

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm.  
14<sup>th</sup> Fl.

B E F O R E: BARRY S. GRODENCHIK  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Joseph C. Borelli  
Justin L. Brannan  
Andrew Cohen  
Costa G. Constantinides  
Mark Gjonaj  
Andy L. King  
Peter A. Koo  
Francisco P. Moya  
Eric A. Ulrich  
James G. Van Bramer

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

Mitchell Silver, Commissioner  
NYC Parks and Recreation Commissioner

Lynn Kelly, Executive Director  
New Yorkers for Parks

Heather Lubov, City Parks Foundation

Everett Hamlet, Leave it Better

Deborah Martin, Executive Director  
New York Restoration Project

Lisa Ortega, Take Back the Bronx

Nilka Martell, Founder, Loving the Bronx

Marcel Negret, Project Manager  
Municipal Art Society of New York

Lucy Koteen, Friends of Fort Green Park

Marilyn Johnson, Parent Coordinator at East Bronx  
Academy for the Future, Founder of Synergy  
Community Improvement Association and Founder of  
Neighbors Helping Neighbors

2 [sound check, pause] [gavel]

3 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Good morning. I  
4 want to welcome everybody. I have two brief opening  
5 statements, which I'd like to read into the record  
6 and then we'll hear from our Parks Commissioner.  
7 Good morning and welcome to the first meeting of the  
8 New York City Council's Committee on Parks and  
9 Recreation for 2018. My name is Barry Grodenchik,  
10 and I'm honored to be the Chair of the Committee for  
11 this Council term. The parks of the city of New York  
12 are universally loved by the 8-1/2 million people  
13 residing in the five boroughs of this great city, and  
14 are enjoyed by millions more people who visit New  
15 York City every year. From Fort Totten Park in  
16 Northeast Queens to Conference House Park in  
17 Tottenville, Staten Island from the great stretches  
18 of Van Cortlandt and Pelham Bay Parks in the Bronx to  
19 the beaches of Coney Island and the Rockaway  
20 Peninsula and, of course, our crown jewel Central  
21 Park, every park in this city matters, and is going  
22 to matter as we go forward. The numbers on parks are  
23 both amazing and staggering. Parks in the city of  
24 New York are 14% of all the land in the city, over  
25 30,000 acres representing over 5,000 individual

2 properties. There are more than 800 athletic fields,  
3 and more than 1,000 playgrounds, over 550 tennis  
4 courts, 67 pools, 50 recreation facilities, 17 nature  
5 centers, 14 miles of beaches and perhaps most  
6 importantly for me 13 golf course. It has been said  
7 that our parks are the lungs of our city. They are  
8 that and so much more. They are a young child  
9 learning to swim or play tennis, older children  
10 playing baseball and softball, cricketeers playing  
11 for hours and hours on end, older folks playing  
12 bocce, the next Doctor Jay—you can see how old I am—  
13 plying on our basketball courts, parents with young  
14 children walking trails off forever wild forests,  
15 hundreds and hundreds of children playing soccer in  
16 Flushing Meadows Corona Park, countless youngsters  
17 using our playgrounds, children learning about our  
18 environment at one of our 17 aforementioned nature  
19 centers, ice skating, mountain biking, cross country  
20 skiing, historic homes, world famous cultural  
21 institutions and offering muskrats, beavers, turtles,  
22 deer, osprey and the odd coyote and even a hacker  
23 like me playing golf. And even with this exhausting  
24 list, we're just scratching the surface. Today, this  
25 committee will be hearing on the progress on the

2 Mayor's Community Parks Initiative, which was rolled  
3 out by Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Silver on  
4 October 7, 2014 in Bowne Park in Flushing in Council  
5 Member Peter Koo's district. I look forward to  
6 getting a status report from the Parks Department  
7 today on the work that has taken place. I also look  
8 forward to hearing from park lovers and advocates who  
9 will share with us their impressions on this  
10 initiative. As we move forward through this calendar  
11 year and into the following three years, this  
12 committee is going to examine many topics, none more  
13 important than the capital construction process for  
14 Parks, which frankly has left much to be desired both  
15 for the cost of each project, and the seemingly  
16 inordinate amount of time projects take to get to  
17 fruition. That hearing and hearings will be  
18 conducted jointly with the Oversight and  
19 Investigations Committee, the Contracts Committee as  
20 well as the Capital Budget Subcommittee. I also  
21 expect to hold hearings on a myriad of topics  
22 including our city trees, their planning, their  
23 pruning and when needed their removal and that of  
24 their stumps. We will conduct hearings on our  
25 historic houses and our beaches and our boardwalks

2 for starters. Next month our hearing will be on the  
3 Preliminary Budget. I also invite the residents of  
4 the city to contact me with ideas and topics they  
5 would like to see this committee take a closer look  
6 at. Since becoming chair, it has been my pleasure to  
7 meet with dozens of advocates who care so much about  
8 the parks and the public lands of our city. This  
9 past Saturday, I was honored to be at the Bronx Speak  
10 Up with Commissioner Silver and Bronx Commissioner  
11 Iris Rodroquezr-Rodriguez Rosa. It was wonderful to  
12 see so many people who care about our parks and their  
13 parks. The expertise of the people I have met with  
14 has provided me with invaluable guidance and insight  
15 about the state of our parks and, of course, how we  
16 can make them better. My life was to a large  
17 measured molded by my experience at Pomonok  
18 Playground where I grew up. My experience is the  
19 same as untold names of others whose lives were made  
20 so much better because of a New York City park. As  
21 Chair of this committee I will carry their hopes and  
22 dreams as we work together, all of us, to make our  
23 parks the very best they can be. I look forward very  
24 much so to continuing this dialogue in the weeks,  
25 months and years ahead. This morning's hearing is on

2 the Community Parks Initiative that I said, and I  
3 will now read a short introduction to today's hearing  
4 on that topic. We have been joined so far by Mr.  
5 Andrew Cohen from the Bronx, and Mr. Peter Koo from  
6 Flushing. I actually mentioned it, Peter, this  
7 morning. I mentioned one of your parks. Over the  
8 course of the last few decades, the city has  
9 gradually reduced its contribution to the park system  
10 as a share of parks funding in the City's Budget fell  
11 from 1.5% in the 1960s to .86% in the mid '80s to .5%  
12 by the year 2013. While the recent Parks budget was  
13 the largest ever in terms of the dollar amount at  
14 about \$560 million, it still only represents about  
15 .6% of the entire expense budget. The trend over the  
16 last few decades has been to rely more and more on  
17 private dollars to fund our parks for the use of  
18 conservancies and other private groups to operate  
19 parks. But the rise of conservancies and in  
20 improving fiscal condition for the city did not bring  
21 about a rebound in the funding for the park system as  
22 a whole. The consequence of increased private  
23 funding was that it dampened the political will of  
24 the city for robust public funding of the Parks  
25 Department resulting in the stagnant Parks budget,

2 which has left disparities in how we maintain, build  
3 staff, police and fund our parks. While the landmark  
4 destination parks such as Central Park, Prospect  
5 Park, and the Highline among others have flourished,  
6 many of our smaller parks have not. So, one of our  
7 biggest challenges is to achieve adequate funding for  
8 neighborhood parks, and to do this, there is simply  
9 no avoiding to begin restoring the city's park budget  
10 back to historic levels. That's where the Department  
11 of Parks and Recreation's Equity Initiative  
12 specifically the Community Parks and Anchor Parks  
13 Initiative come in. the initiative was the first  
14 phase of DPR's framework for an equitable future plan  
15 to address park equity initiatives by improving the  
16 distribution and resources in the City Park system.  
17 In deciding where to focus the initiative, DPR  
18 designated zones located in communities with high  
19 percentages of residents who have income levels below  
20 the poverty line, and then identify parks that have  
21 received less than a quarter million dollars of  
22 capital funding over the last 20 years. The process  
23 at first resulted in 134 parks identified in lower-  
24 income areas that had capital needs with 35 small  
25 parks being prioritized for reconstruction. The



2 initiative was originally funded in FY15 with a \$130  
3 million capital investment of which \$9.4 million was  
4 Council funding, and leveraged through an addition  
5 \$20 million in funds from elected officials and grant  
6 sources. The city then increased funding for CPI for  
7 FY16 to \$289 million in capital through 2019 combined  
8 with sustainable annual commitment over \$2.5 million  
9 in expense funding. This increased the number of  
10 parks that were scheduled for renovations to 67 from  
11 the original 35. Of the 35 initial parks that were  
12 included in CPI, 12 Parks projects were expected to  
13 be completed by the end of last year. The 12 parks  
14 announced in 2015 are in procurement and are expected  
15 to enter construction this year, and the nine  
16 announced in 2016 will enter procurement this year.  
17 The final 11 parks are expected to be completed in  
18 the winter of 2021–2020-21. Regarding Anchor Parks,  
19 \$150 million in major improvements to five parks are  
20 under this initiatives—this initiative. The five  
21 parks included in the Anchor Parks Initiative were  
22 Saint Mary's Park in the Bronx, Highbridge Park in  
23 Manhattan, Betsy Head Park in Brooklyn, Astoria Park  
24 in Queens, and Freshkills Park on Staten Island.  
25 Under the initiative each park was selected based on

2 high surrounding population, historic underinvestment  
3 and potential for park development, and each received  
4 approximately \$30 million in major improvements  
5 including new soccer fields, comfort station, running  
6 tracks and hiking trails. These initiatives are  
7 important if we hope to increase public commitments  
8 to ensure all parks are properly funded and  
9 maintained. There are numerous questions that need  
10 to be explored at this hearing including whether the  
11 will ensure that targeted parks be well maintained  
12 over the long run. Will the administration commit to  
13 expanding these initiatives to cover more parks in  
14 the future? What staff allocations are and will be  
15 going forward? How will projects be completed in a  
16 timely fashion? Whether the initiative will lead to  
17 increase sustained funding in the future rather than  
18 just one-time funding allocations to more properly  
19 ensure that few parks are neglected over time.

20 Additionally, the early evidence seems to indicate  
21 that many CPI projects are proceeding at faster rates  
22 than what has been the case for other non-mayoral  
23 prioritized capital projects. If that is the case,  
24 then maybe CPI can act as a teachable moment for DPR  
25 in the city to learn how to speed up all funded

2 capital projects, which all too often languish for  
3 years before proceeding properly. Let's hope that we  
4 never return to the days that where the parks are now  
5 targeted for renovation—that are now targeted for  
6 renovation are neglected over multiple decades. I  
7 look forward to finding answers to these questions at  
8 this hearing, and examining what other possibilities  
9 there are out there to continue on a path for greater  
10 equity for all of our parks. I'd like to begin now  
11 by welcoming Commissioner Silver and his staffer, and  
12 I'm going to ask the committee chair—committee  
13 counsel to swear in the first panel.

14 LEGAL COUNSEL SARTORI: Chris Startori,  
15 Committee Counsel. Do you affirm to tell the truth,  
16 the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your  
17 testimony before this committee today?

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I do.

19 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Good morning,  
20 Commissioner, and please begin.

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Good morning, Chair  
22 Grodenchik, and members of the Parks Committee.  
23 Chair, you were very thorough in your opening and so  
24 I apologize if I appear redundant in some of my  
25 comments--

2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: [interposing]

3 That's okay.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --as I talk about  
5 some of the various initiatives. My name is Mitchell  
6 Silver. I'm the New York City Parks and Recreation  
7 Commissioner. Thank you for inviting me here today  
8 to talk about our equity initiatives. I just have to  
9 say upfront that one of the major reasons I took this  
10 job in the first place and returned to New York was  
11 the Mayor's vision for equity. So, I will be sharing  
12 information about the Committee Parks Initiative,  
13 Parks Without Borders, our Anchor Parks and then our  
14 other initiatives to ensure that we are being  
15 equitable in the agency. From my point of view,  
16 equity means fairness. Are we fair about how we  
17 distribute our resources? Are we fair about how we  
18 maintain our parks? This serves as our guiding  
19 principle for the Administration as reflected in well  
20 publicized efforts to build and preserve affordable  
21 housing, provide Universal Pre-K and 3-K and keep our  
22 streets safer through Vision Zero. But this  
23 commitment to equity also infuses and informs  
24 everything we do as an agency here at New York City  
25 Parks. For many years, the benefits of our park

2 system so vital to our city's health and happiness  
3 were not enjoyed equally by all New Yorkers. For  
4 many of us our city parks serve as our front yard,  
5 our back yard, our vacation destination. Thanks to  
6 the leadership of Mayor de Blasio, and through the  
7 strong partnership of the City Council and borough  
8 presidents, we've made tremendous progress over the  
9 past four years in fulfilling our commitment to a  
10 more inclusive and innovative park system. We  
11 demonstrate our commitment to equity early on in the  
12 Administration. In the fall of 2014 shortly after my  
13 arrival as Commissioner, NYC Parks announced a  
14 strategic framework, which embodies those prided  
15 values, our framework for an equitable future. This  
16 framework outline our commitment to create and care  
17 for thriving vibrant public spaces for all New  
18 Yorkers providing programming for neighborhoods in  
19 need, standardize our maintenance efforts across the  
20 park system, expand public access to green and open  
21 space. The framework for an equitable future  
22 continues to serve as our agency's blueprint guiding  
23 our efforts to protect the investments in parks that  
24 we've already made while improving the quality,  
25 accessibility, resiliency and sustainability of the

2 overall park system that serves New York City's  
3 diverse neighborhoods. It's also spurned our efforts  
4 to prioritize public input and increase community  
5 stakeholder engagement so we can hear directly from  
6 the users and visitors that benefit from these parks  
7 and develop innovative and data drive approaches  
8 design, plan, develop and care for our parks. Most  
9 notably, the frame work called the Strategic  
10 Allocation city capital investment to benefit high  
11 need communities and park properties have seen little  
12 to no investment in decades. To accomplish this  
13 goal, the Framework for and Equitable Future included  
14 a signature program, the Community Parks Initiative  
15 also known as CPI. Since launching CPI in late 2014,  
16 the City has allocated more than \$318 million in  
17 mayoral funding through the Community Parks  
18 Initiative dedicated to delivering capital  
19 improvements, enhance programming, maintenance and  
20 community partnership and to develop neighborhood  
21 parks that need it most in a way that is inclusive  
22 and equitable. The amazingly transformative impact  
23 of CPI is already being felt in communities all over  
24 the city. As New York City see the parks, they have  
25 been ignored and unloved, become an amazing green

2 open space that all New Yorkers deserve. Through CPI  
3 we're fully reconstructing 67 neighborhood parks and  
4 playgrounds. Where traditional capital projects  
5 often focus on replacing a singular park feature or a  
6 amenity, CPI has allowed to complete reimagine these  
7 parks some of which resemble parking lots more than  
8 parks, and with the help of community members to  
9 create accessible multi-generational spaces for New  
10 Yorkers. Building on our broader commitment to  
11 streamline the capital process and keep parks'  
12 projects moving I'm pleased to update you that all of  
13 these major projects are all well underway. Fourteen  
14 CPI projects are already complete and have reopen to  
15 the public with additional sites reopening very soon.  
16 In fact, on Tuesday, March 20<sup>th</sup>, we'll be holding a  
17 ribbon cutting relay ceremonies in five CPI parks  
18 across the city, one in each borough during the  
19 exciting all-day sprint across the city, and we  
20 invite all of you to join us for that exciting day.  
21 The first neighborhood playground to be full  
22 reconstructed and reopened as part of this initiative  
23 was Van Alst Playground in Astoria. It was completed  
24 ahead of schedule in June of 2017 after investment of  
25 \$3.5 million. It is now a major amenity for the

