's related to trash cleanup, or

1
2 restoration of damage that may have been caused
3 pursuant to their event.

4 You know, there is impact to our landscapes.
5 There is impact to our parks when these events
6 happen. We work with larger events to ensure they
7 actually don't happen, and don't have infrastructure,
8 as much as possible, on our soft surfaces to mitigate
9 those types of issues. We defer and move a lot of
10 our larger events that want that kind of
11 infrastructure, to hardscape areas. Whether it's
12 asphalt pads, you know, paved areas, you know, larger
13 plazas, uh, safety... (CROSS-TALK 01:01:20)

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: I don't mean to be
15 rude... (CROSS-TALK)

16 ANTHONY SAMA: Go ahead.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Running out of time.

18 ANTHONY SAMA: Go head, go ahead... (CROSS-TALK)

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: But, so, I gonna read...
20 It's the... The permit applicant's responsibility
21 for large... For events. Okay. And, that includes
22 impact on the park itself, not just the garbage.
23 Okay... (CROSS-TALK 01:01:35)

24 ANTHONY SAMA: Yes. (CROSS-TALK 01:01:35)

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: The other thing is, you
3 know, as I mentioned earlier, so many of our families
4 took to the parks for birthday parties, because we
5 had to. Right? And, they're great places to have
6 them. And, I... I'm not sure if we're gonna have
7 time for an answer, but a number of families or
8 people... I don't know if it's families, people here
9 in The Bronx, we want people to use the parks, but
10 we've found a lot of people here in The Bronx,
11 especially at some of the smaller sites that may not
12 get as much attention, like small corners of Van
13 Cortlandt Park, (INAUDIBLE 01:02:07) park land, are
14 having gatherings, I won't use the word large,
15 because they're not 500 or more, of larger than 20
16 people, permits are not being requested, and though
17 we want community engagement, we're getting a lot of
18 complaints of noise...

19 ANTHONY SAMA: Mm-hmm.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: people leaving garbage.
21 And, you spoke great about educating... education
22 efforts. I would just like to share that I... I
23 haven't seen a lot of those education efforts take
24 place here in The Bronx. Because, we are getting
25 repeated complaints about areas. It sounds like

1
2 those education efforts get... take place in the
3 parks that always get the most attention, like,
4 Central Park.

5 ANTHONY SAMA: Mm-hmm.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: But, we have park space
7 here in The Bronx, too, where we want families to
8 use, but we don't want them abused, because our
9 families who live around the parks as well. So, I
10 would just ask that you include those education
11 efforts and that enforcement, both in terms of the
12 way that... that the park is treated... (CROSS-TALK

13 01:03:06)

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired. (CROSS-TALK

15 01:03:07)

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: (INAUDIBLE 01:03:07) the
17 park is used here in The Bronx. Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Uhm, thank you. (CROSS-TALK

19 01:03:16)

20 MATT DRURY: Sorry, to... Yeah... (CROSS-TALK

21 01:03:17)

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Please, go ahead.

23 MATT DRURY: No, just really quickly, Council
24 Member, because we appreciate the question very much,
25 and just want to you know, clarify, you know, first

1
2 and foremost, our... Both our borough commissioner
3 and, you know, obviously, your central... We're
4 always happy to talk about, you know, if we think
5 there's specific recurring concerns or issues.
6 Because, this... It sounds to me as if the scale of
7 what we're talking about here, probably doesn't fall
8 quite so much under Anthony and his Citywide Special
9 Events team, but more on sort of the smaller, you
10 know, significant still, but necessarily mega events
11 of that nature. So, you know, whether it's birthday
12 gatherings or other sort of, you know, informal sort
13 of gatherings, that can leave a real impact for sure
14 -- whether it's trash afterwards, or... or noise or
15 what have you. You know, we certainly do have a PEP,
16 a Park Enforcement, contingent for The Bronx. You
17 know, it's... You know, it's..., you know, they're
18 dedicated to getting out there and making sure there
19 are... ,you know, again, education is our first
20 approach. You know if... And, you know, we're happy
21 to kind of talk you through more, you know, how that
22 deployment works. And, it's a challenge for sure.
23 So, the... But, the long and the short of it is,
24 we'd like to work with you and your office to help
25 get out there and educate the public about the

1 importance of keeping our shared spaces clean. You
2 know, enforcement is obviously one important tool.
3 But, I think there's just a broader message that we
4 all, you know, sort of share these spaces. And, we
5 all, you know, especially in light of COVID, and, you
6 know, how valuable these spaces have come to be, you
7 know, I think we all need to sort of share in that
8 responsibility broadly. But, the... You know, but
9 the agency certainly values its importance in our...
10 Parks Enforcement folks are first and foremost on the
11 front lines, getting out there, you know, educating,
12 enforcing where necessary. You know, but we want to
13 work with you and your office to, you know, kind make
14 sure we're getting the word out about keeping our
15 parks and their best condition possible.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DINOWITZ: Thank you, and I do want
18 to highlight that... That this is a very important
19 issue. You know, we're not having tons of concerts
20 in The Bronx. Our issue... You know, a lot of
21 issues here, is want our park spaces to be utilized
22 the right way. I want to be able to use it with my
23 family. I want all of our neighbors here in the
24 Northwest Bronx to use them. And... And, they are
25 gatherings of larger... Of more than 20 people.

1
2 And, these are gatherings, when done right, that are
3 impactful positively to our community, but, again,
4 the complaints that my office is getting about these
5 larger than 20 people gatherings -- which would
6 otherwise according to you require a permit --
7 lasting late in to the night -- and having that
8 impact that we don't want our larger events to do.
9 We also... We also don't want these smaller events
10 to have that impact on the... On the... On the
11 parks, on our community, whether it's noise, whether
12 it's leaving garbage, or whether it's, uh, a coals
13 from a barbecue being dumped and left there.

14 So, these are, again, here in The North Bronx,
15 these are issues that are of great import.

16 So, I... I thank you for your attention to that,
17 and look forward to speaking with you both more about
18 that, and with The Parks Department more about that.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Council Member.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Council Member, and
21 seeing no other committee members with any questions,
22 I will turn it back over to Chair Koo for any
23 additional, final questions.

24

25

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2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, yeah. So, Mr. Sama...
3 Oh, before I ask questions, I want to announce that
4 we also joined by Council Member Ulrich.

5 Mr. Sama, I want to ask you a question about an
6 upcoming (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:06:31) big concert
7 announced for August on The Great Lawn. And, can you
8 tell us what is the preparation process for now, as
9 well as any fees being charged to the organizers?

10 ANTHONY SAMA: Thank you for that question, Chair
11 Koo. We are working diligently with the organizers
12 of that event to plan and prepare and for the event
13 on the 21st.

14 The event details are still coming in to focus.
15 But, you know, we have engaged our agency partners
16 and, other stakeholders, to ensure that proper
17 process are followed, that the park and The Great
18 Lawn operate seamlessly, and are able to accommodate
19 this event with ,you know, minimal impact to the
20 remaining park users, who rely on Central Park for
21 their recreation. So, we are... We are regularly
22 meeting and going through those planning processes.

23 Related to your question, that has to my
24 knowledge, not been negotiated yet in terms of the
25 fee for this event. But, we can certainly get back

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2 to you once those arrangements have been negotiated,
3 uh, as a followup.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, so you will communicate
5 with us, right, now?

6 ANTHONY SAMA: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah. So, in the guidelines for
8 large scale events, DPR states that it tried to
9 ensure there at least 80 percent of event tickets,
10 must be provided free of charge to the public for
11 events taking place in certain locations such as The
12 Great Lawn. So, are you doing that for this event?

13 ANTHONY SAMA: Yes, and... And, thank you for
14 that question, Chair. That... That is the plan,
15 yes. Eighty percent of the tickets for this event
16 will be... will be offered free to the public. It
17 is not yet determined in what capacity that will
18 take. How that will work -- that distribution.
19 Again, (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:08:57) these... These
20 details are coming in to focus. But, a ticketing
21 plan will be submitted to Parks for approval. And,
22 it is our expectation that, yes, that... that 80
23 percent figure to... for the public access free of
24 charge will be... will be part of the plan.

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2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. So, in more other
3 specific park locations, does this 80 percent policy
4 apply? You do you apply it to everywhere, or?

5 ANTHONY SAMA: Well, thank you for that question,
6 Council Member. We... We... The 80 percent is
7 right now something we institute on The Great Lawn.
8 And... primarily. It is... It doesn't... I
9 wouldn't say there are too many other sites that
10 employ a split. You know, thinking about, uh, the
11 other sites where we do have ticketed events,
12 Randall's Island, primarily is one of them. Many of
13 those events are 100 percent ticketed. That's the...
14 the... the lion's share of ticketed events that we
15 do in parks is on Randall's Island, uhm, or on... I
16 should say on public space, is on Randall's Island.
17 And, the other sites where events have historically
18 happened employ a, you know, we start with it... you
19 know, and 80/20, that's what strive for. But, we
20 always work to ensure that the majority of the
21 tickets over 50 percent are... are... are free
22 distributed... distributed free of charge.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: How much revenue was earned The
24 Parks Department for issuing of TUA's and Special

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2 Event (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:10:52) permits for events,
3 uh, during the most recent year?

