

Hearing before the New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation Oversight: Fiscal Year 2018 Preliminary Budget March 21, 2017

#### Testimony By: Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP Commissioner & Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations

Good morning, Chair Levine, members of the Parks Committee, and other members of the City Council. I am Mitchell Silver, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. I am joined here today by a number of our senior staff, including First Deputy Commissioner Liam Kavanagh, and Matt Drury, our Director of Government Relations. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to discuss the agency's Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2018.

Thanks to the leadership of Mayor de Blasio and a strong partnership with the City Council, I'm pleased to report on the progress we've made over the past year. Our testimony will be supplemented by our "Report on Progress," which we released this morning. The report examines the status of the strategic initiatives that have guided our agency's efforts since the beginning of this Administration. As we gear up for the Spring and hopefully some warmer weather, we can look back at 2016 as a particularly exciting year for NYC Parks. Our dedicated employees, working closely alongside elected officials, and supported by thousands of volunteer groups and other park partners, continue to implement our vision of creating and sustaining thriving parks and public spaces for all New Yorkers. These efforts reflect our agency's central mission: caring for our parks and public spaces, planning parks that are resilient and sustainable, and thoughtfully building a park system for present and future generations to enjoy. As I think we can all agree, an outstanding city requires outstanding parks and public spaces, and I'm extraordinarily proud of the job we've done to provide those spaces to residents and visitors alike.

Upon arriving to the agency two and a half years ago, it became immediately clear to me that our employees were dedicated, creative and hard-working, but that there were opportunities to make our processes more transparent, carefully coordinated and efficient. I made it my number-one priority to look closely at the agency's capital process, and I am extremely proud of our efforts to bring transparency and accountability to a process that many said was confusing and unwieldy. Today, any New Yorker who is curious about any city Parks capital project that is



underway can get an update about that project's status within seconds using the Capital Projects Tracker, and the website has seen 282,000 visits since its creation. The average time to complete design on our capital projects in Fiscal Year 2016 was 54 days shorter compared to Fiscal Year 2015, nearly two whole months. The average construction project completed in Fiscal Year 2016 took 99 fewer days than in Fiscal Year 2015. While I acknowledge that many of you have faced frustrating delays on projects you have funded, and you will inevitably be able to point to projects in your district that have taken far too long, I would ask that you keep in mind that these process reforms will take time to make themselves felt. As recently funded projects begin to benefit from a significantly improved capital process, I have no doubt that you will come to agree that we have made important strides towards delivering critical park improvements to your constituents more quickly. On the operations front, we piloted an exciting new model for trash management in our large parks even as we continue to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of our mobile cleaning crews citywide.

It seemed clear early in my tenure that we were missing opportunities to directly engage New Yorkers in helping plan for the future of their park system, so we established new opportunities for community engagement across the board; within our design process, communities are now telling us, first-hand, the features and amenities they value most in their parks, so our designs can better reflect their needs and priorities. Our community scoping sessions have included thousands of attendees, all of whom feel invested in the future of their parks, because they helped shape what those parks will become. For the first time in the City's history, we encouraged New Yorkers to directly nominate parks they thought would benefit from our "Parks Without Borders" design approach. We received over 6,000 submissions from the public, from which we were able to select eight signature projects to receive \$40 million in capital improvements. We launched a citywide conversation about how we can create a more seamless public realm with a Summit in 2016 that brought together experts and thought leaders, students and community activists to weigh in on the future of the park system. And we enlisted over 2,200 New Yorkers in an effort to catalogue every street tree in NYC using cutting edge technology that now allows us to track the caretaking efforts impacting each and every tree.