2 community adjacent to PS 171. Another striking  
3 example of the CPI Reconstruction is Thomas Boyland  
4 Park in Bushwick. As the presentation on the screen  
5 shows, this site saw dramatic improvements including  
6 a reconstructed baseball diamond, and resurfaced and  
7 updated basketball court. These 67 projects were  
8 identified with a data driven approach that  
9 prioritized equity. At the outset of the program in  
10 2014, we took a close look at the city's historic  
11 capital investment in parks and discovered that this  
12 investment did not always reach the communities that  
13 needed it most. Identifying parks and playgrounds  
14 that receive less than \$250,000 capital during the  
15 previous 20 years. We used the demographic data to  
16 define high need communities with above average rates  
17 of population density and percentage of residents  
18 living below the federal poverty line. In this  
19 manner, we developed a target list of public spaces  
20 that fit within these criteria. Through CPI we have  
21 been able to use in-house crews to provide targeted  
22 physical improvements in additional priority parks  
23 and playgrounds such as repainting playground  
24 equipment, handball courts, sports coating,  
25 basketball courts and replanting garden areas. The



2 target improvement was our way of letting the  
3 communities with parks that lacked investment know  
4 that we care, and we are committed to making  
5 immediate improvements while the CPI process runs its  
6 course. Equity did not only guide our approach to  
7 allocating these resources, it also shaped our design  
8 approach to determine which capital projects should  
9 be made at these parks. To create our CPI project  
10 designs, we listened to the voices that needed to be  
11 heard, the local community members and park users  
12 that rely on these parks so they can tell us what—how  
13 these imagined—reimagined parks could best meet their  
14 needs. In the past, public info sessions for park  
15 projects were held during the day resulting in few  
16 attendees, and leaving most local residents feeling  
17 like they weren't included in the conversation. So,  
18 we moved these sessions to the evening when people  
19 could attend and the CPI funds were used so that our  
20 Partnership for Parks outreach coordinators could  
21 actively target community organizations to help get  
22 the word out, and encourage local park users to  
23 attend. We even set up kids' tables. I have to say  
24 they are typically the most exciting and dynamic at  
25 these sessions. So, the younger park users could

2 brainstorm and provide valuable creative input, and  
3 they demonstrated that they had just as much to  
4 contribute to the process as their stodgy adults. I  
5 also want to share two stories what happens at this  
6 meeting. There was one design session in-in next to  
7 Stapleton Playground at PS95 in Staten Island, and  
8 there was a man that came up to me who grew up next  
9 to this park and there were tears in his eyes because  
10 he has a child and he said throughout his entire life  
11 he played in this-in this park, this playground that  
12 just was unkept, and really unloved. And he looked  
13 at me and said, I can't believe that you cared. He  
14 thought nobody cared about this community, and nobody  
15 cared about this park, and I have to say that that  
16 was an extremely rewarding moment that now he knows  
17 that there's going to be a total transformation, and  
18 he will be proud to take his children to that park.  
19 Another story was one at Lafayette Playground. I  
20 remember Council Member Treyger was there, and he  
21 was shocked by the number of Asian-Americans that  
22 came out to this meeting in the evening for the first  
23 time, but was interesting is that there were students  
24 from the High School for Sports Management. They  
25 were young African-Americans, and you can tell they

2 all sat at different tables as you can see here on  
3 the slide, and when it became presentation time, the  
4 Asian-Americans were concerned because they were  
5 coming up with their design about how to deal with  
6 this public space. The Asian-Americans would go there  
7 early in the morning, and they would have tai chi,  
8 and so they were worried, as these young men were  
9 starting to design what they would like to see for  
10 the park. They were holding their breath. The room  
11 was tense, and when the young people said they wanted  
12 to have an education area, and then they said they  
13 wanted to set out a side of a plaza because they said  
14 people in the morning they go there to do tai chi.  
15 And there was this beautiful moment where you saw  
16 this community connect using the public space. It  
17 was a special moment. It was one that I personally  
18 will not forget. I am pleased to report that over  
19 2,600 community representatives participated in the  
20 community input sessions that informed the CPI  
21 project designs and this is again moving it from  
22 afternoon to evening, and this allowing park users,  
23 neighborhood leaders, community board members and  
24 elected officials to provide input on the design of  
25 the parks and playgrounds funded for renovation.

2 Since the CPI approach has been so successful  
3 engaging local community groups and encouraging  
4 participation, we have adopted these practices for  
5 all of our capital design community input sessions so  
6 more park users can have an opportunity to contribute  
7 to shape the future of their parks. Through keeping  
8 parks in a state of good repair is a priority, it's  
9 equally important that the park is active and  
10 programmed fully fulfilling its potential with the  
11 connected community. Great parks are not something  
12 you reconstructed, but they require great care,  
13 stewardship and activation. This is why Mayor de  
14 Blasio has dedicated baseline expense funding to  
15 staff increased public programming and maintenance as  
16 well as community partner-partner capacity building.  
17 Through CPI we're bringing enhanced programming to  
18 parks and playgrounds serving high need communities  
19 including youth games and sports through our expanded  
20 Kids in Motion and summer sports experience. We also  
21 have under our urban park ranger the natural  
22 classroom programs. All of these serving our  
23 children throughout the city as well as our free  
24 shape-up classes for adults and mobile libraries and  
25 much more. 1.5 young park visitors have especially

2 benefitted from the expanded new program over the  
3 past three years thank to the CPI funded playground  
4 associates that we have developed—deployed to these  
5 neighborhoods, and this summer we'll continue to  
6 provide free youth programming throughout the five  
7 boroughs. We recognize that parks are brought to  
8 life by communities that use them. So, to engage the  
9 local residents and advocates and champions that  
10 surround our parks, CPI, our Partnership for Parks  
11 Outreach coordinators have supported 300 community  
12 partners in CPI neighborhoods providing resources and  
13 capacity building training to sustain stewardship  
14 efforts. Through the partnership with the City Parks  
15 Foundation, who is here with us today, we have  
16 engaged nearly 38,000 park volunteers in over 1,200  
17 stewardship projects within CPI neighborhoods for  
18 park clean-up projects and community events, bringing  
19 parks to life and cultivating valuable dedicated  
20 partners that can help us care for these parks in a  
21 sustained supportive manner. I'm also pleased—I'm—  
22 I'm pleased to offer updated about some other park  
23 capital initiatives influenced by the framework for  
24 an equitable future given the needs of fast growing  
25 city, a commitment to equity means we need to

2 continue improving our parks and playgrounds in all  
3 neighborhoods especially those parks acting as  
4 anchors to their surrounding communities by providing  
5 large, diverse recreational resources. In August of  
6 2016, Mayor de Blasio joined NYC Parks in announcing  
7 the Anchor Parks Initiative, an investment of \$150  
8 million for major improvements at five parks, one in  
9 each borough. Through anchor parks, we will invest  
10 in new resources like soccer fields, comfort  
11 stations, running tracks and walking paths  
12 transforming these parks for the 750,000 New Yorkers  
13 who live in the neighborhoods that surround them, and  
14 making these older parks feel new again. The five  
15 anchor parks each slated to receive \$30 million in  
16 major improvements are Saint Mary's Park in the  
17 Bronx, Betsy Head in Brooklyn, Highbridge in  
18 Manhattan, Astoria in Queens, and Freshkills on  
19 Staten Island. The five projects are on schedule as  
20 the phases of significant work in each park are  
21 underway. On the screen you will see some of the  
22 impacts these sites will have including Astoria Park,  
23 and that's the field and Highbridge Park. That's  
24 before and after. Our focus on equity also led us to  
25 finds ways to maximize the impact and utility of our

2 park properties by focusing on portions of the parks  
3 that were being underutilized, namely the entrances,  
4 edges and adjacent park spaces. Parks represents 14%  
5 of the city's land area and streets and sidewalks  
6 represents 26%. In other words, 40% of the city is  
7 in the public realm. In the past, we failed to  
8 maximize the potential of our city-owned land since  
9 the edges and the sidewalks around the park were  
10 often an afterthought that rarely considered true-  
11 were considered truly part of the park. But in 2015,  
12 we launched the Parks Without Borders Initiative,  
13 reflecting a new approach to park design with the  
14 entire public realm in mind. It focuses on the  
15 accessibility and connectivity of sections where the  
16 park and the surrounding community interact most  
17 directly so we can better activate sidewalks and  
18 edges of our parks, and make the park entrances more  
19 welcoming and improve sight lines in and out of our  
20 parks connecting them more seamlessly to the  
21 surrounding communities that depend on them for  
22 recreation and relaxation. In addition to focus on  
23 design, the initiative included \$50 million in  
24 mayoral funding, \$10 million of which was applied to  
25 projects already underway, and \$40 million of which

2 were dedicated toward eight showcase projects  
3 receiving large scale capital redesigns. Embodying  
4 the spirit of fairness and equity, we selected the  
5 showcased projects by gathering direct input from New  
6 Yorkers who knew these parks best. We received over  
7 6,000 nominations for close to 700 different parks.  
8 We can only choose eight. So, roughly one-third of  
9 our park system spread across all 59 community  
10 boards. New York City Parks evaluated the most  
11 popular park choices to determine locations that had  
12 the most potential to benefit from this new design.  
13 Our eight showcased projects with Parks Without  
14 Borders are in the Bronx, Van Cortlandt and Hugh  
15 Grant Circle of the Virginia Park in Queens, Flushing  
16 Meadows and Corona Park. On Staten Island Faber  
17 Park; In Brooklyn Fort Greene and Prospect Park, and  
18 in Manhattan, Seward Park and Jackie Robinson Park.  
19 At this time, all projects have had their designs  
20 finalized and improved by the Public Design  
21 Commission, or Landmarks Preservation Commission,  
22 three are undergoing procurement to identify a  
23 construction contractor, and the remaining five will  
24 enter procurement this spring. Pending a successful  
25 bidding process, we expect all sides to be in



2 construction by early 2019 and completed in 2020. On  
3 the screen are some of the most wonderful  
4 transformation and renovations. First, this is  
5 Flatbush Avenue on Prospect Park. It has a very  
6 thick edge. That is going to be changed to this  
7 entrance just south of Grand Army Plaza. We have  
8 some other interior shots. Again, you did not have  
9 access to the park at this location. This takes you  
10 to the rose garden, and along Meadow. This is the  
11 kind of transformation to make the parks more  
12 accessible and beautify them for the public. Seward  
13 Park has a high gate closed off by the edge with a  
14 fence around this community garden. It's right next  
15 to a library. Now, it will be an open plaza with  
16 seating, and now for once this public asset will be  
17 enjoyed by the public. Beyond these mayoral  
18 initiatives, equity will continue to be a lens  
19 through which we view capital expenditure decisions  
20 in hopes of continuing to allocate city capital  
21 resources where they are needed most. We'd like to  
22 partner with you as you consider making discretionary  
23 capital allocations for Parks projects in the  
24 upcoming fiscal year. As you make those allocation  
25 decisions, we can help identify projects or

2 prioritize a state of good repair of our district  
3 parks, taking historical investment data and other  
4 key metrics into account. The spirit of fairness  
5 helps us inform—helps us inform how we go beyond the  
6 capital improvement process. Equity also means that  
7 all New Yorkers have access to quality green space.  
8 A major goal of our agency and One NYC Plan is to  
9 have 85% of all New Yorkers living within a walk to a  
10 park by 2030, and we have made major strides since  
11 2014 increasing our Park system walk score to 81.5.  
12 Through our parks and boys design we welcome the  
13 opportunity to consider new entrances for a park,  
14 which can greatly increase access to nearby residents  
15 and otherwise could have a walk to a park around  
16 every perimeter of every—to—for the people to enter  
17 the park. We've also clarified signage in some of  
18 our parks and playgrounds to ensure that senior  
19 citizens and other adults have access to parks and  
20 amenities like comfort stations and chess tables and  
21 benches. Through—we do this—though we do designate  
22 that in specific children's play areas, an adult has  
23 to be accompanied by a childe to be present in an  
24 area where clarifying confusing or conflicting  
25 signage at our park—on our park rules, which

2 previously lead senior citizens and other adults to  
3 believe they weren't welcome in an entire park  
4 property as opposed to just specific children's play  
5 area. We also believe that equity means that all of  
6 our parks should kept in the cleanest and best  
7 condition possible. So, we standardized our  
8 maintenance efforts across the city and improved our  
9 management practices to provide a more enjoyable  
10 experience for all New Yorkers. For example, we know  
11 our parks and playgrounds are being used seven days a  
12 week, but in previous years they were only being  
13 cleaned five days per week resulting in overflowing  
14 garbage bins and litter strewn throughout the parks  
15 come Monday morning. In this administration we  
16 reconfigured staffing patterns to provide additional  
17 maintenance on weekends, and the Mayor has provided  
18 expanding baselined funding for increased seasonal  
19 maintenance staffing increases ensuring that our  
20 parks and playgrounds stay clean and welcoming even  
21 throughout a busy weekend. I hope I have  
22 demonstrated today fairness and equity are guiding  
23 principles for this administration and this agency  
24 and this spirit infuses and informs everything we  
25 seek to accomplish. Thank you for allowing me to

2 testify before you today, and for your great advocacy  
3 for parks via the work on this committee, and I will  
4 now be happy to answer your questions.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you,  
6 Commissioner. Thank you for that very broad and  
7 informative discussion and testimony. We've also  
8 been joined this morning by Council Member Andy King  
9 of the Bronx. I am going to ask a few question, and  
10 I'm going to open it up if any of my colleagues—I  
11 think two of them so far have questions. Can you  
12 describe, you know, going back to—going back to the  
13 past now, the criteria that we use to pick the parks,  
14 I know that the—the investment was under a quarter  
15 million dollars. Were there other criteria based on  
16 density and that kind of thing?

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes. So, one, we  
18 looked at poverty, we looked at density, we looked at  
19 potential for growth. We also looked at the amount  
20 of investment, which you stated less than \$250,000  
21 over 20 years. In addition, we looked at our—our  
22 inspection reports, and we did a site visit. So,  
23 those cumulatively is what we took a look as we start  
24 to determine which parks had met this criteria. So,  
25 those were all the factors.

2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay. Initiative  
3 is mostly capital money, and the question—one of the  
4 questions I have this morning have you inserted a  
5 requisite number of expense dollars so that we make  
6 sure that these parks are maintained. As they come  
7 online, we expect—I know when my son was very young,  
8 I—I--like other people we shop with our feet. So,  
9 the local park was very nice, but the park at 188<sup>th</sup>  
10 Street about six blocks north of the LIU is much  
11 nicer. So, what I am concerned about is that these  
12 parks will be—well, we want people to enjoy them  
13 obviously and the worst problem we should ever have  
14 is too many people are visiting our parks, but I am  
15 concerned that the expense dollars are enough to  
16 maintain these parks so that people will feel safe  
17 and comfortable, and have a wonderful experience.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, we added 21  
19 heads. There was also a baseline, \$1.2 million or  
20 mayoral funding used for playground associates to  
21 host several other activities. So, the answer is  
22 we're looking very carefully to make sure that all of  
23 these new parks as well as our entire park system is  
24 maintained properly. So, we've also shifted our  
25 approach to management. As I touched on in my

2 testimony, we've now worked very closely with the  
3 borough commissioners. We now have regional  
4 managers, and administrators in certain parks so that  
5 we can monitor how all of our parks are take care of.  
6 So, the answer to your question is yes. We're very  
7 mindful of how we're maintaining our CPI parks as  
8 well as other parks, but we have 21 new heads on the  
9 maintenance side and then \$1.2 million baseline  
10 funding for the playground associates within our  
11 parks.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: So that we  
13 didn't divert funding from other parks to these parks  
14 because, you know--

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] No,  
16 we did not.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: --we don't want  
18 to talk a war here.

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: No.

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: These--the  
21 projects as they're moving forward have--have you  
22 noted, and I know you've only been commissioner since  
23 2014, some people have said anecdotally to us that  
24 these projects seems to be moving quicker through  
25 the--through the process, which I know is long and we

2 will be looking at that sometime in the near future,  
3 but do you see as a--or are your staff seeing that  
4 these projects are moving through the process faster?