4 ANTHONY SAMA: Uh, so the data that I have, I...
5 once again is on the 2019 calendar year. Uh, we
6 collected Special Event site fees in the amount of...
7 of \$300,599,110.00. Uh, and we collected TUA fees,
8 uh, for vending in the amount of \$128,188.00.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. So, can you tell me, uh,
10 tell the committee, your process for selecting on
11 what events will take place? Can you tell us what
12 factors are considered in determining the location,
13 the size, the content of the event?

14 ANTHONY SAMA: Thank you for that question, Chair
15 Koo. Uh, in... In many cases, it is... it is the
16 applicant that makes the request for a specific
17 location and size of their event. And, then Parks
18 will work with that applicant to determine the sites
19 that are most appropriate to accommodate those
20 details.

21 When it comes to processing applications, and who
22 gets permits and who doesn't, Parks processes our
23 applications on a first come first serve basis. And,
24 so, as I mentioned earlier this is a permitting
25 period that exits and begins on the first Monday of

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2 November in the year prior. Our returning
3 applicants, meaning applicants who ,you know,
4 obviously host their event annually, and intend to
5 use this same space on the same weekend, with the
6 same details of their... of their event, are given
7 first right of re... of refusal on their recurring
8 date -- so long as they apply within the first month
9 of that period.

10 So, if you... if you... if you host an annual
11 fundraising walk in Riverside Park, then... then you
12 will be entitled to that date each year as long as
13 you apply within the first month of our permitting
14 period.

15 Anything received after that first month,
16 December... starting December 1st, is processed on a
17 first come, first serve basis.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, so... So, can you tell us
19 the... the most common reasons The Parks Department
20 has typically denied applications to host events?
21 And, how many instances in the last year the
22 department prematurely closed an event?

23 ANTHONY SAMA: Uh, thank you for that question.
24 So, looking back to our calendar year 2019 data,
25 again, we denied approximately 50 events.

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2 The reasons for denial are few, and actually
3 written in to Parks rules and regulations as well.
4 The reasons why the agency would deny an event, would
5 be because an event is deemed inappropriate use of
6 park land. That can take a variety of... of shapes
7 and sizes.

8 There's also a reason of a conflict existing
9 within a space. Now, as I mentioned earlier, if a
10 conflict does exist, we work very hard to... to work
11 with applicants to ensure that they are accommodated
12 in some other way. But, there are applicants who are
13 very intent on hosting their events on that day at
14 that park. And, uhm, in some cases, believe it or
15 not, will require that the... or... or request that
16 that agency deny their application pursuant to our
17 rules. And, so, we will do so.

18 And, then finally, we also deny applications, as
19 I alluded to earlier, if it's an applicant who has...
20 has historical bad behavior on record, or had
21 multiple violations pursuant to events that they've
22 hosted on park land previously.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, after the event has
24 concluded, (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:15:26) I'm sorry,

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2 I... I was interrupted by a phone, yeah. So, let me
3 repeat the question again.

4 So, after an event has concluded, does your
5 department do a review process to see whether this
6 event... event's successful (BACKGROUND NOISE
7 01:15:49) or not or whether they will do it again
8 next year or in the future?

9 ANTHONY SAMA: Yes, and... And, thank you for
10 that question. We have very close communication with
11 our Special Events staff citywide as well as
12 operations staff, who tend to be the ones on site at
13 these events and who report any issues that they
14 might see or situations where sites are left in poor
15 condition due to an event. And, if that is the case,
16 then, you know, we will work with applicants to
17 rectify those situations to ensure they do not happen
18 the following year.

19 If necessary, we will... We will invoice those
20 applicants to cover the cost associated with Parks
21 having to clean up or restore the site. Uh, but
22 assuming that they pay for those reparations, and...
23 And, are... are open to working with us to develop a
24 plan to ensure that the event does not take place in
25 that fashion again, uh, they are welcome to return.

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2 And, as I said, you know, our applicants... It's
3 in their best interest to... to act in accordance
4 with our rules and regulations, because they do rely
5 on us to... to, you know, provide this space for
6 their recreational and event purposes, uh, the same
7 way we rely on them to program our parks in a... in
8 a vibrant and dynamic way. (BACKGROUND NOISE
9 01:17:23) so, uh, it's... It's mutually beneficial
10 that... that we work together to ensure those types
11 of issues don't happen in a recurring basis.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Mm-hmm. So, do you have a staff
13 actually attending all these events? And, afterwards
14 they write a report on this?

15 ANTHONY SAMA: Well, Thank you for that, uh, that
16 question, uh, Chair. We, uh, my office, the Citywide
17 office, The Special Events office does not
18 necessarily attend every event that happens in the
19 city. Uh, and I'm sure you can appreciate, based on
20 the numbers I've shared... (CROSS-TALK 01:17:59)

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yes.

22 ANTHONY SAMA: Uh, it... It would be impossible
23 for us to do so. But, that said, we do have Parks
24 staff, almost always, in parks where events are
25 taking place. Whether or not they're staff dedicated

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2 to this site, or perhaps it's a... it's manager
3 who's, uh, who's ,you know, moving around the borough
4 to check on the events schedule that weekend --
5 popping in and... and... and, checking on each park
6 in their district, uh, and if they do come across an
7 issue, uh, yes, they will write... They will write
8 up a... a... a... Uh, typically it's... It's
9 not as formal as a report. Uh, typically it would be
10 uh, an email to the... the... The director of
11 special events for the borough, or to myself. You
12 know, we ask our... our operations staff to always
13 take pictures of any issues that they may encounter,
14 uh (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:18:48) and properly document
15 those... those, uh, issues, uh, so that we have a...
16 A record of... of applicants who have... have
17 behaved badly, and can properly communicate with them
18 to... to resolve any... any issues.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. I just want to say, we
20 are also joined by Council Member Cabrera.

21 So, do any conservancies or alliances have the
22 power to hold events and determine the content of the
23 event without Parks input?

24 ANTHONY SAMA: Well, thank you for that... that
25 question, Chair. I... I will say we work

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2 (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:19:30) very closely with our
3 conservancies, alliances, friend of groups, uh, civic
4 groups that are affiliated with our parks, to ensure
5 that events are happening to the standards that we
6 all expect. Uh, regardless of a conservancy or
7 alliances, uh, uhm, agreement with The Parks
8 Department, final approval for events always come
9 from NYC Parks. Permits are always issued by NYC
10 parks. And, so, we... We, uh, maintain close
11 communication on events scheduled at their locations...
12 at their parks.

13 With regard to the events that they themselves
14 are hosting and programming, you know, again, they
15 are required to submit applications for those events.
16 Uh, there is collaboration and communication on what
17 they are planning. And, uh, and, they always do
18 require the approval of parks, uh... uh, via a
19 permit, uh, in order to take place.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. So, can you tell us, what
21 are the bond or insurance requirements for events
22 that are given approval? How much they're to buy
23 insurance or the bonds?

24 ANTHONY SAMA: Well, thank you for that question,
25 Chair Koo. A security bond is generally somewhere

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2 \$250.00, uh, and a thousand dollars depending on the
3 size and scope of the event. That is held as
4 collateral in case of any damage or additional, uh...
5 Uh, fees are incurred related to, you know,
6 reimbursement required for an event.

7 With regard to insurance, uh, and... And, I will
8 say, bonds are... can be substantially larger for the
9 larger events, uh, taking place. Uhm, a bond for an
10 event on The Great Lawn, for example, is \$100,000.00
11 Uh, so... (CROSS-TALK 01:21:35)

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

13 ANTHONY SAMA: So, the larger events that are
14 happening in our parks, you can rest assured are
15 (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:21:39) you know, putting up a
16 security deposit that they wish to get back.

17 (LAUGHING)

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Mm-hmm.

19 ANTHONY SAMA: And, so, uh, and, so, you know,
20 again, it's... it's... It's in all of our best
21 interests to ensure that we're... they're... we're
22 keeping the best standard, uh, and practices for our
23 park space when it comes to events.

24 Uh, as it pertains to insurance, uhm, events are
25 required to get a minimum of, uh, two million general

1 liability, uh, policy for their events. Uh, and then
2 depending on the details of the event, may also be
3 required to submit automobile liability insurance,
4 uh, as well as proof of, uh, workers compensation and
5 disability benefits, uh, to ensure that any workers
6 related to the, uh, the build, and... and... and,
7 who would be working the event are covered under the
8 state's law.

10 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. So, do all events
11 contracts require the promotor to be... Pay grass
12 or other damage that results from the event?