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: All projects  
6 starting in October 2014 are moving faster. When we  
7 launched this Community Parks Initiative, it was the  
8 same time that we went through our streamlined  
9 capital process. So starting in 2014, comparing the  
10 previous years, all projects starting in the fall of  
11 2014 are moving quicker than they had in the past.  
12 So, CPI was just in the--

13 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: [interposing] Is  
14 there--is there a reason--have you've been able to  
15 identify a reason for that, though?

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, we can have a  
17 separate hearing.

18 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: We will. I can  
19 promise you that. [laughs]

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We were able to  
21 shave off about four to six months on the design  
22 side, and 100 days on the construction side, but that  
23 benefitted all projects starting in the fall of 2014,  
24 including the CPI projects.

2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay. Have  
3 there been any problems that you've identified? Have  
4 there been any notable delays through to the CPI or  
5 the Anchor Park projects?

6 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, any delays,  
7 and there have been a few, this affects all projects  
8 whether we did not get a responsible bidder or  
9 there's a variety of reasons why things would slow  
10 down. In some cases, if the bid comes in too high,  
11 and I refuse to accept, and we have to rebid it, that  
12 will be a three or four-month delay. In some cases  
13 there was an issue with one of the designs on one of  
14 the CPI parks. We had to go back several times. So,  
15 that is not unusual, but for the most part, the  
16 majority of all the projects in both CPI, Parks  
17 Without Borders and Anchor Parks are proceeding  
18 generally on schedule.

19 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay. We have  
20 been told that 134 parks were identified as having  
21 extreme capital needs through your surveys were  
22 located in lower-income neighborhoods when this  
23 initiative was first developed. Yet, at this time  
24 there are only 67 parks identified. What's your plan  
25 as go forward to bring in those other 67?



2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, as you know,  
3 we have a budget process every year. This is

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: [interposing] I  
5 know--

6 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --a conversation we  
7 have both with OMB and the Mayor, but we're also  
8 having conversations, as you probably know, with all  
9 the Council Members. We know some of the parks that  
10 will need an investment, and so we continue to put  
11 this first and foremost, and share this information  
12 with the Council member, but it is something that we  
13 are certainly advocating for, and we'll work with OMB  
14 as we look at--as we go through the budget process.

15 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: And maybe  
16 earlier I asked this question, have you tracked the  
17 uses rate--usage rates for the renovated park or had a  
18 post-construction opening. We're going to be opening  
19 a number of them. I hope to join you for part of  
20 that day. It's Preliminary Budget month starting  
21 tomorrow, but I do hope to at least be at one or two  
22 of those parks. I may ask you for a ride, but  
23 [laughter] but--

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]  
25 Right. I'm--I'm running to each one.

2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: You're running.  
3 [laughter] I'll get my roller skates.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It seems a relay.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Oh, okay. I'll  
6 be walking quickly then. Have you determined—has  
7 there been a bounce, you know, in the-- I assume  
8 that—that you open this park and, you know, the word  
9 about it spreads. You got to go to that park because  
10 it's so much getter than it was or it's better than  
11 the park there. And so, have you seen an increase in  
12 usage?

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We are—we have seen  
14 an increase just by site, but in terms of counting,  
15 this summer we have a usership team that will go out  
16 and start to measure the change. We do have a study  
17 with CUNY. It will take some years to see the impact  
18 both health as well as usability of those parks, but  
19 we are seeing an increase. Grand Avenue Playground  
20 in the Bronx that one in Cabrera's district was  
21 unbelievable. There were probably the most people  
22 I've seen waiting for that park to open.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: They were  
24 actually waiting outside for the park to open?

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, it was a-it  
3 was one of the older designs with a fence and a lock  
4 before--

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: [interposing]  
6 Okay.

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --we actually did  
8 the ribbon cutting.

9 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There were over 250  
11 people in line waiting for that park to open, and  
12 that was a good story there. This is one where, you  
13 know, there was not the best behavior happening at  
14 that park. The nearby public housing project when a  
15 tenant association was overwhelmed and crying because  
16 she said: You don't understand. This is where we go  
17 for vacation.

18 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I understand.

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: And so, we-it's  
20 spray shower. It's phenomenal, and it's something  
21 that we're seeing across the board. So on that one,  
22 it was packed every time we went by. This is the  
23 park. I didn't show the images on this. I think we  
24 did show one of the spray shower images that this was  
25 a park basically that was unused, and that was just

2 totally transformed. So, we're seeing it. We're  
3 going do those numbers this summer to see how well  
4 they've improved.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: We opened West  
6 Laurelton Playground soon after Malinda Katz became  
7 the borough president. It was a nice warm day, and I  
8 pressed the button, and the spray shower went off,  
9 and she looked at me and she said, you really don't  
10 have young children do you? [laughter] I said no, I  
11 don't. I'm used to the concrete. We're going to be  
12 redoing Challenge Playground in Little Neck,  
13 Douglaston, which still has the old concrete.  
14 They're well built. It's still there. It's probably  
15 circa 1950 something, and I'm looking forward to that  
16 in my district. I promised myself as the chair that  
17 I wouldn't eat up too much time at the beginning.  
18 So, I'm going to stick to that promise. So-so my  
19 colleagues who—we have a very busy day. The first  
20 one with questions is Councilman—Mr. Moya is with us.  
21 I want to welcome my colleague from Queens, Francisco  
22 Moya, but first up is Mr. Peter Koo, and I'm going to  
23 ask the—I'm going to set the clock. Sometimes it's  
24 three, sometimes it's five. I'll be different. I'll  
25 make it four minutes for the bell.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Well, that's okay.  
3 Yeah. Thank you, Chair. [off mic] Oh, it's on now.  
4 [on mic] Commissioner.

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: There are currently  
7 56 parks included in the Community Parks Initiative,  
8 the CPI. Of those 56, 8 are in Queens, which is only  
9 14% and of the ones in my district Browne Playground  
10 aka PS20Q. How is the funding being divided among  
11 parks, the CPI funding specifically between the  
12 individual parks and how about between the boroughs?

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Just a  
14 clarification. There are 67 Community Parks  
15 Initiative park; 18 in the Bronx, 16 in Brooklyn, 6  
16 in Manhattan, 10 in Queens, and 7 in Staten Island.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Oh, so-so the  
18 percentage is even lower for us?

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, we are  
20 looking at--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: [interposing] We are  
22 one piece.

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: As I stated, we  
24 focused specifically on parks that met the criteria,  
25 and as a result, we identified 134 parks that meet

2 the criteria of poverty, density, growth and receive  
3 less than 250,000 in capital. If the park didn't  
4 qualify, it did not in your district, it did not meet  
5 one of those criteria, but we held to this one. It  
6 was a data driven approach, and so there were 10 in  
7 Queens, and I'm aware that you have Bowne Playground  
8 in your district.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Okay, and I go on my  
10 second question. So, [coughs] Flushing Meadow  
11 Corona Park is one of the biggest parks in the city.  
12 I think it's bigger than Central Park. However, the  
13 Parks Department seems to have forgotten about it  
14 exists when it comes to funding. At least my side of  
15 the park we revisited the park this summer, and ended  
16 in my district you will see dead grass, patches of  
17 dirt, broken walkways if they exist and no lighting  
18 at night. Thousands of people come to use the  
19 swimming pool, the recreation center and the ice  
20 skating ring on my side of the park, but often these  
21 people—these park goers tell my office that they are  
22 scared to go there because it looks abandoned. What  
23 is your plan to address the Flushing side of the  
24 park?

2                   COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, first, I'm  
3 pleased to say that Flushing Meadow Corona Park  
4 probably has more capital funding than—slated for the  
5 future than almost any park in our system, well over  
6 \$270 million of capital improvements are coming to  
7 Flushing Meadow Corona Park. Granted, most of that  
8 funding will go into Two Bridges: Porpoise Bridge  
9 and the Passerelle Bridge, but there are a lot of  
10 investment going on, and as you know, we have—we're  
11 always open to hear from the residents directly. We  
12 now have a new alliance. That's when we sit down  
13 then we have our administrator, and that's when we  
14 sit down to hear the concerns of the community, but  
15 there is a lot of investment going on in Flushing  
16 Meadow Corona Park, and we welcome all input from  
17 your residents to find out what can we do to address  
18 it. In terms of the other aspect, we are now  
19 deploying more of a zone maintenance program, and so  
20 if there's concerns about turf and grass, our crews  
21 will go out there. As you know, soccer is very  
22 popular and South American volleyball. That tends  
23 too do some heavy damage to turfs. We're exploring  
24 where synthetic turf would go in, avoid having some  
25 of the natural turf that's compacted soil and ends up

2 being dirt. So, we're always willing to work with  
3 the residents, and we extend a meeting with you, and  
4 whatever stakeholders you want us to sit down with to  
5 explain to them how we're investing in all parts of  
6 Flushing Meadow Corona Park.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Yeah, because it's  
8 important, you know, on my side of the park. You  
9 know, especially you can walk underneath the—the  
10 highway, the bridges. There's no—there's no sign  
11 there to say go to Flushing Meadow Corona Park.

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yeah, Council  
13 Member, as you know, we just appointed someone to the  
14 Flushing—our Alliance and he was there at the last  
15 meeting. We'll share all our plans. One is going to  
16 be a way finding system throughout the park. So,  
17 people know—as you know [bell] this is a park that is  
18 divided by many highways, and so we have a wayfinding  
19 approach to help people understand what's in the  
20 park, and how to get into the park.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Thank you. So, I'll  
22 come back for that.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Yes, so the mic  
24 is set to low. (sic) Yes. [laughter] We now have  
25 Councilman Cohen from the Bronx.



2 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you, Mr.  
3 Chair. Good morning Commissioner. How are you?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'm fine. Thank  
5 you.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: You know, I-I, you  
7 know, think that this is a great initiative. I  
8 followed, I've been, you know, this is my second go  
9 around in the parks. So, I followed this through.  
10 You know, one thing, though that was always. It's  
11 always been of some concern and I guess it's still of  
12 some concern is, you know, with-with the criteria it  
13 sort of feels like, you know, in my Council District  
14 there's been a history of the Council members really  
15 supporting parks, and you know, that, you know, I've  
16 invested, you know, the vast majority of my capital  
17 in-in Parks projects. I have a lot of parks, and-and  
18 I want them to be beautiful and state of the art, but  
19 it feels a little bit, well, you know, maybe-maybe  
20 the smart thing is to not invest in my parks and  
21 we'll wait and then the Parks Department will do it  
22 and I can put my capital some place else. So, I think  
23 in-in the-under the rubric of being fair it's  
24 important. Like it would be wrong I think if the  
25 Parks Department was not supportive of-of districts

2 where the Council Member in particular versus mayoral  
3 money, and maybe that's when you look at that-at  
4 those figures, it might be worth-you know, as you  
5 develop criteria in the future, I think Council  
6 member support, you might want to pull that out from-  
7 from the city-from the Administration support, and  
8 looking at criteria. And, you know, I'm the first to  
9 admit that, you know, I'm thrilled with the Parks  
10 Without Borders project in Van Cortlandt Park. It  
11 is-is, you know, that was on you, but, you know, also  
12 in terms of process. You know, I'm very envious  
13 that, you know, many of these CPI projects, you know,  
14 cutting ribbons. I have projects, you know, many  
15 projects where there's no shovel in the ground, never  
16 mind a ribbon, but I-and I will say just to give her  
17 credit, you know, my borough commissioner I love her.  
18 She's extremely communicative, and my projects do  
19 seem to be sort of, you know, rumbling along, but-but  
20 to see all these CPI project already having ribbon  
21 cuttings, I'm jealous. So--

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So, just by way of  
23 context, over the past my first four years we  
24 completed close to 380 capital projects. Fourteen of  
25 those have been CPI. So, you can see it's been a

2 small fraction. It does get a lot of attention, but  
3 we've been trying to move all the projects, and it is  
4 a small percentage of all the projects we have  
5 completed. I hear you on the criteria, but from my  
6 perspective, we're not looking to Council-punish any  
7 Council member. When we took a look, and found out  
8 20 years multiple mayors, multiple Council members  
9 and these parks were forgotten, and what we looked at  
10 it was very difficult to not walk away from that  
11 decision. We had to figure out how to help those  
12 parks, and each year more parks fall into that  
13 category, and I'm assuming they may-some of the may  
14 be in your district. So, we're working very closely  
15 to see what we can do. There's a life cycle to a  
16 playground. Twenty years is far too long for a park  
17 to be improved. It was mentioned there are still  
18 Robert Moses Era playgrounds, and we were saying 20  
19 years. It could be 30 years that some of these parks  
20 haven't seen investments. So, for us it was a  
21 fairness about finally over-they were hiding in plain  
22 sight. For 20 years these playgrounds and parks were  
23 forgotten, and we felt that time was up, and we had  
24 to focus our attention. So, it was not to punish  
25 those Council members that invested. It was to

2 address multiple administrations that just dropped  
3 the ball and--and these parks were hiding in plan  
4 sight.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Yeah, I don't  
6 think that I feel punished. I don't thin that any of  
7 my colleagues feel punished, but we--we sort of want  
8 to--I think that we want, you know, as good partner  
9 with the Parks Department we just want to make sure  
10 that's always remembered also.

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We hear you and  
12 we're sitting down through our new approach toward  
13 looking at our Capital Needs Assessment, and we want  
14 to do better planning on the life cycle side so we  
15 know play equipment only has a certain life cycle,  
16 and we want to do a better job working with Council  
17 members so we can keep up with maintenance, but your  
18 point is well taken. I understand it, and--and we'll  
19 take a look to see how we can--I won't say look at the  
20 park equity equation, but also look at how we can  
21 start addressing some of the other parks in the park  
22 system that haven't seen investment in let's say ten  
23 years.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you,  
3 Council Member Cohen. Council Member Andy King.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Thank you, Mr.  
5 Chair and thank you Commissioner for your testimony  
6 today. I am going to stay on the same road as my  
7 colleague Council Member Cohen because we share the  
8 same borough and we're neighbors. He's the eleventh  
9 and I'm the twelfth, and when he talked about equity  
10 and fairness, and that's what I wanted to know a  
11 little about because there are parts of the city of  
12 New York where some parks and playgrounds are only in  
13 affluent neighborhoods, and conservatories and the al  
14 come together, and they put their money in. How-I  
15 want to know how the park balances that as opposed to  
16 a neighborhood who doesn't have, you know, the  
17 godfathers on the side that's able to put a million  
18 in and say-- Let's make sure the Central Park can,  
19 but this little park around on 86<sup>th</sup> and York is taken  
20 care of where a park is struggling because economics  
21 just doesn't for that type of care. So, I just want  
22 to get an idea on how do you do that. Do you ever  
23 have to move money around or do you say, listen, this  
24 neighborhood is being taken care of, but let's-let's  
25 focus over here. And secondly, I'd like to know how

2 do you pursue when it comes to parks who have  
3 historic values in the city of New York? I have a  
4 park that's in my district called Seton Falls Park,  
5 which, you know, the district that I represent was  
6 connected—it's still connected to the state, but it  
7 was farm land. So, many of those parks it's—it's a  
8 lot of greening, a lot of grass and grapevines, and  
9 so forth, and waterfalls, and they're very pretty,  
10 but the maintenance has been so off, you know, as far  
11 so are people using them or are they using them for  
12 the wrong reason because it's not conducive to family  
13 life. It's conducive because it's dark, it's  
14 desolate. No one cut anything down. So, the history  
15 of the park tend to go down if parks don't say hey,  
16 how do we take a look at the parks and playgrounds  
17 that have a historic value to us.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well first, I will  
19 take a look at that specific park, but as our stand  
20 across the board that no park is considered not cared  
21 for and maintained. So, if that's the case, I'll  
22 certainly sit down with the team. I have to—and have  
23 an understanding of what the public's expectation,  
24 but in terms every single month I get the Park Rating  
25 about how parks are maintained large and small, and