13 ANTHONY SAMA: Uh, Thank you for that question,
14 Chair Koo. And, yes, uh, our contracts with our
15 larger events all require that it is the licensee or
16 permittee's responsibility to return the site and
17 restore the site, uh, uh, upon completion of the
18 event.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:23:12)
20 I'm sorry, uh, I got interrupted again.

21 ANTHONY SAMA: No problem.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, who... So, the... The...
23 The promotor is required to repair, right?

24 (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:23:30) on all of their... They

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2 can... Are they doing it themselves, or they hire
3 partners to do it?

4 ANTHONY SAMA: And, thank you for that question.
5 Uh, it... They... With pursuant to our agreements,
6 they have the ability to utilize vendors of their own
7 if they wish. But, those vendors that are selected
8 to do any kind of restoration or repair, would need
9 to be approved by The Parks Department prior to such
10 work taking place. So, uh, you know, they... they
11 would need to run any, you know, an... Any vender
12 they wish to use by our agency to ensure the work
13 that would be done would, uh, would meet the proper
14 standards and requirements pursuant to city and, uh,
15 law and, uh, and agency standards.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, so, they cannot ask you guys
17 to do it? Say, I don't have staff to do it, uh, I
18 pay you to do it. Can you do it for them?

19 ANTHONY SAMA: Uh, it... it... It would...
20 How... It would depend, I... I assume, you know, I
21 would presume it would depend on what they're asking
22 us to do.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, yeah.

24 ANTHONY SAMA: Uh, you know, if it's a... If it's
25 a small organization asking us to assist with...

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2 with cleanup for their event, it might be as simple
3 as saying, "Just make sure your bagging your garbage,
4 and place it by the... or in the receptacles, and...
5 and... and, we will take care of that for you."

6 Uh, for events that... that are larger and
7 expect to generate a substantial amount of garbage,
8 no. Parks will not provide those types of resources.
9 And, we'll work with events on reviewing their trash
10 plan to ensure they have, uh, at least on paper,
11 presented us with a plan that represents proper
12 staffing and proper carting services if necessary,
13 uh, for... for trash generated during their events.
14 Uh, by permit it is... it is the... the... the
15 applicant's and permittee's responsibility, actually,
16 to also remove any generated trash from the event
17 from the site. Uh, and, so, you know, we... we also
18 work with applicants to review those plans to make
19 sure they're doing so. Again, unless it's a small
20 event that Parks, uh, is... is able, uh, and willing
21 to... to remove trash from.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, does, uh, Parks Department
23 get a funding, the (INAUDIBLE 01:25:56) if there are
24 damages that require making an insurance claim or
25 from bonds? Suppose there's some damages, and then

1 insurance pay you money? (INAUDIBLE 01:26:08)

2 (CROSS-TALK)...

3 ANTHONY SAMA: Uh, yeah, thank you for that
4 question.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

6 ANTHONY SAMA: Uhm, typically the way we would
7 handle any restoration or damage that would be...
8 need to be repaired, uh, is that, uh, the agency
9 would, uh, if we're... Well, a few things. If we
10 are the ones who are going to hire a vendor, or do
11 the repairs ourselves, then we would, uh, prepare an
12 invoice for the applicant, which they would have to
13 then pay in full, uh, and they would receive their
14 bond back once they've paid for the damages to be
15 covered.

16 So, to be clear, the bond that we collect is...
17 Is not, uh, it... in practice, is not deposited and
18 utilized, unless damages that have been invoiced for,
19 are not paid in full. Uh, it... those... those
20 checks are... are held as collateral, uh, and then
21 we work with the organization to pay for the repairs
22 that need to be done. Uh, and they pay for those
23 repairs, uhm, and then the... the bond is returned
24 to them.

1
2 Uh, in terms of how insurance comes in to play in
3 that, uh, it... To my... And, and, I do not know,
4 quite frankly, and I'm not, uh, involved directly in
5 the claim that an organization would make to their
6 insurer to cover, uh, damage or, uh, or restoration
7 from their event.

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Well, I'm interested to know
9 that when they pay you a payment, does it go to the
10 department directly or go to the general fund?

11 ANTHONY SAMA: If they are paying for restoration
12 or repairs, uh, stemming from their event that had
13 been, uh, that have been done by the agency or done
14 by a vendor of the agency's, then that money comes to
15 the de... the... the department to cover that...
16 those costs. Whether it's overtime or materials,
17 whatever... whatever stemming from the cost, they
18 would... that... that money would stay within the
19 agency. If they are paying... (CROSS-TALK)

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay... (CROSS-TALK)

21 ANTHONY SAMA: a... or... or they'll be paying a
22 vendor directly, uhm, that we've approved to do the
23 work, in which case, we obviously would not receive,
24 uh, money from those repairs.

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2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. So, can you tell us, uh,
3 the... The security requirements, uh, uh, uhm, what
4 kind of security requirements are placed on the
5 promoters? Do they have to hire their own security
6 guards, or are they use, uh, (BACKGROUND NOISE
7 01:28:47) N. Y. P. D. or they use PET officers, and
8 do they have to pay for it?

9 ANTHONY SAMA: Uh, Thank you for that question,
10 uh, Chair Koo.

11 Uh, it is the responsibility of the promoter, uh,
12 of an event producer, to provide security related to
13 their event operations. Uh, any... any compliment,
14 uh, of... of security (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:29:09)
15 staffing, that Parks enforcement or N. Y. P. D., uh,
16 puts towards an event is solely in a public safety,
17 uh, uh, public safety condition. They are not there
18 to provide security for even purposes. Uh, meaning,
19 that if, uh, an event has, for example, a ticket
20 related to the event for access, it is event security
21 that checks those tickets. It is event security that
22 maintains order amongst the crowds and queues waiting
23 to enter an event.

24 It is event security, private security, who
25 oversees, uh, any event related equipment, uh, and

1 ensures, uh, that the event, uh, infrastructure is
2 protected. Uh, N. Y. P. D. and Parks Enforcement's
3 involvement in events (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:30:04) is,
4 again, merely, to provide public safety and
5 additional support in cases of emergencies.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, who... who's paying for the
8 extra, uhm, N. Y. P. D. or... or other security?
9 The promotor, right?

10 ANTHONY SAMA: And, thank you for that question,
11 Chair Koo.

12 Uh, in many cases, uh, yes, the promoter is the
13 one who is covering those costs. And, those costs
14 are... Are part of the resources that are, uh,
15 reimbursed through the very large site fees, uhm ,you
16 know, for The Great Lawn 1.1 million dollars, uh,
17 ,you know, uh, a sizable portion of that is, uh, is
18 used to help cover the city's resources that go in
19 to, uh, ensuring these events are happening safely.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, uh, can you tell us the...
21 What factors determine whether The Parks Department
22 has to shut down an event? And, how often this
23 happened in the past for, uh, in the past for last...
24 uh, for large events? Has it ever happened? That
25 you shut down an event?

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2 ANTHONY SAMA: To... To my knowledge, uh, I have
3 never heard of an event... a permitted event, uh,
4 being shut down. Uh, there are cases where events
5 need to be evacuated due to an emergency or a weather
6 related reason. Uh, and certainly that has happened.
7 Uh, and, uh, but, uh, to my knowledge, no permitted
8 event has ever needed to be shut down for a reason
9 related to, uh, a permittee or promotor's behavior at
10 the event.

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: No? Does your department, uh,
12 play any role in determining what the admission cost
13 will be for ticketed events?

14 ANTHONY SAMA: Uh, Thank you for that questions,
15 Chair Koo.

16 Uh, while , (CLEARS THROAT) excuse me, while we
17 do request, uh, information, uh, related to the
18 ticket plan, which included, uh, pricing for ticket
19 levels for those events, uh, the department does not,
20 uh, does not, uh, influence what those tickets costs
21 could be. That is, uh, up to the promotor to
22 determine. Uh, and in many cases, is, uh, industry
23 standard for, uh, for, you know, large festivals.

24 (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:32:53) that take place
25 nationwide. (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:32:54)

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2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Let me pause for a minute. Uh,
3 Mr. Sartori, do we have any members that wanted to
4 ask questions?

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: No, Councilman, there are
6 no... currently no members with additional
7 questions.

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, so, I will continue with a
9 few more questions. Does DPR include any reported
10 requirements on the part of the promotor as to
11 condition of being issued a special event permit or
12 TUA, uh, for promoters of largescale events?

13 ANTHONY SAMA: Uh, Thank you for that question.

14 Uhm, uh, I'm not sure which reporting
15 specifically, uh, you might be referring to. We...
16 we do require, uh, lots of documentation ahead of
17 time, uh, in order to approve events. Uh, ,you know,
18 , such as, uh, site plans, uh, production schedules
19 related to load in, runs or show, load out, uh,
20 obviously we require administrative documentation
21 such as payments and insurance up front.

22 Uhm, you know, we may also... Again, we require
23 things like ticket plans, uhm, any plans related to,
24 uh, concessions that will be on site, sponsor
25 activations on site, uh, you know, the Parks

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2 Department (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:34:17) approves all
3 details surrounding and related to, uh, the events
4 that take place on our property.

5 Uh, so, you know, there is reporting from the
6 promoters done on what the events will entail
7 (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:34:30) Uhm, in some cases,
8 there's also reporting in real-time done, uh, related
9 to how many people are attending the event. Uh,
10 again, pursuant to... to our contracts with, uh,
11 especially the... the... the much larger concerts
12 and events, uh, that are... that have a ticket
13 associated with them, uhm, we request real-time
14 reporting, uh, on how many people are inside the
15 venue at any given time. Uh, and so that is
16 reporting that's done.

17 Uhm, post - event, uh, I am not, you know, the
18 city does within our... our agreements, reserve the
19 right to audit, uh, and... And, things along those
20 lines. Uhm, but in terms of... of formal reporting,
21 uh, post-event, uh, no, there is nothing that's...
22 that's... that's necessarily required.

23 Uh, we may have debriefings, uh, meetings to
24 discuss, you know, the good and the bad. Uh, and
25 especially for recurring events, you figure out how

1
2 to rectify any issues that may have (BACKGROUND NOISE
3 01:35:31) occurred for future years. Uhm, uh,
4 that's, you know, like I said, those are, uhm,
5 meetings that would happen post-event, uhm, and
6 there's no formal reporting that's required or done,
7 uh, uh, on the part of the departmentee.

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. So, does DP, uh,
9 does, now, Parks Department allocate more of its
10 employees to work and be present doing, uh, approved
11 events? Do you assign some more workers, uh, because
12 it's a big event?

13 ANTHONY SAMA: Uh, yes, and thank you for that
14 question.

15 Uh, when... when it comes to certain events, uh,
16 the Citywide Special Events Office, will have staff
17 assigned to be on site, uh, at some of these events.
18 Uhm, primarily, the, you know, the larger... the
19 larger concerts and larger festivals, uh, there is
20 special events staff in... in some locations, uh,
21 that are also, uh, designated (BACKGROUND NOISE
22 01:36:32) you know to be on site within their
23 respective parks, uh, to cover and review, uh, large
24 events that might be taking place.

1
2 Uh, generally speaking, citywide, uh, as I
3 mentioned earlier, uh, it is the operations staff,
4 uh, as part of their regular role, uh, to, you know,
5 review and pop in to events that may be happening,
6 uh, within their districts or within their parks.
7 Uh, so that's... That would be part of their regular
8 shift and regular responsibility.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, can you tell us now, how is
10 the maximum number of participants determined? And,
11 who ensures that the maximum is not exceeded during
12 an event?

13 ANTHONY SAMA: Well, Thank you for that question,
14 uh, Council Member.

15 Uh, when an applicant makes a request for a site,
16 uh, on the application they have to specify how many
17 people they expect.

18 Uh, in many cases, applications, uh, will reflect
19 an overall number for an event. Uh, that is not
20 necessarily a number will be there at any one time.
21 Uhm that is a number of people that may attend the
22 event over the course of the event's term.

23 Uh, typically, you know, four... between four
24 and six hours. Uh, we work closely, and our borough
25 director's work closely with applicants, uh, given

1
2 their in... you know, institutional knowledge, uh,
3 of the sites, and working closely with the park
4 managers and regional managers, who oversee the
5 operations within these sites, uh, to ensure that we
6 are not putting anything in there that would stretch
7 the limits of what the site can hold.

8 In cases where there are ticketed events, uh,
9 obviously those have events had a perimeter, uh, that
10 surrounds them.

11 Uh, obviously for any of the free events that we
12 host, are parks are ambiguous spaces. And, so, uh,
13 it is ,you know, there... there is not really a
14 mathematical equitation that is used to deem what
15 site... what a site... particular site can host,
16 uhm, because it's... it's borderless.

17 Uhm, but when it comes to our ticketed events,
18 uh, and any events that are enclosed -- are in an
19 enclosed space by temporary fencing -- uhm, or
20 perhaps within, uh, let's say an NPAA site that has a
21 fence around it naturally, uhm, those events are
22 required to get, uh, a Department of Buildings
23 Temporary Place of Assembly permit. And, those
24 permits, uh, designate a capacity, a maxim capacity,
25 for the space. And, it is the promoters and

1 organizers responsibility to enforce that capacity.

2 Uhm, which is, again, why for some of those events,

3 for most of those events, we require reporting on how

4 many people are in the space, uh, to ensure that that

5 capacity is not exceeded. And, in many cases, we do

6 not allow promoters to ticket beyond what the

7 capacity of a space is, to ensure that safety.

8 Uh, so, for an event, like, just on The Great

9 Lawn, for example, uh, you know, they will have a TPA

10 that designates 60,000 people fit within this space

11 based on the size of the venue. And, they are not

12 allowed to distribute more than 60,000 tickets to

13 ensure that even if everybody who gets a ticket

14 decides to come to the event, uh, we will not exceed

15 capacity.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Uh, thank you,

17 Director Sama. Mr. Sartori, do we have members on

18 the committee want to ask questions?

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: At this time, Chair, no, there

20 are no additional questions from other committee

21 members.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. Then, I'm done with the

23 questions. Can we go to public participation?

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, Chair, uh, we'll now move on to public participation, then. Thank you to the Parks Department.

ANTHONY SAMA: Uh, I want to thank the council for, uh, giving me the opportunity to testify today. Uh, Parks will have representatives who stay on, uh, for the public testimony portion of, uh, of the hearing, uhm; however, myself, uh, and the others on the panel will need to... to leave the meeting at this point. Uhm, but there are other representatives who are listening in.

And, uh, Chair Koo, we will be sure to follow up with you, uh, on any other items that are outstanding from today's hearing. So, thank you again.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you... (CROSS-TALK 01:41:18)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you for your participation.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

At this point, we will now turn to public testimony.

1
2 I'd like to remind everyone that, unlike our
3 typical council hearings, we'll be calling on
4 individuals one by one to testify.

5 As I stated earlier, each panelist will be given
6 three minutes to speak. Please begin once the
7 Sergeant at Arms has started the timer and given you
8 the cue to begin.

9 Uh, council members who have questions for a
10 particular panelist should use the raise hand
11 function in Zoom, and I will call on you after the
12 panelist has completed their testimony.

13 Again, for panelist, once your name is called, a
14 member of our staff will unmute you and the Sergeant
15 at Arms will give you the go ahead to begin upon
16 setting the timer. So, please wait for your cue.

17 At this point, we will hear from Heather Lubov of
18 The City Parks Foundation, who will be followed by
19 Joe Puleo of Local 983.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

21 HEATHER LUBOV: Hi, I'm Heather Lubov, I'm the
22 Executive Director of City Parks Foundation. We are
23 a non-profit that leads free sports, arts,
24 environmental education, and community building
25 programs that encourage 300 thousand New Yorkers to

1
2 use and care for their neighborhood parks and green
3 spaces every year.

4 As a programmer, we apply for hundreds of permits
5 each year. And, let me say right up front; although,
6 I know they've left, uhm, Director Sama and Deputy
7 Director Melo, are wonderful. And, the entire team
8 handling permits is incredibly conscientious. And,
9 they do everything they can to accommodate our
10 requests -- which are many.

11 Uh, for summer stage in Central Park, we offer 45
12 or more free performances each year. Our license
13 agreement the Parks Department sets limits on the
14 number of events that can be closed to the public --
15 or ticketed -- and when we do rent the venue for
16 either private or paid ticketed events, that money I
17 used to directly subsidize our free concerts.

18 This arrangement helps make our free summer stage
19 shows possible, and we're enormously grateful to the
20 agency for allowing us to maintain these funds.

21 Typically, festivals of our size and stature book
22 their concerts at least a year in advance. So, we're
23 already talking now with artists for the summer of
24 2022.

1
2 While we do get right of first refusal, as you
3 heard, on dates that we've used in the previous year,
4 the current permitting system won't allow for initial
5 permit approval on new dates until January of each
6 year. Which is at least six months after we start
7 booking shows.

8 So, we're taking risks every time we confirm an
9 artist before the permit process catches up, which
10 makes it difficult to remain competitive in the
11 marketplace, whether for our free performances or
12 performances planned by our for profit promoter
13 partners who have tickets sales at stake.

14 And, we've already lost several shows next year,
15 because we weren't able to confirm some of those
16 dates.

17 As the co-manager of Partnerships for Parks, we
18 work with hundreds of volunteer community groups each
19 year to plan service days, community events, and
20 other activities in parks.

21 Let me stress how important it will be to fully
22 fund both maintenance staff and the parks enforcement
23 officers in this year's budget, because, again, as
24 you heard, they are essential to the success of the
25 many events held by our volunteer groups.