2 if a park does not seem to be doing well, we  
3 intervene immediately. So, I will see the parks that  
4 you're referring to. If, in fact, there are some  
5 issues in that park, we'll rectify that very quickly.  
6 In terms of your first question, we do have a number  
7 of conservancies that do support their parks. What  
8 we do? One, we have a partnership with these  
9 conservancies. They now are part of the Parks  
10 Inequity Initiative, and eight of the largest  
11 conservancies are helping to support the Community  
12 Parks Initiative. Eight have joined together either  
13 through in-kind or direct contribution are  
14 contributing \$5 million per year over three years.  
15 That' was \$15 million to help support the Community  
16 Parks Initiative. So, they bought onto it, and they  
17 understand that there are parks throughout the city  
18 that haven't an investment in a long time, and even  
19 though that three-year commitment ended, some  
20 continue to support the Community Parks Initiative  
21 because they recognize this is something in our city  
22 that should not have happened. In terms of how  
23 decisions are made, there's mayoral funding, there's  
24 Council funding and there's borough president  
25 funding. Each of our staff will sit down with the

2 Council Members to share what are some of the parks  
3 in in need. We don't take into account how affluent  
4 the neighborhood is. We know each Council Member  
5 [cell phone ringing] has a certain allocation, and we  
6 share with you underfunded projects, projects in need  
7 so we can in some cases partner with you to improve  
8 those parks. So, we approach everything from a point  
9 of equity and fairness, and we don't favor the  
10 affluent in one community versus another. Our  
11 commitment is to have a park system where all parks  
12 in all neighborhoods are maintained and cared for  
13 properly.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: And I—and with  
15 this, thank you for those answers, and I'm looking  
16 forward to, as Cohen said, our Commissioner Iris  
17 Rodriguez is wonderful. I know at times that she may  
18 struggle with the money to get a project done. Other  
19 than me seeing what's happening in Van Cortlandt  
20 Park, I don't ever see in the North Bronx parks.  
21 They get, you know, the big flavor and favor, and I'm  
22 just—I'm just calling for what it is. So, I'm asking  
23 as we move from working together that moving for the  
24 past Fordham Road that we get the same kind of  
25 considerations, support and help. That it doesn't



2 always rely on the Council Member to try and find an  
3 extra dollar that you need [bell] to deliver on parks  
4 in our neighborhoods. So, thank you. Thank you, Mr.  
5 Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you,  
7 Councilman King. Councilman Moya.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Thank you, Mr.  
9 Chairman and thank you, Commissioner. I just want to  
10 say that since we met and I told my mother about  
11 [laughter] the--

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Is she back?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Yeah, she--I can't  
14 get her off the computer

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: So, thank you for  
17 that, but I just wanted to go back to a couple of  
18 things that some of my colleagues have brought up,  
19 and some of the things we talked about that you had  
20 mentioned that you had looked at projects before your  
21 tenure and--and after since you've become  
22 Commissioner, and you were saying that you were  
23 getting them back on track--

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: --but what about  
3 the rest of the--those projects that are still  
4 pending? What's the status of those, and are those  
5 updates delivered to the Council members to see if  
6 they can help move that along, and also to help us  
7 answer questions that we get from constituents in our  
8 communities?

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, one, we have a  
10 tracker. So, at any given time any member of the  
11 public or Council Member can go on our Capital  
12 Tracker to look at the status. There's roughly about  
13 110 left on the list of the lay projects before my  
14 tenure. 70 of that 110 are in construction. So, the  
15 good news is the majority within the next year or 15  
16 months will now be completed and off the list. The  
17 remaining 40, about 31 are in procurement and about  
18 nine are still in design. These are problematic  
19 projects that have been around some dating back 8, 9  
20 years. We share the information with the Council  
21 members and we're making a determination of what to  
22 do for some of these projects, and the issues with  
23 them are quite severe. We'll certainly sit down with  
24 the Council member to decide how do we proceed, but  
25 the good news is the vast majority are now--will be

2 constructed and completed very soon. The procurement  
3 projects will be moving into construction, and then  
4 there's a chronic nine that are extremely  
5 problematic, and I'm trying to figure out what we can  
6 do to either just end those projects or how do we  
7 proceed with them, but they have just been  
8 chronically delayed for quite some time.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: The other question  
10 I have is what's the process for repurposing elements  
11 of a park that are unused such as handball courts, et  
12 cetera? Like in certain parts of my district where  
13 handball courts are no longer in use any more, what  
14 is that process that you guys go about looking at it?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We have public  
16 input sessions, and that is a conversation we have  
17 with the community. There's also some advocates out  
18 there. There's a woman who is part of the Wall Ball  
19 Association, and she hears about a handball court  
20 coming down, you may hear from here, but in general,  
21 we have that conversation at the community meeting to  
22 find out what is their plan. In some cases, it's  
23 taking down a few handball courts, leaving up, but  
24 that is just a conversation we have with the  
25 community.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Okay, and—and—and—  
3 and lastly, what exactly inflates the cost so much  
4 for parks projects and can you sort of walk us  
5 through the labor costs, et cetera.

6 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I don't have the  
7 specific labor and material costs. I understand  
8 there'll be a future hearing. We're more than willing  
9 to sit down. Again, we have a very hot market here  
10 in New York, and we're seeing prices increase  
11 dramatically. It's not just parks. It's all projects  
12 across the board. All I can say is what we're doing  
13 is we're standardizing all of our designs so that now  
14 we can compare project to project. We're not doing  
15 anything that's customized. So that is easy to  
16 maintain and design and build, but we'll certainly  
17 welcome to sit down with you to show you over time  
18 how those costs are increasing. We're frustrated as  
19 much as all of you. We'd love to build more comfort  
20 stations rather than just build them, I'd rather  
21 build two for the \$4 million versus just one. I'm  
22 not saying they're—[bell] they're \$4 million, but  
23 we'll certainly sit down and have a conversation  
24 about how we can take a hard look at what we can do  
25 about the cost of construction.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Thank you,  
3 Commissioner.

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you,  
5 Councilman Moya. We've been joined by Councilman  
6 Brannan from the great borough of Brooklyn.  
7 Councilman.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Thank you,  
9 Chair. Commissioner, how are you?

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'm fine.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: It's great  
12 meeting with you, and agreeing that a bathroom in a  
13 park shouldn't cost \$4 million to build. I  
14 appreciate we're on the same page there. I wanted to  
15 ask to get a little parochial about Calvert Vaux  
16 Park. In 2009, Bloomberg promised \$40 million to  
17 Regional Park, and to this day it's not-not done.  
18 What are we-what are we doing there?

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I do know that  
20 we're putting in a comfort station that I believe is  
21 starting construction very soon. We had to resolve a  
22 utility extension. So, that will be a great asset to  
23 that park. I do not believe there's additional  
24 funding. I'll have to get back to you about what  
25 happened with the prior commitment. I don't have an

2 answer now, but my staff will get back to you. I do  
3 know it's come up a number of times. There currently  
4 is no funding to compete the other portion of Calvert  
5 Vaux. What is there now, as you probably know is  
6 probably one of the best soccer fields in Brooklyn,  
7 and now having that comfort station there would  
8 equally make that a great destination for that park,  
9 but I'll have to get back to you about exactly what  
10 happened with the—I know it was a Bloomberg  
11 recommendation. I don't know what happened from that  
12 administration to see what happened with that  
13 funding. We'll get back to you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: Okay, appreciate  
15 that.

16 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Well, you're  
17 quick. Thank you Councilman. For a second round  
18 Councilman Koo.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: [off mic] Thank you,  
20 Chair. You know there's no extension on that.

21 [laughter]

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: He's using equity  
23 so--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: [on mic] So,  
25 Commissioner, yeah. You know in my district we—we

2 really like condensed. We have lots of pedestrians.  
3 It's one of the most busy places in the whole of New  
4 York City, you know. So, we have a place called  
5 Bland Playground on 44<sup>th</sup> and Penn Street, and I think  
6 it used to be considered for City Park Initiative or  
7 the Anchor Park Initiative, you know. My staff has a  
8 four-year-old daughter, and my office is only like  
9 one block away from that playground, and she-she  
10 refused to go to that playground because she tells  
11 her oh, this is a dirty park, you know. And-and-and  
12 I hear the same thing from a lot of families, and  
13 this is the most inconvenient--the most convenient  
14 park in Downtown Flushing. It's around a lot of  
15 apartments, you know. So, it's sad that nobody wants  
16 to go there. So, I hope you can take a look on this.  
17 I guess last year I put in \$500,000 on my allocation  
18 to renovate the park. So, I hope we can work  
19 together to make sure the park gets renovated because  
20 it's right in Downtown Flushing. It creates a really  
21 bad image for the city because we cannot even manage  
22 our small paper, you know--

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] Okay.  
24 Well, if it is in--within the zone, we'll just take a  
25 look at it--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Yeah.

3 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --and we'll get  
4 back to you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: And then-and then  
6 another question is when I go to the parks, the most  
7 people ask me is the bathroom is terrible. You know,  
8 no matter which park we go to. Sometimes they are  
9 closed. Sometimes there are no bathrooms. So, I  
10 hope in the future we'll put this as a priority the  
11 comfort stations in parks because we are human  
12 beings. So, what goes in has to come out.  
13 [laughter-

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I've heard that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Yeah, so--[laughter]  
16 especially with the senior citizens. No?

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Yeah.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: [off mic] So, I'm  
20 running it three ways before me. (sic)

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Yeah.

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Rest assured--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: [interposing] So, I  
24 hope you do because--and then I don't when--I  
25 understand--



2                   COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] If  
3 you have specific ones, we also have—we inspect our  
4 parks. We conduct—I'm guessing like 6,000  
5 inspections to our park system every year. We do  
6 inspect comfort stations, and so we get reports on  
7 those that pass and fail. So, is our commitment to  
8 make sure that people have a wonderful experience  
9 even in our comfort stations, that they are clean,  
10 that they are well serviced with the proper toilet—  
11 the paper, hand towels, et cetera. But if you have a  
12 specific park, we'll take a look at it because our  
13 goal is to make sure that every park is—and comfort  
14 station is a pleasure to go.

15                   COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Because if you go to  
16 that neighborhood playground, the bathroom is closed  
17 all the time and—and Kissena Park playground it's  
18 closed all the time. You know, it's not fair to our  
19 residents. They have no place to go.

20                   COMMISSIONER SILVER: We'll check into  
21 that one. If it's closed, that means there's certain  
22 times—times of the year it's going to be closed, but  
23 if it's closed permanently that means that something  
24 may be happening with the comfort station. We'll

2 also check on that comfort station. You said Kissena  
3 Playground?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Yeah. So, can--can--in  
5 the future can you like when you do the bathrooms can  
6 you consult at the local office? Because sometimes  
7 you do a bathroom, which is not functional, you know.

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: All of our  
9 conversations are standardized right now. There's a  
10 newer design.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: [interposing]  
12 Because I have to take exception because--

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]  
14 Right.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: --usually a bathroom  
16 has a male and women. It's not enough. You should  
17 have along, you'll able to--you know.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes. Council  
19 Member.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Five or six people  
21 can do it if you went in there together.

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: You know?

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We're trying to  
25 keep the costs down. It's just--it's just that this--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: I mean. I don't want  
3 to do it—do it in details in the public hearing, but  
4 this is something we have to change, you. Thank you.

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you, Mr.  
7 Koo, for illuminating us on that. [laughter] [bell]  
8 We might do—we may do a hearing on comfort stations  
9 but not today. Thank you for your questions, Council  
10 Member Andrew Cohen for a second round.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I think I'm  
12 covering ground. I'm just unsure I got the answer.  
13 There—there is going to be a second round of CPI?

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There were two  
15 phases of CPI. The first was 35 parks. The second  
16 was 32 parks. We are now again in the Capital Budget  
17 process. So, we're having those conversations with  
18 OMB. There are multiple needs, but for now there is  
19 no announced next phase of—of CPI at this time.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: So, you made a  
21 request to OMB and we're in sort of--?

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It is an ongoing  
23 request. Every year we have more parks that move  
24 into the 20-year phase. I can't say what is

2 happening right with the budge process. It will be,  
3 as you know, it will be released--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: [interposing]  
5 Neither can I.

6 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes. [laughter]  
7 But--but certainly there's a desire not--as the budget  
8 process starts that's an ongoing conversation about  
9 the program and whether it will continue.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: How many and I--I  
11 think you also said this, too, but just one more  
12 time. How many parks do you think are eligible  
13 currently?

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, the initial  
15 round was 134. Every year, maybe 8 to 10 parks roll  
16 into that 20-year older--it varies because they  
17 weren't all built at the same time, but on average  
18 you'll have anywhere from about 8 to maybe 10 parks  
19 that falls into that 20-year threshold.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: [interposing] So,  
21 maybe 75 parks. You have a menu of about 75 parks  
22 that would be--

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, that's parks  
24 in general in terms--in the CPI zones. We'll have to  
25 see how many, but looking at our entire portfolio

2 there's about a thousand playgrounds throughout the  
3 city, and so--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: That would be--that  
5 would meet the CPI criteria or no?

6 COMMISSIONER SILVER: No, no, no--

7 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I'm saying like 75  
8 meet the--

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: globally there are  
10 a thousand playgrounds and some of these playgrounds  
11 are within parks themselves, but on average we're  
12 seeing about 8 to 10 that reached that 20-year  
13 threshold

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: But eligibility  
15 for CPI right now you're thinking is--there are about  
16 75 parks that would meet the criteria?

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'd have to get  
18 back to you on the exact number. I know we started  
19 with 134. We're doing 67. A few others that we  
20 added to that we added to that list--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: [interposing] In  
22 that neighborhood.

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --and get back to  
24 you--yeah, I would say in that neighborhood.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Okay. Alright,  
3 thank you very much, and thank you, Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: We've been  
5 joined by Costa Constantinides, and since he's chair  
6 and oversees the Environmental Protection Department,  
7 I wanted to ask you this question: Since DEP is  
8 involved in-in the process, what environmentally  
9 sustainable futures are being contemplated for the  
10 parks that are-have been or are going to be  
11 redesigned in the CPI?

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I don't know the  
13 exact number, but it's a significant number. We are  
14 working with DEP

15 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: We are working  
16 with DEP to do storm water retention in those parks.  
17 I'm guessing it's almost installed. Do we know the--?

18 FEMALE SPEAKER: [off mic] Yes, it's at  
19 29 of the 35.

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: 29 of the 35 have a  
21 DEP green infrastructure element within the park.  
22 So, that's extra funding for those parks. So, that's  
23 something. WE certainly enjoy that partnership and  
24 we look to that--

2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: [interposing]

3 You get money from DEP?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Even better,  
6 even better.

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: And to also  
8 emphasize these parks were also done in the new  
9 expedited timeline working with DEP and incorporating  
10 their green infrastructure design with our design.  
11 So, this is showing not only is the partnership  
12 working, but the new streamlined capital process is  
13 working as well even though you're adding another  
14 agency on board.

15 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay. We'll now  
16 hear for the second round from Councilman King and  
17 then Councilman Constantinides. So, Mr. King.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Thank you, Mr.  
19 Chair and Commissioner again. My two questions for  
20 you this round goes back to the criteria of the CPI.  
21 So I want to know if a park does not meet any of the  
22 12, 22 criteria, but is still in need us there a plan  
23 still to address it, address those--those parks or  
24 playgrounds, and secondly, when you do have your  
25 quote, and you're about to build a park, and we know

2 we've all experienced that, and amid this time you're  
3 telling us it is \$2.6 million and in 2018 in January,  
4 but by May it is \$3.9 million. So, what is your  
5 response? How do you—how have you dealt with this?  
6 Do you—do you—does the Council come in or do you just  
7 say no to this developer or do you just add the  
8 money? What's—how do you handle that?