1
2 What's more, many of these events were previously
3 funded by member designated grants through The Parks
4 equity initiative, which puts funding straight in to
5 parks and communities. So, I hope the council will
6 restore funding to that important initiative.

7 Many of these volunteer groups are not
8 incorporated, and the cost of insurance, when
9 required, can be prohibitive. But, more concerning,
10 is that if a group is holding an event in a park, and
11 a member of the public gets hurt in the park, and
12 decides to sue the city, those individual volunteers,
13 who are in the park that day for an event -- whether
14 or not they had anything to do with the patron's
15 accident -- can be held personally liable, because
16 they're not backed up by an incorporated
17 organization.

18 New York City Parks is very careful to facilitate
19 public/private relationships and really takes care of
20 its partners. So, if the city's goal is to encourage
21 community engagement and support Parks, which I
22 think... (CROSS-TALK 01:45:20)

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

24 HEATHER LUBOV: which I think is critical, there
25 are a number of challenges that, if addressed, could

1
2 create a much more positive and encouraging
3 environment for volunteers and non-profits.

4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

7 Our next speaker is Joe Puleo of Local 983, who
8 will be followed by Jessica Saab of New Yorkers for
9 Parks.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 JOE PULEO: Okay, Thank you. Thank you, Chair
12 Koo, I appreciate the time for... for me to speak on
13 behalf of the Local.

14 Uh, for those of you who don't know, my name is
15 Joe Puleo, I represent the Parks Enforcement
16 Officers, the Urban Park Rangers; I represent the
17 associate Parks service workers, and all the city's
18 seasonal aides.

19 I, uhm I commend you in restarting our parks
20 special events. But, I just have some serious
21 concerns.

22 Uhm, although The Parks Department does its best
23 to keep these events moving as best as they can, we
24 simply do not have the workforce that is necessary to
25 keep the parks under control.

1
2 For example, we have the 4th of July coming up
3 in, you know, uh, soon. Do we have the capability
4 when it comes to enforcement and maintenance to keep
5 these events in check?

6 Most people do not take out permits for the 4th
7 of July. And, a lot of these events consist of 20 or
8 more people, multiple groups in one small area.

9 These become problematic. A lot of people do not
10 understand that they cannot barbecue -- even though
11 it's the 4th of July -- in these specific locations.

12 We had a reduction in staff. We have a 130
13 people that we lost the last budget. You know? Uhm,
14 so, we're gonna be at a deficit to what we were in
15 2019. And, we already had a difficult task prior to
16 that.

17 We need to restore those numbers immediately.
18 There is a... I heard some of the council people
19 talk about what you could do.

20 We could restore the budget. Restore the 130
21 people that we lost last year. For the first time in
22 20 years, we lost 50 rangers that had to actually be
23 laid off. There hasn't been one since that time.

24 So, we urge the city council to restore and
25 add... add additions, too.

1
2 Because of what's happening now, you're gonna see
3 a surge in park usage. People have been coupled up.
4 People want to go to the parks. People want to
5 enjoy. People want to make sure that they're safe in
6 the parks.

7 So, I thank you all. I appreciate all of the
8 others that have joined in, like, with The
9 Partnership of Parks. And, hopefully, we'll have a
10 safe park season this year.

11 Thank you again.

12 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Mr. Puleo?

13 JOE PULEO: Yes?

14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: I have a question for you.

15 JOE PULEO: Sure.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Uh, we heard that there are
17 only 17... (CROSS-TALK 01:48:23)

18 JOE PULEO: Yes.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: PET Officers for the entire
20 borough of Brooklyn?

21 JOE PULEO: Yeah, happens... (CROSS-TALK
22 occurring 01:48:27)

23 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So...

24 JOE PULEO: when a lot of people... I'm sorry.
25 Uh, what happens is that during the summer months, a

1
2 lot of the resources from Parks goes to the beaches
3 and pools.

4 So, what you actually have is a reduction in
5 staff that's already minimal. So, everybody's
6 basically covering the beaches and the pools, which
7 leaves boroughs like Brooklyn -- like you said, 17
8 people -- 17 people to facilitate all of the parks in
9 Brooklyn, uh, is... is... is ridiculous. You know?

10 So, we need... we need... we need people... we
11 need to hire them, and we need to hire them quickly,
12 Mr. Koo.

13 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, how do you cover when...
14 when we have a special event, you know?

15 JOE PULEO: Yeah, that... (CROSS-TALK 01:49:12)

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: If you only have 17 PET officers
17 for the whole borough... (CROSS-TALK 01:49:15)

18 JOE PULEO: Uh...

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, you will... (CROSS-TALK 01:
20 49:16)

21 JOE PULEO: (INAUDIBLE 01:49:16)

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, it will be a, uh, a great,
23 big impact on you.

24 JOE PULEO: Yeah, it... It is. And, uh, and...
25 And, these dedicated people do the best that they

1
2 can. But, unfortunately, the odds are stacked
3 against them. It is an impossible task that you're
4 asking them to do. A lot of them work extended
5 hours. They switch their work schedules, which
6 they're not supposed to do by law, by the way. Uh,
7 we're... we're dealing with a grievance on that
8 issue.

9 Uh, we need to hire more. We need to have more
10 funding for overtime. There's no money there for
11 overtime either.

12 I hear that they get these, uh, revenues, uh,
13 from... from the permit holders. Uh, that money
14 should be used to pay for their overtime when needed.

15 Uhm, that's... that's the only way I could see
16 this thing working out, uh, properly, is more
17 staffing. The 100 and, uhm, 30 people that lost,
18 have to be put back in, uh, in... in order for us to
19 get, uh, get things as close to normal as we can.

20 And, I appreciate all of your efforts, by the
21 way.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Thank you, Mr.
23 Puleo.

24 JOE PULEO: Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

1 JOE PULEO: Thank you. Thank you so much.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

3 Our next speaker is Jessica Saab of New Yorkers
4 for Parks, who will be followed by Carlos Castell
5 Croke of the New York League of Conservation Voters.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

7 JESSICA SAAB: Good afternoon, my name is Jessica
8 Saab, and I am the Advocacy and Communications
9 Project Manager at New Yorkers for Parks.
10

11 We want to thank the city council for its strong
12 commitment to restoring essential Parks worker's
13 positions in the preliminary budget response this
14 year, and thank Chair Koo for hosting this hearing,
15 and inviting us to speak.

16 The council's commitment to supporting the badly
17 needed staffing levels for city park workers, PEP
18 Officers, and urban park rangers is essential to
19 helping our Parks system re-bounce.

20 Over the last year, our city's parks became the
21 safest, and at some points, the only places to gather
22 in community.

23 New York City communities have a rich history of
24 volunteering in their parks, and this year, that was
25 stronger than ever.

1
2 We work with grass roots volunteer groups every
3 day, who take care of their parks in different ways -
4 - from cleaning them, to planting them, to
5 programming them. However, during a season with
6 devastating budget cuts, it remained difficult and
7 unnecessarily complicated for volunteer groups to do
8 their work.

9 Principle among the issues, is that of
10 indemnification. The city indemnifies many of the
11 groups that volunteer through "It's My Park Program".
12 But, does not indemnify may other grassroots
13 organizations that care for parks citywide.

14 This forces groups to get their own insurance, a
15 burden too large and expensive, causing many of these
16 groups to give up -- the exact opposite of what New
17 York City needs right now.

18 In addition, there's often confusion due to each
19 borough having a different permitting process. This
20 should all be streamlined, made easier for the
21 citizens that are volunteering their time, especially
22 now as parks have played such a significant role in
23 our lives.

24

25

1
2 I also want to take this opportunity to talk
3 about two related budget items we hope the council
4 will restore.

5 We urge leaders to restore 4 million dollars to
6 the Parks Equity Initiative, which gives funds
7 directly to over 600 small volunteer groups, and is a
8 critical lifeline for many small parks throughout the
9 city, with dedicated volunteers hoping to make
10 essential improvements. Eight-hundred million must
11 also be restored to maintain our city's natural areas
12 and wetlands as well as adequately fund Green Thumb
13 and our city's community gardens.

14 The New York City Parks Department is always
15 asked to do more with less. It is urgent to restore
16 the full budget to ensure parks are safe, clean, and
17 accessible to all New Yorkers, whether part of a
18 small volunteer group, hoping to put on events for
19 their communities, of every day New Yorkers who are
20 just enjoying being outdoors.

21 Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

24 Our next speaker is Carlos Castell Croke of New
25 York League of Conservation Voters, who will be

1
2 followed by Sarah Charlop-Powers of the Natural Areas
3 Conservancy.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

5 CARLOS CASTELL CROKE: Good afternoon, my name is
6 Carlos Castell Croke, and I am Associate for New York
7 City Programs at The New York League of Conservation
8 Voters.

9 NYCLCV represents over 30 thousand members in New
10 York City. And, we are committed to advancing a
11 Sustainability Agenda that will make our people, our
12 neighborhoods, and our economy healthier and more
13 resilient.

14 I'd like to thank Chair Koo and the council
15 members on the committee for the opportunity to
16 testify today.

17 NYCLCV supports a fiscal year '22 city budget
18 that bolsters our... an equitable permitting process
19 and protects our parks overall.

20 Our city is on the road to recovery from the
21 COVID-19 pandemic, and it is incumbent upon our
22 elected leaders to invest our tax dollars in climate
23 action solutions that protect people and public
24 spaces.

1
2 Parks and other green spaces are one of the
3 city's most valuable environmental assets, and are a
4 major source of the city's urban canopy. It
5 communicates climate change, provides clear air and
6 habitats for native wildlife, and contributes to
7 well-being of our residents and economy.

8 (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:54:16) Parks and Green
9 Space is the top priority for NYLCV. But, over
10 the past year, through the hardships of the pandemic,
11 we have seen the cleanliness and safety of our parks
12 drop significantly due to unfair budgetary cuts to
13 staffing and programs, which also impacts access to
14 parks to people most in need. Therefore, in this
15 critical third year of The Play Fair campaign, we are
16 thankful that the council has voiced support for our
17 plea to restore the \$78.9 million in FY22 Parks
18 budget to ensure our parks are safe, clean, and
19 accessible.

20 From our platform, I would like to specifically
21 highlight the 4 million dollars for the Parks Equity
22 Initiative, the 9 million dollars for PEP and Urban
23 Park Rangers, and the 8 million dollars for nature
24 and resiliently. that are all absolutely critical
25 for park safety and operations.

1
2 The COVID-19 crisis is still placing stress on
3 our economy and communities. This was apparent in
4 the FY 21 budget, it does not need to be the case
5 again this year now that the federal government has
6 provided relief.

7 We urge the mayor and city council to have
8 foresight and prepare for the climate crisis by
9 making permanent commitments to environmental
10 investments and the parks.

11 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you... (CROSS-TALK)

13 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, you... (CROSS-TALK)

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Oh, sorry... (CROSS-TALK)

15 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, you... I have a question
16 for you. So, you are saying you need 4 million
17 dollars for a Parks Equity Initiative? Right?

18 CARLOS CASTELL CROKE: Yes, that's what we're
19 asking for.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: And, what was the rest of the
21 numbers. I didn't... I missed it. (INAUDIBLE
22 01:55:38)... (CROSS-TALK)

23 CARLOS CASTELL CROKE: I'm sorry, it was... So,
24 it's specifically, we... What I wanted to highlight,
25

1
2 is 9 million dollars for PEP and Urban Park Rangers,
3 and 8 million dollars for nature and resiliently.

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

6 Our next speaker is Sarah... Sarah Charlop-
7 Powers from the Natural Areas Conservancy, who will
8 be followed by Kathryn Heintz of NYC Audubon Society.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Miss, uh, Miss Powers, could
11 you pause for one second? I think, uh, we just need
12 a second to unmute you. Just give us one second,
13 please. (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:56:54) Uh, Miss Powers,
14 can you try to unmute yourself, uh, perhaps?

15 HELEN FORGIONE: Yeah.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Oh, great. Uh, yes...

17 (CROSS-TALK)

18 HELEN FORGIONE: Okay.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, please begin.

20 HELEN FORGIONE: Alright, thank you.

21 Uhm, my name is Helen Forgione, I am reading
22 testimony submitted by Sarah Charlop-Powers, the
23 Executive Director of The Natural Areas Conservancy.

24 (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:57:17) Uhm, thank you, uh,

1
2 Council Chair, Koo and the committee for the
3 opportunity to testify today.

4 The Natural Areas Conservancy is a non-profit
5 organization that was formed in 2012 with the goal of
6 increasing the capacity of New York City Parks and
7 its partners to restore and manage the 10,000 acres
8 of forest and wetlands under the agency jurisdiction.

9 I am testifying today to implore The Parks
10 Committee to act to ensure that next year's budget
11 include funding for the care of natural areas --
12 spaces that have been critically important to New
13 Yorkers during the pandemic.

14 (BACKGROUND NOISE 01:57:56) A signature of our
15 organization was the development of The Forest
16 Management Framework for New York City, which we
17 released in partnership with New York City Parks in
18 spring of 2018. This plan includes ecological and
19 social metrics with care of the city's natural
20 forest, and calls for an investment of 385 million to
21 manage them over the next 25 years.

22 We were thrilled in 2019 by the leadership of the
23 city council and mayor, which resulted in 43 million
24 of expense funding for New York City Parks, including
25

1
2 4 million to support the management of 73 hundred
3 acres of forest and natural areas.

4 This funding was used to implement the first year
5 of recommendations for the Forest Management
6 Framework.

7 New York City Parks was incredibly efficient with
8 this fund. They employed 47 seasonal staff, planted
9 20 thousand new trees and shrubs, engaged two
10 thousand volunteers, improved 40 miles of trails, and
11 cared for 900 acres of parkland.

12 The plight of our city's natural areas has
13 mirrored that of the full park system of the past
14 year.

15 Visitation to natural areas (BACKGROUND NOISE
16 01:59:09) increased 65 percent between 2019 and 2020.
17 At the same time, the Parks Department ability to
18 care for the one-third of Parks property that is
19 natural areas has been drastically impacted due to
20 budget cuts and the loss of more than 50 seasonal
21 staff.

22 Another significant challenge is the impacts of
23 the hiring freeze, which has left key leadership
24 positions empty for more than a year and resulted in
25 an incalculable loss of institutional knowledge.

1
2 Today I stand with my trusted colleagues and
3 friends in strong support of Play Fair, calling for
4 the full reinstatement of funds that were cut in the
5 agency's budget last year. It is imperative that
6 next year's budget includes 4.5 million to continue
7 conserving and caring for our natural forests and
8 begin critical improvements for our city's wetlands
9 and trails network.

10 Thank you again for your leadership and for the
11 opportunity to express our support for increased
12 investment in New York City Parks.

13 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

14 HELEN FORGIONE: Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Our next speaker
16 is Kathryn Heintz of NYC Audubon Society, who will be
17 followed by Roxanne Delgado of The Friends of Pelham
18 Parkway.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

20 KATHRYN HEINTZ: Thank you Chair Koo, and thank
21 you committee members for sharing your commitment to
22 a healthy and green New York City.

23 My name is Kathryn Heintz, and I am The Executive
24 Director of New York City Audubon. We are a science
25 based conservation organization who's mission is to

1
2 protect the 350 plus bird species -- almost a third
3 of all the species in North America -- amounting to
4 millions of individual birds that live in or pass
5 through New York City each year.

6 Some 40 percent of the Atlantic Flyaway's bird
7 species are species of conservation need -- some
8 threatened and some even endangered.

9 Protecting these birds and their habitat improves
10 the health and quality of life for all New Yorkers,
11 as all humans benefit from clean air, clean water,
12 and clean green space. And, yes, this includes
13 Forever Wild areas and buffers that are critically
14 important to safeguard.

15 Millions of birds, like our millions of city
16 dwellers, depend upon New York City Parks maintaining
17 and protecting our urban parks and natural areas to
18 survive and thrive. These birds fly for thousands of
19 miles each spring and fall before resting here
20 temporarily -- feeding on native plants and insects.
21 Wintering water fowls depend on clear waterways and
22 wetlands. Summer residents forage here to feed and
23 fledge their young in our city's parks. And, coastal
24 nesters rely upon clean, undisturbed, and evasive
25 predator free beaches.

1
2 During these challenging times of COVID-19, more
3 New Yorkers than ever are flocking to our parks and
4 beaches. New York City parks continue to be our
5 shared refuge. But, increased use warrants greater
6 care and maintenance, engagement, supervision, and
7 fair equitable and adequate enforcement by PEP and
8 Urban Park Rangers are also essential to safe, clean,
9 and welcoming green spaces for birds and for people.

10 Large unplanned and unpermitted gatherings, that
11 leave excess garbage, hot charcoal, dogs roaming off-
12 leash in natural areas, firecrackers, ATV's, off-road
13 bikes, and even human feet trampling where they don't
14 belong, cause and real lasting damage.

15 We stand proudly with New Yorkers for Parks and
16 the Natural Areas Conservancy in demanding adequate
17 funding for the New York City Parks expense budget.

18 Please restore essential funds for PEP, Urban
19 Park Rangers, and horticultural and maintenance
20 staff.

21 Please also restore the Parks Equity Initiative,
22 which helps small groups like ours host inclusive
23 events and programs for our communities.

24 And, please, please, please restore the 8 million
25 dollars for Nature and Resiliency in this year's Play

1 Fair platform to support Green Thumb Gardens,
2 forests, trails, and wetlands. Our city health
3 depends upon it.
4

5 Thank you for this opportunity to advocate on
6 behalf our membership and millions of birds.

7 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

9 Our next speaker is Roxanne Delgado of The
10 Friends... of Friends Pelham Parkway, who will be
11 followed by Lucy Sexton of New Yorkers for Culture &
12 Arts.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

14 ROXANNE DELGADO: Okay, thank you, Chair, for
15 analyzing the costs and benefits of special events on
16 our open green spaces and the local communities
17 surrounding those spaces.