9           COMMISSIONER SILVER: It depends. It  
10 varies across the board. We do our best at  
11 estimating. In fact, we even include more in the  
12 estimate, and then we put out to bid. Now, that a  
13 contractor is responding, the number is higher than  
14 we expected. This is not just for parks. This  
15 across the board for all agencies, and I know there  
16 will be a hearing to discuss exactly what is  
17 happening on the industry side. In terms of parks in  
18 need, we look at all strategies. Clearly, we reach  
19 out to the borough presidents. We reach out to the  
20 council members. We have state of good repair that  
21 we focus on. We use in-house resources if we can do  
22 it that way. So, I'm looking at a variety of ways  
23 because we have close to 2,000 parks, a thousand  
24 playgrounds, and I'm looking at every single strategy  
25 that we can use. We've used in-house staff to repair



2 a comfort station. We now have specialized turf team  
3 that cleans our turf. I'm trying to be as innovative  
4 and creative with what we have, and that ill  
5 continuing going forward. So, in your district  
6 you'll soon meet out somewhere if you haven't already  
7 with Commissioner Rodriguez Rosa to show some of the  
8 parks in your community that we see are in most need,  
9 and then we'll figure out how you can help, where it  
10 is possible mayoral dollars, or we can use some of  
11 our innovative approaches within Parks to address  
12 some of those issues. So, it's—I put everything on  
13 the table to figure out what we can do because I do  
14 agree there are parks that are in need, and we went  
15 to figure out council district by council district  
16 what we can do to improve those parks spaces.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: And let me just  
18 wrap up. I got a minute for the—any of those vendors  
19 who come back with a large number that's not within  
20 your budget, have you ever figured out how not to do  
21 business with them, and hold them accountable because  
22 they mess up your time line?

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, what we do we  
24 want to make sure we have good relationships. We  
25 want our contractors to be successful. We want our

2 MWBES to be successful. So, we work with our  
3 contractors to make sure they reap success. We  
4 resident engineers—resident engineers to help them  
5 move through the process. If a bid is too high, when  
6 it's submitted, I have two choices: Accept this high  
7 bid for a comfort station or reject it and wait  
8 another three or four months to rebid it out again.  
9 So, in one case, people may get upset about the high  
10 price, but if I reject it, people get upset that the  
11 timeline is a lot longer. So, it's a bit of a Catch  
12 22. We talked to them and examine why is this coming  
13 in so high, and we have a Deputy Commissioner  
14 Braddick from our Capital Team analyzes this, and so  
15 we only will default someone--and that is a rare  
16 case--if they're just not doing the job well. It's  
17 rare that we do that. We try to work with the  
18 contractor. Keep him on schedule to make sure they  
19 produce a quality project.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KING: Thank you and—and,  
21 Mr. Chair, I'll end with this: I'm drafting  
22 legislation that coming before you, and I'm urging  
23 us—I had the conversation with the Commissioner to  
24 make sure that if a bid comes in at this number that  
25 they can't boost up the number six months down the

2 road, and I think once we start sending a message to  
3 the people who are out there who are just-- Because  
4 right now they're--they're dictating the prices of  
5 everything. So, if the city says we're only going to  
6 pay \$5 million for this project and if Joe wants to  
7 do the project for \$5 million [bell] because you came  
8 in at \$6 million, you're going to stop--stop using  
9 contracts because everyone is setting the bar too  
10 high for us right now. So, they can get paid as  
11 opposed to--If they can do it at \$5 million in May  
12 then they can do it at \$5 million in November, and if  
13 we start taking the new approach then they--then they  
14 we can get forced down to bring the numbers down, and  
15 then we get projects done within two years instead of  
16 eight years as has been the going rate around here.  
17 So, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

18 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you,  
19 Councilman King and I look forward to seeing you at  
20 the hearing where we examine the Catville  
21 construction process. Councilman Constantinides.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Thank  
23 you, Chairman Grodenchik, and I am so glad to say the  
24 word, Chairman Grodenchik, congratulations on your  
25 first hearing, sir.

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2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: And  
4 Commissioner, it's always great to see you. I have a  
5 few questions. So, talking about CPI parks out in  
6 Western Queens, is there a timeline relation to  
7 Astoria Health?

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [background  
9 comments, pause] Astoria Health is a procurement 85%  
10 complete, a schedule to be completed, procurement in  
11 April, which means it will start construction this  
12 year.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: So, we're  
14 talking about ground breaking sometime later on this  
15 year.

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: That's  
18 great to hear. [laughs] And then the—I know that we  
19 just recently had—I-I have Gepetto Square and I—what  
20 we affectionately call in Astoria the Cheese Box. I  
21 know that's on the—I use the Astoria lingo, you know.  
22 [laughs] The—the Cheese Box in Astoria that just  
23 went into scoping. That should be—we should be  
24 seeing design soon?

25 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Okay.

3 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [background  
4 comments] Alright. So, you'll see the conceptual  
5 design very soon.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: And we  
7 had—I know we had it in late October and November,  
8 but the months are all trying, you know, blend into  
9 one another at this point, but I know, but soon we'll  
10 see that particular design. [background comments,  
11 pause]

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay. Yes. The  
13 answer is yes. In terms of this whole design process  
14 that's scheduled in October, you'll—you'll see the  
15 concept before then, and then it goes to PDC before  
16 it gets finalized, but you will see the conceptual  
17 design raise.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: And as  
19 far as the Anchor Park Program, I know that Astoria  
20 Park was very excited to get those dollars. I think  
21 that's—oh, excuse me. I'm leading—I'm limited on the  
22 rights. (sic) The—we're looking at Phase 1 to begin  
23 this year—

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: --and  
3 construction.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: I mean  
6 that will be done by 2019.

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: No, 20--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: By 20--by  
9 19?

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Hold on a second.  
11 Astoria Park we'll say 2020? [background comments]  
12 2020 will be good.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: So the  
14 Phase 1 will be completed in 2020?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: On phase  
17 2 when are we looking at construction--procurement--

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] 2021.  
19 That should be--about a year, 2021.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: So, 2021?

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES Okay. So,  
23 we'll have procurement sometime this year.

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct, correct.

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Alright  
3 and then lastly looking at just conceptually right.  
4 So, I'm asking very specific questions about Astoria,  
5 but I think there are other larger questions about  
6 how we then fund—outside of Anchor Parks these large  
7 entities that are, you know, like these—that these  
8 that resemble my Astoria, the Astoria pool that are a  
9 huge construction project that is beyond of any, you  
10 know, one City Council member, one borough president.  
11 You know, you're talking in the neighborhood of \$40,  
12 \$50 million. How do we work together to  
13 conceptualize a way forward there?

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: As I stated  
15 earlier, this is all part of the budget process  
16 working with both the Mayor's Office and OMB. As we  
17 go through, we hear some of these, and then as we go  
18 through the process we'll determine what are some of  
19 the priorities. So, I hear you. We certainly  
20 understand what some of these (sic) are out there,  
21 but it is again part of the Capital Budget process  
22 that will, which is basically, you know, we'll have  
23 our hearing on March 27 to start to begin that  
24 conversation about some of the needs expressed  
25 throughout the city and from the Council members.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Because  
3 there are—I mean there are are—I mean there—you know,  
4 there are different needs. We have a playground  
5 that's \$3 million. That's easier to put that puzzle  
6 together than it is the larger part, and I think  
7 having the discussion about how we citywide look at  
8 these larger entities and say how do we at least  
9 begin the conversations on these large projects I  
10 think is important as well. If you know where the  
11 end is, you know how to build a road to it.

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Alright,  
14 great. Thank you Commissioner.

15 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you,  
16 Council Member Constantinides. I know it is possible  
17 [bell] to do it because we're doing the bridge over  
18 the LIRR that leads from the 7 Train into Flushing  
19 Meadow Park, and I was—it's a long time ago. I found  
20 the original maps at Borough Hall and Parks  
21 Department is hoping that it said MTA on the map, but  
22 unfortunately, it said Park Department. I think it  
23 was done on Commissioner Moses the last time. So, we  
24 look forward to that being completed. Councilman  
25 Deutsch has joined us. He will have questions for



2 you, but just a couple more from me. Conservancies  
3 have grown tremendously over the last few years in  
4 the city of New York and we welcome them. I wanted  
5 to know what roll if any they are playing in this  
6 initiative, these initiatives, and is the  
7 Administration planning to involve them in  
8 contributing some of their resources to lesser  
9 financed parks, and if so, will the resource  
10 contribution be focused only on parks covered under  
11 the initiative or will parks outside of the  
12 initiative zones will also be considered? I know  
13 that--

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] As to  
15 your last question, the answer is all parks will be  
16 considered. Central Park has a relationship with the  
17 historic Harlem parks that are not part of the CPI.  
18 They have their Institute Program that's helping  
19 parks throughout the city outside of the Community  
20 Parks Initiative. So, the answer is yes, and the  
21 same goes for the other conservancies. As I stated,  
22 there was a commitment of \$15 million through 2018.  
23 It was \$5 million per year. I'll just summarize some  
24 of the contributions from each one of the parks:  
25 Bryant Park Corporation that runs Bryant Park, they

2 contributed revenue from the Carousel and merchandise  
3 sales for 2014 and in 2015 we supported the community  
4 CPI outreach team comprised of AmeriCorps members.  
5 They also contributed \$250,000 toward a five-year  
6 study in CPI zones being conducted by CUNY and the  
7 New York City Parks, which I've mentioned to look at  
8 the health outcomes of residents who undergo park  
9 improvements. Central Park Conservancy: They  
10 completed 35 turf renovation projects in 15 different  
11 sites, and trained 160 park employees in turf  
12 management and techniques, and in terms of Friends of  
13 the Highline, they have been supportive. Their Green  
14 Council recruited 43% of their teens from the CPI  
15 communities, and Madison Square helped secure  
16 \$100,000 donation to help Von King Park New York  
17 Restoration project, plant 163 trees in Crotona Park,  
18 Classic Park Alliance helped with the design of  
19 various CPI Stroud and Epiphany and Pin Triangle.  
20 Reynolds Island is helping on the East Harlem  
21 Waterfront project. Battery Park Conservancy is  
22 helping our Green Thumb. So, throughout, all of  
23 these are either in kind or cash contributions,  
24 support the Community Parks Initiative. Some even  
25 though their commitment ended this year, continue the

2 relationship with these parks as well as other parks  
3 outside of the Community Parks Initiative zones.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Okay,  
5 barriers or removal of barriers among parks. I t's  
6 been said that that will actually improve park  
7 safety, and I appreciate that and parks can be lonely  
8 places at times. I have two very large parks in my  
9 district: Cunningham Park, which is totally in my  
10 district which is about 358 acres and Alley Pond  
11 Park, which is about 660 acres, which I share with  
12 Councilman Vallone. We can get lost in there really  
13 easily. They're big parts, tremendous stretches of  
14 forever wild. When--when you started to look at  
15 taking down the barriers to entrance to the parks,  
16 was the NYPD consulted?

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, they were.  
18 Before we even considered putting this into the  
19 OneNYC, we sat down with NYPD. Fortunately, there's  
20 something call CPTED. It is crime prevention through  
21 environmental design. They actually had experts  
22 within NYPD that was familiar with the approach as  
23 well as we had on staff. We went through the  
24 principles with them. They support it. We had to  
25 get their support before it was included in OneNYC,

2 and they fully supported and embraced the whole  
3 approach toward Parks Without Borders, which is a  
4 part of what we call CPTED..

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Alright,  
6 you're not going to quiz me on that are you?

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It's Crime  
8 prevention through Environment Design. It took me a  
9 while. Sometimes I get it mixed up myself.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Alright  
11 and to follow up on that, will removal of certain  
12 park barriers make it more difficult to enforce  
13 certain park rules such as for instance opening and  
14 closing times?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, this is not  
16 removal of fences or barriers citywide. The program-  
17 -

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES:  
19 [interposing] Yeah, I get that.

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: \$150 million have  
21 showcase and then pipeline projects, but we have  
22 conversations with the community. Certain fences are  
23 needed for sports, dog runs, children play areas,  
24 steep slopes. You need to have those security  
25 measures to keep the public safe, but in other areas

2 they certainly can come down, but it has no impact on  
3 enforcing our park rules. Someone can very easily if  
4 there's a fence, traverse a fence, but people are not  
5 permitted in our parks at certain hours after it  
6 closes whether there is a fence or not a fence and  
7 both NYPD as well as Parks, if they're available,  
8 will enforce those park rules.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CONSTANTINIDES: Okay. At  
10 this time I'm going to ask Councilman Deutsch if he--  
11 yes he does.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Thank you,  
13 Chair. Thank you very much. By the way, I just want  
14 you to know Commissioner that you have the funniest  
15 chairperson in the City Council chairing the Parks  
16 Committee. [background comments] I-I spent a-a week  
17 in Israel with Council Member Grodenchik, and I did  
18 not eat for a week. I was laughing all week, and  
19 he's really funny so--

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I hope he brings up  
21 the elements of the next hearing about the budget. I  
22 would certainly that. [laughter]

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: You have to--you  
24 have to watch when he gets serious.

25 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, now when  
3 someone wants to get, you know, their tree pruned so  
4 the procedure is either call 311 to call your local  
5 elected official to call the community board, and  
6 then hopefully it gets done sometime within the next  
7 few years. But, and if an individual homeowner  
8 wants to prune a city-owned tree in front of his or  
9 her home, then there is a way to fill out a permit,  
10 an application that the city would require—would  
11 allow the homeowner to get a licensed bog mill  
12 contractor to—to prune that tree. Now, if someone is  
13 building a house, and there is a tree like in the way  
14 after they file the Building Department permits, and  
15 they want to relocate that tree, then there's under  
16 certain circumstances the city would allow that  
17 property owner to relocate, not kill the tree, not  
18 cut the tree, but to relocate that tree. Can you  
19 first explain to me under what circumstances you  
20 would grant permission and what circumstances you  
21 would not allow?

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I don't think we  
23 have a team from forestry here. I'll have to get  
24 back to you on the relocation. This is—it's  
25 concerning. I'm not sure how successful a relocation

2 of a tree can be. I'm not sure in terms of the root  
3 system whether that tree can, in fact, survive, but  
4 I'd rather get one of our foresters to respond to  
5 your office directly on the specific rules about  
6 relocating the tree from one location to the other.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay. So-so  
8 there are specific rules when it could be done?

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'm not sure about  
10 relocating a tree because it is--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Matt?

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yeah.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Maybe you got an  
14 answers.

15 MATTHEW: Generally speaking and again, I  
16 think our forestry team can get back to you, but  
17 relocation of a tree is generally not really feasible  
18 for the--for the--for the tree's life. So, I think it,  
19 you know, there are other instances. You mentioned  
20 our plan review process where we work with DOB to  
21 review a homeowner's, you know, proposed plan  
22 building a new driveway or something like that, and  
23 if it is--there is going to be a tree impact, that  
24 tree will have to be removed, which generally

2 speaking to my knowledge generally means, you know,  
3 the end of the life of that tree.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, according to  
5 your knowledge, in your times working for the Parks  
6 Department, do you know of any time that a tree was  
7 granted to you to be relocated.

8 MATTHEW: Well, I'm not aware of an  
9 instance. We'll double check with our forestry team.  
10 I'm not aware of the actual relocation of a tree.  
11 There—we talk about tree replacement. There we talk  
12 about tree replacement, which is, you know, in  
13 essence a homeowner, you know if a tree has to be  
14 removed or it's unavoidable under circumstances—under  
15 certain circumstances, it will be approved by the  
16 agency, but there is what we call a tree replacement  
17 or restitution program.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Plus I—the reason  
19 why I'm pausing is I in my practice when I was a  
20 consultant, you know, I've seen trees, historic  
21 champion trees, and the cost of the tree to relocate  
22 it because it's a champion tree I mean you're talking  
23 about in some cases half a million. So, we need to  
24 find out (1) if we allow it, (2) the likelihood of a  
25 tree being relocated my guess is probably not, but we



2 want to check with our foresters about literally  
3 relocating a tree to another location unless it's  
4 just a sapling that was planted, and it's like a year  
5 old, but in terms of a the larger tree to remove  
6 that, you have to take the entire bowl, the root  
7 system and that could be quite extensive.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Alright thank  
9 you. Okay, now I want to—I'd like to talk about tree  
10 replacements.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: You've got six  
12 seconds.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: No, you got to  
14 give me--

15 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I'll give you  
16 more than six seconds. It's more than six seconds.  
17 [laughter] [bell]

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, now I'd like  
19 to talk about tree replacement. So, someone wants to  
20 replace that tree after filing the Building  
21 Department permits, what's the procedure on that?  
22 You have less than three seconds. Tell me in three  
23 seconds for the question.

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There is a standard  
25 formula that we use. We can share that formula with

2 you as well, but there's a formula they have to use  
3 depending on the caliper of species that has to be  
4 replaced.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, in-according  
6 to your knowledge does the city issue those permits  
7 for tree replacement?

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: What is the cost  
10 of that approximately?

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It' depends on-  
12 there's an assessment. It's various factors. We  
13 have to sit down and go over that.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Approximately.

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It varies.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: \$1,000, \$2,000?  
17 Is it more than \$10,000?

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I do not have that  
19 number off hand.

20 MATTHEW: Yeah, if I may, sir, it's-it's  
21 completely dependent on the size and caliber, which  
22 is the width of the tree, and the equivalent number  
23 of new trees that it will take to essentially replace  
24 that tree's impact especially over the course of  
25 time.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay. So, I had  
3 a--someone reached out to my office that it was a not-  
4 for-profit. In fact, it's a house of worship that  
5 they need to have a tree replaced. Because it's in  
6 the way of the expansion, and the cost that there  
7 were given was \$50,000, 5-0 thousand dollars. Is  
8 that possible, \$50,000?

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It is possible.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, if you have  
11 a program where you allow for people to take out a  
12 permit to--to prune their tree, why can't you allow  
13 them to replace that tree at the owner's cost and not  
14 charging the \$50,000 because for someone to replace a  
15 tree is not going to be nearly the amount of \$50,000,  
16 maybe a few thousand dollars.

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There's--there's  
18 restitution involved in that, but again we'll sit  
19 down with you to go over the schedule because tree  
20 replacement and restitution is not just a one-for-  
21 one. The tree has a value that could have multiple  
22 trees replace that one tree depending on the caliper,  
23 the age, the species. So, there's not just a quick  
24 answer tree for tree, and we'll certainly sit down

2 with you and have a forester explain it to you  
3 because it's not—it is complicated.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Well, can you  
5 just give me like a brief description of what the  
6 restitution is?

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: They make a  
8 determination about the value of that tree that is  
9 being taken down, and once--there's a whole chart  
10 that we used the national standards to determine what  
11 is the value of that tree, and then that then  
12 determines how many trees or the cost of that tree is  
13 given in value. It ranges across the board.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So how much--how  
15 much did it cost to like take down a tree?

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It would be  
17 \$100,000.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: A \$100,000. If  
19 you have a new—a tree that's maybe three years old

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Oh, three years old  
21 would be much less.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: It would be much  
23 less?

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So is that the  
3 price you're charging that--that--

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] No,  
5 the price is that there's a whole standard. We can  
6 share with the standard so you can see it. Its  
7 species, its age, its size, its condition, and each  
8 one of those has a monetary value. It is calculated,  
9 and that's how staff determines what is the tree  
10 restitution value for that tree.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, is the  
12 charge only for the removal of the tree and  
13 replacement?

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: No, not it's--it's  
15 the value of the tree that's being taken away.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, what's--  
17 what's the value defined?

18 MALE SPEAKER: I don't now.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: You don't know.

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Size, species, age.  
21 It is all the factors. There's a whole list. You  
22 determine how you calculate the value of that tree.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Okay, thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you,  
25 Councilman Deutsch. The last question, Commissioner.

2 A certain park is undergoing work pursuant to the  
3 Community Parks Initiative are also being targeted  
4 for renovations according to the Parks Without  
5 Borders Guideline. Has there been a difference in  
6 that in moving them forward or like a combination  
7 just like--? [background comments, pause]

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay repeat-repeat  
9 the question again, sir.

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Certain parks  
11 undergoing work pursuant to the Community Parks  
12 Initiative are also being targeted for renovations  
13 according to Parks Without Borders Guidelines.

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Oh, yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I'm sorry if I  
16 wasn't clear the first time.

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: So, how many  
19 parks are undergoing this work (a) and number 2 what  
20 types of renovations?

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: In terms of Parks  
22 Without Borders is—is now part of the agency's design  
23 philosophy. We take a look at the fence and the  
24 sidewalk adjacent to the park. So, it's not just  
25 applying to CPI or anchor parks. It's applying to

2 all of the 540 park projects that where it is  
3 appropriate, we have the conversation with the  
4 community about lowering the fence, making the  
5 sidewalk more appealing, the outer parks so to speak.  
6 So it's hard to quantify because now it's just part  
7 of our overall design philosophy.

8 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Is it going to  
9 make things more expensive? I hate to ask that  
10 question, but I have to.

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I would say would  
12 necessarily if it was not. If it is a budget issue we  
13 discuss that, but I do not think in terms of  
14 improving the sidewalk that I'm sure there's some  
15 additional costs associated with it, but I don't  
16 think it's substantial not at all.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay. Well,  
18 thank you, Commissioner. Thank you for being here  
19 this morning, Mr. Jury staff. We'll now be hearing  
20 from members of the public, and I would ask as we  
21 always do if you could leave some people behind to  
22 listen for—from the advocates and for the New Yorkers  
23 who love their parks. The first panel I'm going to  
24 ask you to limit your testimony to three minutes  
25 because I do have to surrender this conference room

2 at 1:00 but I have no doubt that we'll be able to  
3 hear from everybody who signed up. Lynn Kelly, New  
4 Yorkers for Parks; Heather Lubov from City Parks  
5 Foundation, and Everett Hamlet from Leave it Better.  
6 [background comments, pause]

7 LYNN KELLY: Good morning.

8 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Good morning.  
9 I'm going to ask that the committee counsel swear  
10 you. Oh, we don't swear them? Okay. I'm new at  
11 this. So, excuse me. Good morning, Ms. Kelly.  
12 Please begin.

13 LYNN KELLY: Good morning.

14 Congratulations.

15 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you very  
16 much.

17 LYNN KELLY: I want to point out we think  
18 this is the most important Council.

19 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I couldn't agree  
20 with you more.

21 LYNN KELLY: Wonderful and thank you for  
22 allowing me the time to speak today. My name is Lynn  
23 Kelly. I'm the Executive Director of New Yorkers for  
24 Parks. We are the citywide independent advocacy  
25 organization for parks and open space in New York.



2 We've been here in the past previously to testify in  
3 support of CPI and Anchor Park Initiatives, and we're  
4 actually pleased that the committee is going to  
5 convene another meeting to talk about the capital  
6 process in particular. We share some of the  
7 frustration that the committee and the New Yorkers do  
8 about the length of time on the capital process, but  
9 we do note the improvements that the Parks Department  
10 has made to speed up the process. One particular  
11 improvement was the implementation of the Capital  
12 Tracker tool, but we would add more specifically on  
13 this that we'd love to see it prominently displayed  
14 on the home page of NYC Parks so that there is more  
15 transparency for the public to really understand what  
16 is happening. Additionally, another concern we have  
17 with a key aspect of the CPI and anchor parks is that  
18 as you've well mentioned, there are smaller parks  
19 that are in the pipeline or in the backlog of the  
20 backlog of the Parks Department for much needed  
21 improvements that haven't been able to receive the  
22 type of big infusements of capital funding, and  
23 that's something that we think is important, but  
24 what's more important is that there is a comparable  
25 maintenance allocation for not just the capital

2 investment, but for these smaller parks throughout  
3 New York City. Well, the investment that we're  
4 making as a taxpayer is frankly moot. We need to see  
5 a more robust maintenance budget for the Parks  
6 Department in order to meet the capital needs.  
7 Lastly, I would like to say that while I'm delighted  
8 to be here in front of all of you, I am saddened to  
9 see that your committee does not have one single  
10 female representative. No, no, and I would like to  
11 work with you--

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: [interposing]  
13 You shared that with me.

14 LYNN KELLY: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I appreciate it.  
16 I've shared that with the Council Speaker.

17 LYNN KELLY: [interposing] Because 25 of  
18 the largest parks in New York City, advocacy  
19 organizations and capital project organizations are  
20 all run by women, and I think if you look in this  
21 room--can everybody raise their hands?

22 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I can see them.

23 LYNN KELLY: It's a majority of the  
24 audience. So I would hope that we could work  
25 together sincerely to convince Speaker Johnson why

2 it's so important that your committee represents 50%  
3 of the users of parks in New York City, and more than  
4 the majority of the management and caretakers of this  
5 administration.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: [interposing] I  
7 can assure you that we will take—I take my job very  
8 seriously. I know the members of the committee do as  
9 well. I wish it was more diverse in the sense of men  
10 and women, but that will not detract us at all from  
11 what we have to do.

12 LYNN KELLY: Than you.

13 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, are you  
14 done or--?

15 LYNN KELLY: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay. You had 20  
17 more seconds. Alright, Ms. Lubov.

18 LYNN KELLY: I promise to always keep it  
19 on time.

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, and thank  
21 you, and I think that that's an excellent suggestion  
22 on the Park Tracker because a lot of people may not  
23 be aware of it, and you know if you don't go to the—  
24 beyond the front page you don't see. It's like the  
25 cover of the newspaper. Ms. Lubov.

2 HEATHER LUBOV: Good morning. Thank you--

3 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Good morning.

4 HEATHER LUBOV: --Chair Grodenchik, and  
5 members of the Parks Committee. I'm Heather Lubov.  
6 I'm the Executive Director of City Parks Foundation.  
7 We're a private non-profit organization that uses  
8 performing arts, sports, environmental education and  
9 community building programs to bring people into  
10 parks. We believe that thriving parks play an  
11 essential role in creating vibrant and healthy  
12 communities. Complementary to New York City Parks  
13 Community Parks Initiative we work in more than 350  
14 parks around the city, and our site selection also  
15 reflects an emphasis on building equity across the  
16 city. We focus our programs be it a free puppet  
17 mobile performance or a summer soccer class for kids  
18 in parks that are under-resourced and prioritized by  
19 NYC Parks. We are a proud partner with NYC Parks on  
20 Partnership for Parks, which you've heard about a  
21 little earlier. Our jointly managed program that  
22 supports a growing network of leaders who care and  
23 advocate for neighborhood parks. As a private non-  
24 profit, we bring a different perspective to the  
25 table, and can play a key role in the Community Parks

2 Initiative, the Anchor Parks Initiative and Parks  
3 Without Borders. We're proud to report that we're  
4 directly addressing this administration's strong  
5 focus on equity thanks in large measure to the  
6 Council's Parks Equity Initiative. Partnerships is  
7 charged with bringing neighbors together for scoping  
8 and visiting sessions that provide input for upcoming  
9 renovations. After those scope meetings,  
10 Partnerships engages interested neighborhoods and  
11 that goes to Council Member King's question about  
12 those without conservancies to create sustainable  
13 park groups helping them to plan It's My Park Service  
14 projects and connecting volunteers to skill building  
15 workshops. Partnerships now actively supports more  
16 than 65 groups in CPI and Anchor Park sites. Long-  
17 term Partnerships helps groups stay focused and  
18 active by connecting them to additional resources  
19 including small capacity building grants, mentorship  
20 opportunities and a larger citywide network of  
21 volunteers. Throughout the city Partnerships for  
22 Parks is supporting more than 600 volunteer park  
23 groups including 300 groups in CPI targeted  
24 neighborhoods. Since the launch of CPI and Anchor  
25 Parks, we have distributed nearly 140 small grants,

2 and engaged nearly 38,000 volunteers through 1,200

3 It's My Park Service projects that help beautify and

4 improve parks in CPI targeted neighborhoods.

5 Partnership for Parks helps groups realize their own

6 visions for their communities, and most important for

7 all of you to note today the vast majority of our

8 technical assistance resources are available because

9 of funding from the Council's Parks Equity

10 Initiative. So, we—we owe an enormous thank you to

11 you and the Council for making that work possible.

12 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

13 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you and we

14 look forward to continuing to fund that initiative,

15 of course, and I want to thank both of you for being

16 with me, and sharing your expertise. I look forward

17 to working with you, and everybody in this room as we

18 go forward. Edward Hamlet you have a show for us.

19 EVERETT HAMLET: Yes, I have a trailer.

20 I'm doing a film on one of the 67 parks that are

21 being reconstructed, and I'm going to pull that up on

22 screen for you guys right now.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: [interposing]

24 Okay.

2           EVERETT HAMLET: Is it possible for me to  
3 put it up on the laptop?

4           CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: It's okay with  
5 me. I thought it was—is it set already?

6           EVERETT HAMLET: Oh, I'll try the audio.

7           CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

8           EVERETT HAMLET: Is the audio? It's on.

9           CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I'm Chair of  
10 Parks. Not Chair of Technology. [laughter]

11           AUDIO PRESENTATION:

12           MALE SPEAKER: Why are these parks being  
13 neglected?

14           FEMALE SPEAKER: No community should be  
15 saddled with more environmental burden and less  
16 environmental benefits than any other.

17           MALE SPEAKER: I don't want to neglect  
18 parks in communities of color.

19           FEMALE SPEAKER: Are these just  
20 neighborhoods that are gentrified?

21           MALE SPEAKER: Many of these are nothing  
22 more than blacktop, just asphalt. Not too—not too  
23 many places in the world that would call that a park.

24           MALE SPEAKER: My park, this is our home,  
25 you know.

2           EVERETT HAMLET:    That's me standing  
3 right in front of Public School 75 and that's me. I  
4 can go there in front of my house. I've lived in this  
5 neighborhood my whole life and I consider every inch  
6 of it my home. My name is Everett Hamlet, and I'm a  
7 young documentarian from the Bronx. I'm making this  
8 documentary on the New York City's Parkland Alliance  
9 for a playground, and my friends and I call it the 75  
10 Park Ride up. (sic) For as long as I can remember  
11 this park was neglected by the New York City Parks  
12 Department, but I entered this journey. I am  
13 concerned about that. (sic)

14           FEMALE SPEAKER:  Yeah, I'm a poor black  
15 child from the ghetto. These things make me  
16 different from you.

17           MALE SPEAKER:  They've always been in the  
18 Bronx for ever. I mean I don't think they were in  
19 the Bronx before it was called the Bronx. It was  
20 still part of Westchester.

21           MALE SPEAKER:  I was born and raised  
22 there in the South Bronx, and I am currently [sirens]  
23 standing in front of the Bryant Square Park.

24           MALE SPEAKER:  This is our home. You  
25 know, even though we have our houses where we sleep,



2 by day this is where we—we congregate. This is where  
3 we recreate. This is us.

4 MALE SPEAKER: These are the parks where  
5 people send their kids to play after school where you  
6 might walk your dog or where you'll take your toddler  
7 to play in the sprinklers on a hot day. These really  
8 are at the heart of neighborhoods.