18 I would like to argue that I actually think the
19 cost outweighs the benefits of these special events,
20 and based on the number provided by Director of
21 Special Events, 4.5 million, I think the cost of this
22 definitely outweighs the... the financial gain.

23 And, some of these costs cannot be measured.

24 And, I'd like to argue, just weekend we had groups
25 doing illegal barbecuing in Pelham Parkway, but there

1 was PEP Officer available. They were all diverted to
2 Special Events Citywide and to the beach nearby. So,
3 had groups burning up our trees, trees that provide
4 us with the share, uhm, shared open, uh, clean air,
5 as well as habitats for birds migrating from Pelham
6 Parkway to The Botanical Gardens, and these costs are
7 not measured. So, not only do I consider cost out
8 measures , uh, outweighs the benefits of these open
9 spaces, but there's costs indirectly in other green
10 spaces that are not being measured.
11

12 So, I think that when they do special events,
13 they should only measure the enjoyment of those who
14 are attending those events, but also the negative
15 impact on all living beings that require... that use
16 that open space and other green spaces throughout the
17 park agencies that manages those spaces.

18 I'd also like to say, I think, uhm, elected...
19 newly elected officials Dinowitz, Council Member,
20 mentioned those un-permitted events. Because, Pelham
21 Parkway, there's no special events allowed in Pelham
22 Parkway, because it's a greenway. Yet, we have many
23 groups, over 10 to 20 groups, holding parties in
24 Pelham Parkway that generate over 500 to 600 gallons
25 of trash every weekend. And, Parks does not have the

1 maintenance to clean up. We don't get regular
2 maintenance, because we are a green space... a
3 greenway. But, yet, it's used as a park. And, the
4 PEP Officers, when they're available, they don't
5 enforce the rules. They don't enforce the illegal
6 barbecuing, they don't enforce big, massive bouncy
7 houses on the parkway.
8

9 I mean, this is, uhm, either give us the
10 maintenance and enforcement if you're going to treat
11 Pelham Parkway as a park, or enforce the rules. You
12 can't have it both ways.

13 Again, I'd like to thank the chair for his
14 advocacy for our green space. I really do appreciate
15 it. It may sound like I do complain, but I do
16 appreciate everything you've done for our green
17 spaces.

18 And, yes, we need money for more park
19 enforcement. We have misuse of our parks. And, when
20 we don't have any enforcement, it just not only
21 continues the misuse, but it encourages other people
22 to abuse our parks.

23 And, what's sad is that we do a lot of efforts to
24 keep our parkway clean. But, a few groups... A few
25 people on, uhm, does so much damage it un-does our

1
2 work for the whole year. It takes one person to
3 create so much damage on parkway.

4 So, I thank you for your time, and please Play
5 Fair for Parks, I hope that we get... Parks get the
6 adequate funding to care for our... all our green
7 spaces for all living beings.

8 So, have a good day, thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

11 Our next speaker is Lucy Sexton of New Yorkers
12 for Culture & Arts, who'll be followed by Stacy Papas
13 Executive Director Friends of the East River
14 Esplanade.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 LUCY SEXTON: Thank you Chair Koo, and members of
17 the city council.

18 My name is Lucy Sexton, I am with the Cultural
19 Advocacy Cotillion, New Yorkers for Culture & Arts,
20 who's membership includes arts and culture groups,
21 and art workers from across the five boroughs.

22 I want to address the use of parks for cultural
23 events by non-profit cultural groups and independent
24 artist.

1
2 The city's parks are one of its treasures, and we
3 of course want access to those treasures to be
4 democratic and available to all the city's
5 communities.

6 So, I'll address some of the barriers experienced
7 by non-profit cultural groups, particularly groups
8 and artists without deep pockets.

9 First, I want to thank and recognize the hard
10 work of the personnel follow at... hard work and
11 personal followup done by The Parks Department staff
12 dealing permits.

13 Once group has engaged and applied, there's
14 responsive support by the department, and it's great,
15 and ongoing relationships are built.

16 However, getting to that stage is not always
17 easy. In the lead up to this council's passage of
18 open culture, which allowed permitting for specific
19 streets across the city, The Department of Cultural
20 Affairs put together an info-session on city
21 permitting processes. Four or five different
22 agencies presented, and that is part of the problem.

23 It is not at all clear how to navigate the
24 permitting process since you first need to know the
25

1 correct agency. Is this a city park? A state park?
2 A community garden? A DOT Plaza?
3

4 Parks should find a way to message the processes
5 clearly, and make sure the information is reaching
6 every community.

7 I would go so far as to ask that the parks
8 include permitting information in their signage in
9 each park. That would go a long way to making it
10 accessible to the hip-hop dance troupe in The Bronx,
11 who might want to permit a Parks space for a
12 performance, but has no previous experience or
13 relationship.

14 Second, there are financial barriers. While the
15 permit for free events is affordable, the fees jump
16 astronomically if the group wants to find a way to
17 charge for the event or even pass the hat.

18 I propose that the Parks Department look at the
19 system set up for Open Culture -- where event must be
20 available and free to the public, but a group is able
21 to charge their audience in advance, online, or to
22 post a Venmo address for donations, or to pass the
23 hat -- So, there's no blockage of visibility or
24 passage for the public, as is necessary for our
25 community public places, but there are avenues for

1
2 arts groups to bring in income to pay their artists
3 and costs.

4 Finally, the Open Culture program also has a
5 hardship waiver for insurance; here again it would be
6 great for the Parks Department to follow suit and
7 make performing in the parks democratic and
8 accessible by all the city's communities and cultural
9 groups.

10 In this way, New York City can fill its parks
11 with the culture our communities are craving. We can
12 allow hard hit arts groups to generate the income
13 they desperately need. And, we can set the standard
14 for the world on how to heal, recover, and thrive
15 with arts and culture for every citizen in every
16 park.

17 Thank you so much for all your work, and thank
18 you for letting me testify.

19 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

21 Our next speaker is by Stacy Papas of The Friends
22 of East River Esplanade, who will be followed by
23 Eileen Myles, who is our last registered speaker.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.
25

1
2 STACY PAPAS: Thank you everyone. Uhm, Stacy
3 Papas, Executive Director of The Friends of the East
4 River Esplanade.

5 We are small non-profit that hosts events in our
6 park of about 500 people or less. So, a lot of what
7 we have to deal with is not quite on the large scale
8 of summer stage or 60 thousand people in a park, but
9 we still have to go through the same process of
10 permitting. It is cumbersome. It is... Uhm, the
11 wait time is really problematic.

12 I want to thank everybody for the support they've
13 given. I've been in a lot of these meetings, and
14 listening to all of the questions that Chairman Koo
15 has asked today, he's obviously listening to what
16 everybody has been saying. So, that's really
17 encouraging, and I thank you for that.

18 Uhm, Event permitting process is easy to submit,
19 until one receives 3 pages of safety protocol that
20 are no up to date with lifted COVID safety protocols.

21 As of 06-16, I submitted a permit for 100 events,
22 and I got a 3 page safety protocol. Meanwhile, the
23 state has been list... has been lifted.

24

25

1 Uhm, Yankee Stadium is filled 15,000 people.
2
3 Madison Square Garden is filled with 15,000 people
4 with no safety protocols in place.

5 Uhm, it takes Parks an inconsistent number of
6 days or weeks to approve a permit, leaving
7 organizations in limbo during the review process.

8 Uhm, as Chairman Koo pointed out earlier, the
9 length of time spent waiting for approval has caused
10 my organization to cancel events and withdraw permits
11 for events as small as 20 people, or as large as
12 100, just because the online status for the submitted
13 permit simply states, "under review".

14 Uhm, there's no indication of a good faith effort
15 to approve or a reason for the lengthy review time.

16 Uhm, in addition, sound permits are obtained
17 through N. Y. P. D., and not until a week before the
18 event -- At which time, Parks can deny or contradict
19 the sound permit that was issued by N. Y. P. D.

20 The permitting process for volunteer activities
21 is the same. It takes 30 days for approval and
22 because of short-staffing, submitted permits are
23 often forgotten requiring multiple rounds of follow
24 up by the organizer.
25

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2 Volunteer activities require a lead time to allow
3 for sign up, are weather driven and seasonal, require
4 material support from Parks.

5 Alternatively, there is no opportunity to create
6 a last minute project to address a pressing need like
7 weeding or litter pick up.

8 Volunteering is an activity encouraged by Parks,
9 but it's prohibitive to organize based on the
10 permitting process.