9 EVERETT HAMLET: I started asking  
10 questions. I started reaching out to these boroughs,  
11 and this park apparently is a really big deal. A  
12 Brooklyn Expresso (sic) was opened in my neighborhood  
13 in 1973. According to the New York City Planning  
14 Department this made it one of the last rows of the  
15 New York City Express System to be built.

16 MALE SPEAKER: It was built so middle-  
17 class citizens could cut through the Bronx and headed  
18 into Manhattan for work.

19 FEMALE SPEAKER: These are the parks that  
20 haven't seen much investment in the last 20 years and  
21 stand in contrast to the major parks projects. They  
22 saw so much attention during the Bloomberg years.

23 FEMALE SPEAKER: Race and class are  
24 extremely reliable indicators as to where one might  
25 find a good stop like parks and trees and where one

2 might find the bad stuff like power plants and waste  
3 facilities.

4 MALE SPEAKER: I'm really looking forward  
5 to a turnout to this park. It looks like it's going  
6 to be a great and interesting new experience.

7 FEMALE SPEAKER: We're very proud of the  
8 fact that this park is going to get a whole new  
9 renovation, a whole new facelift like it's never seen  
10 before.

11 MALE SPEAKER: We don't want to neglect  
12 parks in community of color.

13 MALE SPEAKER: To the City Council it's  
14 important and we want to get more resources in the  
15 low-income parks.

16 MALE SPEAKER: But why would they neglect  
17 it for long? Why these neighborhoods? Why these  
18 parks. Why my neighborhood? Why my park?

19 EVERETT HAMLET: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you very  
21 much. [applause] I do want to say it's going to be  
22 my priority to make sure that every park gets the  
23 attention that it deserves, and as the people who  
24 testified before you said in part and the  
25 Commissioner said in part it's a matter of resources

2 and in some cases, and I have seen parks in very  
3 well-to-do neighborhoods as well that do not get the  
4 attention that they deserve. So, it's about advocacy  
5 and it's about working with the elected officials at  
6 community boards and the people in this room who care  
7 about parks, and we're going to push to make sure  
8 that the parks budget increases. It was an  
9 initiative in 2001, 1% for parks, which would be  
10 about \$868,080 million which would go a long way  
11 toward alleviating the problems that we have. So,  
12 that's something that I am looking into now. I do  
13 not control the budget of the city of New York, but I  
14 will be a very strong advocate. Nobody will be a  
15 stronger advocate for parks than I will, and as I  
16 said in my opening statement my life revolved around  
17 my park growing up. If it was two kids, it was stick  
18 ball, four kids it was basketball, and if we got 15  
19 to 20, it was softball. That's how—those were the  
20 rhythms of my life. So, those three acres were a  
21 piece of heaven for me. So, I appreciate it, and I  
22 am certain that Commissioner Rodriguez Rosa will get  
23 to the bottom of that park, and it seems to be under  
24 construction. I don't know if it's delayed or is it?  
25 What is the status now?

2                   EVERETT HAMLET: We just finished and  
3 we're waiting for the ribbon cutting.

4                   CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, wonderful.  
5 Is it open now?

6                   EVERETT HAMLET: Yes.

7                   CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, the ribbon  
8 cutting is not as important. It's the opening. So,  
9 thank you. Thank you for your testimony this morning  
10 and I look forward to working with you as we go  
11 forward. We're going to call up the next panel.  
12 Deborah—Deborah Martone or Martin. [background  
13 comments] Martin. Okay. Lisa Ortega, and Nilka  
14 Martell. I believe it's Martin as well so they're  
15 all here. Okay. Deborah Martin, if you could start.

16                   DEBORAH MARTIN: It's okay. [laughter]

17                   CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Nope, it doesn't  
18 matter, it doesn't matter where you sit as long as  
19 you're there. No problem. As long as you have a  
20 voice.

21                   DEBORAH MARTIN: Yeah. Welcome, Chair.  
22 Congratulations.

23                   CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thanks you very  
24 much.

2 DEBORAH MARTIN: I'm Deborah Martin.  
3 Yean.

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

5 DEBORAH MARTIN: So, I'm Deborah Martin.  
6 I'm Executive Director of New York Restoration  
7 Project. We're a city-citywide conservancy focusing  
8 on open spaces in high need communities only. So  
9 that's parkland but it's across all jurisdictions and  
10 including community gardens that we own and hold in  
11 public trusts. We are very happy about the anchor  
12 park and CPI-CPI obviously, and that's because we're  
13 driven by the belief that access to high quality open  
14 space is a fundamental right of every New Yorker for  
15 the reasons that we just eloquently pointed out. Not  
16 just because they're pretty or good for recreation,  
17 but every day science tells us, and there's more and  
18 more to relation of evidence that access to nature  
19 and open space improves mental and physical health.  
20 It reduces crime, and it encourages economic growth.  
21 Because of all this, our city's shared-shared land is  
22 the foundation of equity. It's that fundamental to  
23 everything else that happens in our city. At NYRP  
24 we've been active participants in both the Highbridge  
25 and the Saint Mary's Park Anchor Park visioning. We

2 have seen the commitment of fellow community-based  
3 organizations as the process—process moves forward  
4 first hand. At Highbridge Park, we are the  
5 conservancy of record. So, we've been working  
6 closely with Parks Department on the visioning and I  
7 wanted to say that the Parks Department has done an  
8 excellent job in prioritizing community priorities  
9 that existed there for decades like addressing  
10 deteriorating infrastructure, poor pathways,  
11 neglected entrances and—and similarly at Saint Mary's  
12 they've been very responsive. At Saint Mary's we're  
13 a member of the Healthy and Livable Mott Haven  
14 Coalition that includes the New York City Department  
15 of Health. It includes Bronx's Blooming New York  
16 Road Runners. So it's a broad group of 15  
17 neighborhood organizations. It's been integral for  
18 promoting active parks used for a long time now with  
19 programs like Second Saturdays that delivers free  
20 health activities from May to October. Anchor Parks  
21 is driving tremendous improvements, but we still need  
22 investment for programming and coalition building  
23 that's exemplified by the Healthy—Healthy and Livable  
24 Mott Haven. Recent studies by the Rand Corporation,  
25 which is an independent policy research organization

2 show that programming and community investment in  
3 local parks is the single biggest driver of use.  
4 Groups like Healthy Living—Livable Mott Haven have  
5 provided important programming and continue to do  
6 that, but for this work to grow, and to be sustained  
7 over time it will require support in marketing,  
8 programming and planning resources. We recommend  
9 that the Council develop an annual funding initiative  
10 like Parks Equity or Greener NYC, which I have to say  
11 MRP has been a recipient of, and we're very grateful  
12 for that, and that allows us to do programming [bell]  
13 both in our parks and community gardens. That would  
14 demonstrate and ongoing investment to the idea that  
15 social justice and environmental justice are  
16 inseparable and that our open spaces are strongest  
17 when communities lead in their stewardship program,  
18 and ultimately in their care over time.

19 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: If you could  
20 send me an outline on what you'd like to see funded  
21 in the initiative, I obviously can't promise.

22 DEBORAH MARTIN: Yes.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I don't—I never  
24 promise. You'll never hear me promise [laughter]  
25 anything or very, very rarely I should say except

2 that I'll be somewhere, but-but I would be curious to  
3 see what you have and to see maybe whether or not it  
4 could become part of the Parks Initiative that we  
5 already have but I look forward to hearing from you  
6 on that.

7 DEBORAH MARTIN: Thank you. I will send  
8 that, and I will say that the most important thing  
9 that happens in parks happens after the ribbon  
10 cutting.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: There is no  
12 question.

13 DEBORAH MARTIN: Right.

14 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: The most  
15 important thing that happens in Parks is whatever  
16 people do--

17 DEBORAH MARTIN: [interposing] Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: --and--and our  
19 parks, as I said in my opening statement they mean--as  
20 many people as we have that's what they mean to those  
21 people.

22 DEBORAH MARTIN: Exactly. Yeah.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: So, you know, I  
24 don't play basketball any more but I do play  
25 [laughter] golf now. So, Ms. Ortega.



2 LISA ORTEGA: [off mic] Yes, I just want  
3 to say--

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: You've got to  
5 press the button. [background comments] It should be  
6 working.

7 LISA ORTEGA: It is--okay, now I've got  
8 it. Yeah.

9 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: You got it.

10 LISA ORTEGA: Just real briefly. I just  
11 wanted to say Just real briefly I just wanted to say  
12 that for community rep--before I introduce myself  
13 before, community members are told that we matter.  
14 We need to change the process in here, because having  
15 Council people have round two's and talk about  
16 personal trees while we have community members who  
17 are left at the end to speak where people are leaving  
18 is truly disrespectful and we feel like it's a horse  
19 and pony show, and this service.

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: It's--it's--it's  
21 not--unfortunately, this is a very busy day for a  
22 hearing.

23 LISA ORTEGA: Right, I just wanted to  
24 comment the process itself is horrible.

2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I actually moved  
3 the hearing--

4 LISA ORTEGA: [interposing] It should be  
5 changed.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: -- from the 26<sup>th</sup>  
7 today because it was even busier on Monday.

8 LISA ORTEGA: That's something we can  
9 talk about--

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: I appreciate  
11 your comments, though.

12 LISA ORTEGA: --but yes. However, my  
13 name is Lisa Ortega and I have lived in the Bronx and  
14 I'm part of a grassroots organization called Take  
15 Back the Bronx. (sic) We have utilized Lyons Park  
16 a/k/a PS 75 Park for over 24 years. In our South  
17 Bronx section of the Bronx, Lyons Park represents  
18 many things to us. Some of the history of Lyons Park  
19 has not always been good. There has been many  
20 shootings and fights, and the park had been left to  
21 decay. My own son was shot in the face in that park  
22 at 19 while playing basketball resulting in the loss  
23 of his right skull and his right eye, and to this day  
24 he suffers from seizures. Even with these horrific  
25 events such as this that have taken place in that--in

2 that park in the past, it has always been our park  
3 regardless. We in the community made the memories  
4 there mixed in with some of the unfortunate events  
5 that took place there, we also had birthday parties,  
6 relaxed, enjoyed, had conversations while our  
7 children ran in the sprinklers and played with one  
8 another. Now, more than ever there is a great  
9 opportunity for Lyons Park to become a place of  
10 healing, reclaiming, bonding and rebuilding for our  
11 community ties. Since the park has been reopened,  
12 there has been a sense of hope that once again  
13 beautiful memories can be made there. Being able to  
14 have access to the Partnership for Parks Catalyst  
15 team members such Diami, Linza and Ted have been  
16 instrumental for us. They have provided a space and  
17 facilitated meetings where we were able to come  
18 together as a community and put forth our visions for  
19 a park. Many of us had different ideas and strong  
20 personalities, which the Catalyst team members helped  
21 us to put into concrete short-term and long-term  
22 goals for our park. It was helpful, and much needed.  
23 It gave us the opportunity to re-bond with one  
24 another and work as a unified force. Realistically,  
25 resources are needed to ensure we are able to have

2 programming happening that engage our community in  
3 positive activities. The physical improvements are a  
4 priority as well. New updated and safe equipment in  
5 our park is a must for us to fully get Lyons Park and  
6 feel safe with the young children playing there.  
7 Often times in low-income areas of color such as  
8 ours, we are forgotten and expected to make do with  
9 what we have. I suppose it's because it is what we  
10 already do. So, we've been overlooked. I'm here  
11 today to let Council members know that our community  
12 and our children deserve to have access to the same  
13 monies and services as other more affluent  
14 neighborhoods have, and we expect that the funding  
15 continue to flow. Thank you for your time [bell] and  
16 attention in this matter.

17 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you for  
18 your testimony, and I'm sorry to hear about your son.  
19 I think that this administration, and I've taken them  
20 to task for other things, but they have certainly  
21 shown and Commission Silver has shown a commitment to  
22 Parks that were neglected and that was the basis of  
23 this hearing to see how they're doing. We hope that,  
24 and we asked them about today, myself and several  
25 other Council members, I asked them about that, and I

2 will be asking them next month at the Preliminary  
3 Budget to see if we can continue this, and it is a  
4 commitment that I'll make today and I have already  
5 made to increase funding for parks that are baselined  
6 because we can talk all day about what we'd like to  
7 see in our parks, but at the end of the day it does  
8 take—it takes the narrow money or whatever you want  
9 to call it. So, we will continue to push for that,  
10 and we need advocates like yourself because that's  
11 what elected officials like myself are expected to  
12 respond to, to be quite frank with you. Thank you  
13 for your testimony, Ms. Ortega. Ms. Nilka.

14 NILKA MARTELL: Hi. Good morning. My  
15 name is Nilka Martell, Founder of Loving the Bronx.  
16 We are the stewards of Virginia Park and Hugh Grant  
17 Circle, two beautiful parks within—within the  
18 Community Parks Initiative zone. That's District 18  
19 City Council District.

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: And what part of  
21 the Bronx is that?

22 NILKA MARTELL: Parkchester.

23 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

24 NILKA MARTELL: Yeah, but when you get  
25 off at the train station. Since their reopening in

2 1956, the public has not had access to these fenced  
3 off parks. We are elated to know that both parks  
4 will be renovated through the Parks Without Border  
5 Initiative.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Are they public  
7 parks, are they--

8 NILKA MARTEL: [interposing] They are.  
9 They're public parks with fences, with locks that you  
10 can look at the green space.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: So, they're not  
12 open? Are they open or--?

13 NILKA MARTEL: Well, through the Parks  
14 Without Borders Initiative they will be.

15 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

16 NILKA MARTEL: At least Hugh Grant Circle  
17 will be.

18 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

19 NILKA MARTEL: Virginia Park has a large  
20 green space which is fenced off and then a sitting  
21 area. So, you are--you know, you can go to Virginia  
22 and sit in the sitting area, but you don't have  
23 access to the green space at all.

24 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

2 NILKA MARTEL: So, we're, you know, of  
3 course Parks Without Borders Initiative is, you know,  
4 great for us because we'll see these renovations, and  
5 we'll actually count on it.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Is there a  
7 reason that they've given you why they—I—I know--

8 NILKA MARTEL: You know, they were  
9 reconstructed. They were ren-renovated in 1956, and  
10 when they were, they were—they were—those fences came  
11 up.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

13 NILKA MARTEL: Last year through the help  
14 of Partnership for Parks, Loving the Bronx received a  
15 \$5,000 grant from City Council members Park Equity  
16 Initiative funds. We held a series of Fun Friday  
17 events, weekly themed programming providing free  
18 community events at Virginia Park. We were able to  
19 host 17 events and two It's My Park Day community  
20 service events. Partnership for Parks also provided  
21 Loving the Bronx with and additional \$23,000 from the  
22 Parks Equity Initiative Funds for this year's  
23 programming. We have over 20 events planned at  
24 Virginia Park and Hugh Grant Circle for 2018. None  
25 of this would be possible without the help of

2 Partnership for Parks and funds made available  
3 through the PEI. So, we look forward to further  
4 activating our local parks and green spaces to ensure  
5 that they're serving the public and as volunteers we  
6 are grateful for the Parks Equity Initiative Fund so  
7 that we can further enhance our parks and  
8 programming.

9 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you and--  
10 and who's your Council Member?

11 NILKA MARTEL: Right now it's Senator  
12 Diaz. I don't think that he's active right now.

13 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: He's a new one?

14 NILKA MARTEL: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, okay. He's  
16 here. He's here. He's active. So, thank you for  
17 your testimony, and thank you for--

18 NILKA MARTEL: [interposing] Okay.

19 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: --your work.  
20 Thank you for being involved. [background comments]  
21 We're going to add a seat, Mr. Sergeant-at-arms,  
22 please. Marcel Negret. [background comments] If I'm  
23 mispronouncing your name I'm sorry. I do pay  
24 attention to such matters because my name is  
25 constantly butchered. Lucy Koteen, Anita Reyes, and



2 Marilyn Johnson. [background comments, pause] This  
3 will be the last panel unless somebody else signs in  
4 now. So--[background comments, pause] Marcel. I  
5 think he's--you're outnumbered over there.