11 Uhm, please incorporate supportive staffing
12 measures so that communities can actively enjoy and
13 care for the parks that they love, streamline the
14 permitting process to make it easier for people to
15 get their approvals -- in the time that they need in
16 order to get the organizations time to plan -- to get
17 their vendors secured, and to get them word out that
18 an event is happening that they want people to come
19 and enjoy it -- especially now that things are
20 opening up. People are act... are actively seeking
21 events.

22 We've gotten plenty of emails and calls about
23 when we're going to start doing things again. So, we
24 need the process to be quicker and more streamlined.

1 Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

4 Our next speaker is, uh, (CLEARS THROAT) excuse
5 me, Eileen Myles.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

7 EILEEN MYLES: Great, hi, Uhm , I want to thank
8 the city council and The Parks and Recreation
9 Committee for having this meeting.

10 Uhm, I'm speaking as individual, but also as a...
11 part of a group called East River Park Action.

12 Uhm, I've been a resident of the east village for
13 more than 40 years; a writer a poet, and an educator.

14 Uhm, (BACKGROUND NOISE 02:13:11) I followed the
15 completely undemocratic process of the planned of the
16 closure (INAUDIBLE 02:13:15) utter destruction of
17 East River Park.

18 There is a shortage parks in the city and
19 especially in low income and neighborhoods that are
20 predominantly People of Color.

21 The NYCHA housing across the street from East
22 River Park has been kept in the dark about the real
23 process of the ESCR project. They are endlessly cited
24 as who ESCR is for, but their voices, except for
25

1
2 tenant leaders whose voices are easily leveraged by
3 public servants, who support ESCR, are nowhere to be
4 heard.

5 Uhm, the NYCHA residents have submitted thousands
6 of petitions against this plan. They have
7 (BACKGROUND NOISE 02:13:54) marched and recently, are
8 going to the polls.

9 Those of us who care about our neighborhood, have
10 been asking for an oversight meeting on this plan,
11 rather than ramming it through.

12 ESCR is a ghost of the departing administration.
13 Heat is the number one killer in New York City, yet
14 the city council is allowing the removal of 1,000
15 trees next to FDR.

16 Uhm, what we're looking at is a real danger to
17 the (INAUDIBLE 02:14:19) in terms of air quality, and
18 the mental and physical wellbeing provided by green
19 space.

20 Also, East River Park is the home of a 120
21 different species of birds. There's so much natural
22 disaster in the impending destruction of this park.

23 Also, as New Yorker, I know a three to four year
24 project, as projected by the city, is a ten year
25 project, and it is already over budget. And, this

1
2 project has potentially been given to a construction
3 company (INAUDIBLE 02:14:57)

4 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Hello? You are breaking up.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Uhm, Ms. Myles, are you still
6 on the call? We... You seemed to have broken up.

7 It appears we have lost her at this point. Give
8 us one second, please. (02:15:39)

9 EILEEN MYLES: (02:16:19) Hello?

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hello?

11 EILEEN MYLES: Yeah, I think I actually...

12 (CROSS-TALK)

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: (INAUDIBLE 02:16:20)

14 EILEEN MYLES: (INAUDIBLE 02:16:21) my statement.

15 I had finished my statement. Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Uhm, it... Okay, very good.
17 Thank you very much.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: (INAUDIBLE 02:16:31) (CROSS-
20 TALK)

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Are there more? Any more
22 participants?

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: At this point, Chair, there do
24 not appear to be.

1
2 I will just make one last call for anyone; if we
3 have missed anyone inadvertently who had registered
4 to testify, and has not yet been called, please use
5 the Zoom (BACKGROUND NOISE 02:16:45) raise hand
6 function now. And, you'll be called in the order
7 that your hand has been raised.

8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: I see one there. Josephine...

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Oh, I see one person, yes.
10 Uh, Josephine Scalia, please, uh, please begin once
11 the sergeant has given you the cue.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now. You're still
13 muted.

14 JOSEPHINE SCALIA: Hello, good afternoon, uh, my
15 name is Josephine Scalia, and I am a board member of
16 the Forest Park Trust.

17 Thank you for supporting and restoring Park's
18 budget. And, for the opportunity to testify about
19 the importance of New York City forests.

20 I ask The Parks Committee to ensure that next
21 year's budget includes funding for the care of
22 natural areas, which is so important to the wellbeing
23 of New Yorkers.

24 The Forest Park Trust is a non-profit
25 organization founded in 1997. We work with

1
2 partnerships and New Yorkers with New York City Parks
3 and the Forest at Highland Park Administration in its
4 effort to manage, care for, and secure funding for
5 programs and park improvements.

6 In 2019, forests at Highland Park benefited from
7 the city council's 40 million dollars, which funded
8 the natural areas and The Forestry Management
9 Framework, FMF, plan.

10 An FMF study was actually conducted by the
11 National Areas Conservancy in Forest Park, and found
12 that 64 percent of our patron use our natural areas.
13 But, they also found that our forest health scale is
14 tipping due to less native and tree regeneration --
15 especially Oak species in the mid and understory.

16 Can you imagine Forest Park without its towering
17 trees and its forest cradling canopy?

18 The Parks greatly benefited from the Play Fair
19 Program. We hired seasonal staff that removed trash,
20 invasive plants, maintained trails, re-forested
21 sections, and provided a consistent presence within
22 the forest interiors.

23 This targeted aide improved the vigor of
24 unnatural areas, park safety, and contributed to our
25 patron's physical and mental health.

1
2 However, during the pandemic, Parks suffered from
3 drastic budget cuts, which resulted in poor park
4 conditions.

5 Although, we did receive a grant from the Green
6 relief, uh, grant... Uh, trusted receiver Green
7 Relief Grant to keep seasonal staff, we witnessed
8 higher trail usage, and an increase in brushfires,
9 dumping, and graffiti conditions that we haven't seen
10 in decades.

11 We hope that the City Council will restore the 8
12 million for the nature and resiliency in this year's
13 Play Fair platform to support Green Thumb Gardens,
14 forest trails, and wetlands.

15 Please, help us to continue to protect, preserve,
16 and care for these areas by restoring the funding.
17 It will ensure our parks will be safer, cleaner,
18 healthier, and more accessible.

19 Thank you again for your leadership and
20 commitment to New York City parks.

21 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much. And, at,
23 uhm, I... I do see Council Member Holden does have a
24 question.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Uh, yes, I just wanted to
3 say hi to Josephine, and thank you for your testimony
4 on behalf of the Forest Park Trust. They're a great
5 organization. And, it seems like we're fighting a
6 losing battle many times in our parks. But, thank...
7 thank, uh, heavens for The Forest Park Trust...

8 (CROSS-TALK)

9 JOSEPHINE SCALIA: Thank you.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And, I... And, I just
11 echo, you know, Park's never receives the funding
12 that it deserves, obviously. And, The Chair had said
13 that earlier. But, it's great, you know, we have so
14 many volunteer groups within our parks, and Forest
15 Park is no exception.

16 Uh, we have The Friends of Forest Parks, we have
17 the, like, I... like I said, The Forest Park Trust.
18 But, it's such a large park with, uhm, wonderful
19 trees. And, you're right, the trees need a good
20 investment to persevere, uh... even the memorial
21 trees that were from World War I, need some tender
22 loving care. And... Or, they... They won't survive
23 much longer.

24 Uhm, So, I thank you, Josephine, again, I can't
25 thank you enough for staying on this, uh, hearing so

1 long, and, uhm, for your testimony. Because, it
2 is... It will go long way. And, it is being heard.
3 So, thank you again... (CROSS-TALK)

4 JOSEPHINE SCALIA: Thank you. And, we thank you,
5 Councilman Holden, for your wonderful support of
6 Forest Park. You've really made a difference.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Uh, I'd love to... Again,
8 you don't have to go far to go to the forest, because
9 you have Forest Park. You don't have to go upstate,
10 folks, because Forest Park, it... you can see what
11 Queens used to look like by just hiking the trails at
12 Forest Park. So, again, thank you for your advocacy,
13 Josephine, again.

14 JOSEPHINE SCALIA: You're welcome... (CROSS-TALK)

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And, thank you, Chair Koo.

16 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you Council Member.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, and at this point,
18 I will turn it back to Chair Koo to offer any closing
19 remarks and to adjourn the hearing.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

21 So, I want to thank the Department of Parks and
22 all the advocates who testified today.

23 As our parks permitting process restarts and
24 events begin, I hope that the city will remember the
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impact that all events have on our parks -- both good and bad -- and ensure that we have the necessary resources and appropriate policies to ensure that our parks continue to not only be cultural and event hubs, but they remain safe, clear, and enjoyable for all visitors.

Uh, finally, I want to thank the committee staff and my Chief of Staff, Elaine, and, of course, our moderator, uh, for helping this committee, uh, this public hearing to be successful.

This meeting has been adjourned.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Live recording has ended.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, everyone.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sergeants, is it okay to end the webinar?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yeah, we're good.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, have a good one.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Have a good one, every one.

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date June 22, 2021