6 MARCEL NEGRET: Yes, I am. Hello. Thank  
7 you so much. My name is Marcel Negret. I'm a  
8 Project Manager at Municipal Art Society of New York.  
9 Today, I want to raise attention to a specific type  
10 of park, which is classified as jointly operating  
11 their playgrounds.

12 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Yes.

13 MARCEL NEGRET: MAS believes that jointly  
14 operated playgrounds are crucial to the provision of  
15 quality and accessible parks and open space in the  
16 city particularly in underserved neighborhoods. JOPs  
17 are defined as operated by one--by one--by more than  
18 one agency, the Parks Department, and particularly  
19 the Department of Education. The city has  
20 consistently acknowledge the importance of  
21 playgrounds in achieving its long-term open space  
22 goals and improving park equity. Contrary to these  
23 efforts, a recent development initiated and approved  
24 the City at the Marx Brothers Playground in East  
25 Harlem sets a dangerous precedent that may put many

2 JOPs at risk throughout all five boroughs. In  
3 response, MAS urges the City Council to uphold the  
4 city's long-term vision treating parks and opens  
5 spaces as essential components of New York's  
6 neighborhoods. There are 116 JOPs within the CPI  
7 zones. They provide over 144 acres of open space and  
8 recreation opportunities. There's a map behind the  
9 testimony highlighting the geography of the CPI zones  
10 and those JOPs that overlap. There's about a—about a  
11 dozen JOPs within the CPI zones that are currently  
12 receiving capital funding under the CPI initiative.  
13 Based on the latest census data under Parks  
14 properties dataset, the open space ratio, which is an  
15 indicator of the degree to which neighborhoods are  
16 served by open space it's 0.93 acres per 1,000  
17 residents within the CPI zones. This is 30-38% below  
18 the city median of 1.5 acres per 1,000 residents or  
19 63% below the city's goal of 2.5 acres. Without  
20 JOPs, these neighborhoods will be further underserved  
21 by open space, which would have long-lasting diverse  
22 impacts on the quality of life of residents and widen  
23 the gap of the city to achieve its open space goals.  
24 In addition, JOPs have figured prominently in the  
25 city's open space policy, and have been continuously

2 identified as key-key infrastructure necessary to  
3 accomplish citywide and long-term open space goals.  
4 When NYC identifies a playground as having an  
5 important role in creating these neighborhoods that  
6 promote and active-and healthy lifestyle, JOPs make  
7 an indis-indispensable contribution to OneNYC's  
8 objective of increasing the percentage of adults and  
9 high school students that need recommended levels of  
10 physical activity. I just wanted to highlight this  
11 because as I said in the beginning there's a project  
12 that's putting at risk Marx Brothers Playground, MAS  
13 and-and-and with several other prominent civic-civic  
14 organizations has filed a lawsuit to prevent this,  
15 which would [bell] put a privately operator (sic) to  
16 construct a 700-foot residential tower on that site.  
17 So without that, we think this is a very dangerous  
18 precedent for all these JOPs. I hope I-I made my  
19 point, but if you have questions--

20 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: You did and I  
21 have met with the Director of the Municipal Arts  
22 Society, Ms. Goldstein, and we have discussed this  
23 for a while. So, but I'm glad you made it on the  
24 record today. So, thank you.

2 MARCEL NEGRET: Thank you. I-I also have  
3 copies if you are interested.

4 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

5 MARCEL NEGRET: Thanks.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Ms. Koteen. I  
7 hope I'm pronouncing that correctly.

8 LUCY KOTEEN: [off mic] Correct.

9 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

10 LUCY KOTEEN: Is this on?

11 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: We've had  
12 problems with that one.

13 LUCY KOTEEN: [on mic] Yes, how's that?  
14 Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Lucy Koteen. I'm  
15 representing an organization called Friends of Fort  
16 Green Park today, and I will begin. The city has a  
17 policy to increase shade tree canopy by 30% by 2030  
18 referred to as 30x30. Knowing, as you must, that the  
19 city plans to increase resiliency and decrease storm  
20 water runoff, how does it fit to cut down 58 mature  
21 shade trees, some as tall as 60 feet, and remove two  
22 large earthen mounds by noted landscape architect  
23 A.E. Bye, which places another 14 large trees at risk  
24 given the city's resiliency policy. I just want to  
25 say I'm sorry Costa has left because I wanted to talk

2 to him further about the resiliency issues. I'm here  
3 to discuss the PWB plan for the northwest corner of  
4 Fort Greene Park. The Parks Department plans to  
5 spend \$10.5 million here for a totally unnecessary  
6 and wasteful new design plan that involves removing  
7 58 large trees and building a 43-foot wide hardscaped  
8 plaza. NYCHA residents that are direct-directly  
9 across the street from the park use this park  
10 extensively. This is a widely used park by school  
11 children, athletes, mothers with children, public  
12 housing residents, and has a wide diversity of use by  
13 all races and religions. The few NYCHA residents who  
14 know about the plan are totally opposed to the  
15 redesign. Yes, they do want the Myrtle Avenue  
16 sidewalk be built, which was allowed to fall into a  
17 disgrace condition. They do want the torn up cement  
18 paths rebuilt, new lighting and benches, the  
19 basketball court repaved, increased barbecues and an  
20 increased workout center. They do want the four  
21 drainage issues resolved. They do not want the two  
22 large mound that are used by all removed, beautiful  
23 big shade trees removed, the border stone wall  
24 removed and a large highscape plaza that invite  
25 commercial-commercial usage into the park built. The

2 concept that the park needs to be open to the street  
3 and that trees need to be clear cut so that an  
4 unobstructed view of the monument is created strikes  
5 park users and local residents as beyond absurd. No  
6 one has asked for this. The people in the area truly  
7 appreciate the border that surrounds the park, and  
8 the separation from the hustle and bustle of the  
9 street. If you want to talk about equity, then talk  
10 about consistent maintenance in the park, and giving  
11 park users what they want. The Parks Department  
12 frequently gave misinformation to the people in  
13 public discussions and community meetings, and to the  
14 community board, and did not listen to the keen  
15 community people who attended these meetings. The  
16 only we could get factual information about the trees  
17 was through the FOIL process. There was no  
18 transparency from the Parks Department. They refused  
19 to give information when requested. The one thing  
20 all park users agreed upon was the need for a newer  
21 renovated comfort station. The Parks Department says  
22 that rebuilding the comfort station would come under  
23 operating budge [bell] and not capital budget.  
24 Therefore, it did not fit into their \$10.5 million  
25 budget. As we all know, money is fungible. Not only

2 that, but I have a list of nine public bathrooms  
3 being built with capital money, which was provided to  
4 me from the Comptroller's Office. You should know  
5 that Public Advocate James's request for an EIS has  
6 been ignored. I'm almost done.

7 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay.

8 LUCY KOTEEN: With so many parks needing  
9 funding, why is the Parks Department allowed to spend  
10 excessively on project plans that no one asked for  
11 and no one wants? There are too many needs in the  
12 city to waste money will not actually be essential.  
13 As one NYCHA resident adds: How is it possible that  
14 we can go without heat for a week in freezing weather  
15 when right across the street from us they are  
16 planning to spend money to remove beautiful big shade  
17 trees that benefit the neighborhood and creates  
18 something—and create something that we don't want? I  
19 wish I had known about this plan earlier so I could  
20 protest it. I was never informed. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you for  
22 your testimony, Ms. Koteen. Ms. Reyes.

23 ANITA REYES: Good afternoon.

24 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Good morning,  
25 good morning, good afternoon. It must be that time.

2 ANITA REYES: I'm on a roll 100% to the  
3 City Council. My name is Anita Reyes. Thank you for  
4 inviting me to testify today on the impact that Mayor  
5 de Blasio's Community Parks Initiative or CPI has  
6 made on the neighborhood that I grew up in, and that  
7 today is still home to most of my family. First,  
8 though, let me tell you a bit about myself. Born in  
9 the Bronx in the early--

10 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: [interposing]  
11 Me, too, but not in the early '70s.

12 ANITA REYES: Well, that's good. (sic)  
13 [laughs] I was the first American citizen in my  
14 family. Both my parents came from the Dominican  
15 Republic as teenagers, and labored most of their  
16 lives in factory jobs to ensure my siblings and I got  
17 a good education. We lived near the Corner and Field  
18 and Alder Street in what we then called the  
19 Morrisania section of the Bronx, a rough neighborhood  
20 if ever there was one. My sister was stabbed to  
21 death at 18. My brother died of a gun shot at 20.  
22 To date, fortunately the neighborhood is a much  
23 friendlier place than it was when I was 19 or 20.  
24 Lyon Square Park is one of those reasons why that's  
25 the case. The park, one square block in the shadow



2 of the elevated Bruckner Expressway has recently been  
3 renovated thanks to the Mayor's Community Parks  
4 Initiative. The park has been transform from the  
5 desolate crime ridden patch of concrete buzzing with  
6 bullets into a bright spot in a neighborhood that now  
7 has hope. The physical improvements to the park  
8 inspire neighborhood residents to care about their  
9 park. I cannot tell you how important this is to me  
10 and my family. For immigrants from a different  
11 country Lyon Square Park was our patio or back yard.  
12 For all its problems and safety issues, it was still  
13 all we had. Today, it's still all there is for many  
14 people in the nearby area, and the CPI has made that  
15 all it is—all there is a whole lot better. I along  
16 with scores of residents and stakeholders thanks to  
17 the Parks Department and Partnership for Parks,  
18 Catalyst Program have now begun the process of  
19 activating the park or in plain English: Making sure  
20 that the community is organized, the park used  
21 properly and that its programs serve the widest  
22 variety of people. Everyone doesn't always agree on  
23 what's best. We're New Yorkers--

24 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: [interposing] No  
25 we don't.

2 ANITA REYES: --or Bronxites after all,  
3 but we do all agree that it can never go back to the  
4 way it was before. Thank you for your support of the  
5 CPI. On behalf of Lyon Square Park, I hope you'll  
6 see fit to continue and even increase your support  
7 for the park, and other parks like it in high needs  
8 areas across the city.

9 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you very  
10 much, and I'm sorry for your losses that you  
11 described here today. There's no going back as far  
12 as I'm concerned. I grew up in public housing in the  
13 1960s. It was a wonderful place to live. I can  
14 remember the days when my parks because there was no-  
15 bottle bill was loaded with the debris, all the  
16 bottles that were broken and all the glass. We had a  
17 very dedicated park keeper, but he was hard pressed  
18 to keep up with all the garbage there. That park has  
19 been transformed, even though I thought it was an  
20 oasis as a child. We had a nightly for softball,  
21 which helped with public safety and when the lights  
22 went out, there were Local 3 electricians in the  
23 league, and they brought in their own bucket truck  
24 and fixed them themselves because, you know, it was  
25 the '70s and we couldn't wait for fixing. So, we're

2 not going to go back. The city has moved so far  
3 forward, but it's important that we all move forward  
4 together and that no park is neglected. That is not  
5 always easy to accomplish, but I know that myself and  
6 the members of this committee and—and our Speaker  
7 Corey Johnson is dedicated to our parks, and look  
8 forward to working with you and people like yourself.  
9 So thank you for being here today.

10 ANITA REYES: Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: And the last  
12 person of the day Ms. Johnson. You share the surname  
13 with our Speaker so I'll give you an extra minute for  
14 that.

15 MARILYN JOHNSON: Thank you. Good  
16 afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to speak.  
17 My name is Marilyn Johnson. I—I work as a Parent  
18 Coordinator at East Bronx Academy for the Future. I  
19 am the founder of Synergy Community Improvement  
20 Association. I am a Community Board 3 member, and I  
21 also founded Neighbors Helping Neighbors. I've  
22 lived, worked, raised my children, shopped in my  
23 community for the past 35 years. When I—the park  
24 that I am discussing is Seabury Park which is right  
25 adjacent to my school. When I first moved to the

2 area, Seabury was a nice place. It was maintained  
3 well by the Parks Department, and there was a Seabury  
4 Daycare Center right next door to it, and we used to  
5 take the children there on a daily basis when it was  
6 nice out. For over the past 30 years, I've seen this  
7 park deteriorate. I've seen it grow. I've seen it  
8 with drug dealers, and bottles and prostitution and  
9 drug transactions and fights, and needles, all kind  
10 of things left in the park when it was unattended.  
11 Thank God that we have the opportunity to work with  
12 Partnership for Parks and get this renovated. We had  
13 an opening ceremony and a ribbon cutting, et cetera,  
14 et cetera. I personally would like to be a steward  
15 of the park because I'm the only one in that  
16 particular part-particular area that actually lived  
17 in the community and have—we partnered with—I have a  
18 speech here but I can't [laughs] I'm not focusing.  
19 We sent you guys some pictures to talk about the  
20 things that we've done in our parks. I've worked  
21 with several community-based organizations over the  
22 years, which was Synergy Community Gardens 2.0 with  
23 Future Star Productions, Red Code, Mid-Bronx  
24 Desperados, and quite a few more. We received a  
25 grant this year 2017 to be in Partnership for Parks

2 Division cohort, and Lonnie was our point person. We  
3 went down to Cole Street me and my team and we worked  
4 on our visioning projects of how we wanted to see,  
5 what we wanted to see, and the project was given a  
6 lot of resources, and a lot of tools to help us to  
7 continue to build our community. We work with MED and  
8 the local farmers came in front of the park to sell  
9 fruits and vegetables, but we dismantled that  
10 relationship because they was bringing soil, fruits  
11 and vegetables and things with bugs in it, and our  
12 seniors and our students was going over there, and  
13 our families was eating their products and we didn't  
14 want to have a relationship with that farmers market  
15 any more. We have rallied, we have petitioned, we  
16 have done so many things inside and outside of that  
17 park to help to maintain it. We plan to—we worked  
18 with the gardener from the Parks Department. We've  
19 planted flowers and herbs and things like that, and  
20 we've seen it [bell]—seriously go down. My point is  
21 I'm happy to be a part of a grant that we received in  
22 2016 to revise not only that part, but Synergy  
23 Garden, which is a few blocks away from that area. I  
24 think that the Parks Department does great work, and  
25 I continue to work with them, and be a part of the

2 process. My thing is maintaining afterwards because  
3 a lot of times there's money thrown into different  
4 areas and communities and there's no maintenance  
5 afterwards. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Thank you very  
7 much, Ms. Johnson and—and I think you hit it on the  
8 head. We can build the nicest parks in the world,  
9 but if we don't maintain them then it's kind of  
10 useless, and the parks are what we make of them. You  
11 know, they are our parks, and we all have our  
12 favorite park or favorite parks, and do it's  
13 important that we be involved, and so many  
14 organizations that are here today are working with  
15 communities across New York City to make sure that  
16 people are involved, they get involved and they  
17 remain involved, and through those efforts because  
18 people use parks I am hopeful that we'll be able to  
19 get a larger share of the New York City Budget going  
20 forward. I also want to note the—we've been joined  
21 by Councilman Borelli. Thank you. I mentioned  
22 Conference House Park.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: [off mic] Which  
24 has the greatest number of acres.

2 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: He's got more  
3 park—you have the most park acres? Okay. Even  
4 bigger than Mark Jonah with Pelham Bay Park.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: I probably have  
6 five.

7 CHAIRPERSON GRODENCHIK: Okay, he has  
8 five, and we're also joined by—Eric Ulrich as well.  
9 With that, seeing no other testimony, I am going to  
10 close this hearing. I thank you all for being here  
11 today, and I look forward to seeing you for the  
12 Preliminary Budget hearing in March. [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date March 20, 2018