But we recognize there is always more work to be done, and we continue to strive in every way to be responsible stewards of public dollars, while implementing our innovative and inclusive approach to ensuring that our parks serve all New Yorkers. Thanks to the support of the Mayor and our partners at the City Council, we have deployed additional cleaning staff during the times



our parks are most heavily used, created a "step in" program to replace staff that are redeployed to beaches and pools during the summer season, hired additional gardeners to beautify parks throughout our Community Park Initiative neighborhoods, and significantly increased the ranks of our Park Enforcement Patrol in all five boroughs. At the same time, we are investing \$150 million dollars to transform Anchor Parks in each of the five boroughs and to date, the City has invested over \$318M in Mayoral capital funds through our Community Parks Initiative to reenvision parks and playgrounds that hadn't seen investment in decades. With an operating budget that has increased by 18% since 2014 and a record-level \$4.5 billion worth of investments in critical park infrastructure in our capital plan, Mayor de Blasio continues to demonstrate this city's commitment to building a more equitable park system for all New Yorkers.

I'd like to introduce Matt Drury, our Director of Government Relations to help provide more context and detail about the agency's efforts as we head into Fiscal Year 2018.

Thank you, Commissioner Silver, and thank you to the Council for the opportunity to testify today. I'd like to begin by outlining some key facts and figures that help illustrate the scale and diversity of what we do at NYC Parks. We are the steward of over 29,000 acres – 14 percent of New York City's land mass – including 10,000 acres of natural areas. We oversee nearly 4,500 individual properties, ranging from parks and playgrounds to community gardens and Greenstreets. There are currently **515** active capital contracts for Parks improvement projects, including **190** in design, **148** in procurement and **177** in construction.

The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2018 reflects the agency's on-going priorities, providing for operating expenses of \$487.5 million, a significant increase over the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2017. The Preliminary 10-Year Capital Plan, in combination with the current Fiscal Year, provides a total Parks Capital budget of \$4.5 billion, with \$657 million in Mayoral funding for approved new capital needs. The Mayor's FY18 Preliminary Budget reflects a strong budget for NYC Parks, as this administration continues to invest the resources we need to get the job done. In the Preliminary Budget, there were several key additions to the 10 Year Capital Plan, including \$82 million in funding for street tree planting, as well as significant investments in critical state of good repair items: retaining walls, boilers & HVAC systems, playgrounds & comfort station repair, park bridges, investments in our agency vehicle fleet and safety upgrades



for our recreation and nature centers. While these additions may not make headlines, they are critically important to sustaining our parks and recreational facilities into the future.

The Mayor's Preliminary Budget allows us to continue delivering on NYC Parks' Framework for an Equitable Future, released in October 2014, which has served as our guide in delivering meaningful improvements to our parks and public spaces. In Fiscal Year 2018, we will announce 11 additional new capital sites set to receive park improvement projects through the Community Parks Initiative, our Agency's signature effort to distribute city resources in a fair and focused manner. Launched in 2014, the Community Parks Initiative has invested \$318 million to date in Mayoral capital funding to strengthen parks and public space in under-resourced and high-poverty neighborhoods, transforming more than 67 sites citywide.

The positive impact of CPI is already being felt in communities all over New York City. Since the launch of CPI, over 2,100 community representatives have participated in 45 design meetings, allowing park users, neighborhood leaders, community board members, and elected officials to provide input on the future design of their neighborhood park.

Neighborhoods across the city have benefitted from immediate, high impact improvements completed by in-house crews, and we are pleased to report that we expect to cut the first ribbons at some of our CPI sites this summer. In the meantime, Partnerships for Parks Outreach Coordinators have engaged with 50 park groups and enlisted over 12,000 volunteers in park clean-up projects in our CPI neighborhoods. Younger park visitors have benefitted from new programming, thanks to the Playground Associates and Urban Park Rangers we have deployed to these neighborhoods-- last year we had over 500,000 visits to our programming sites.

Our parks are an essential part of our urban fabric: anchoring neighborhoods, enriching lives, and supporting communities. Our newest initiatives focus on designing and building our parks with the entire public realm in mind. To that end, in 2016 we launched Parks Without Borders, a new approach to park design. It focuses on the accessibility and connectivity of three main areas within our parks: the entrances, edges, and adjacent park spaces, which are the places where parks and the surrounding neighborhoods interact most directly. We have applied this design approach in a few ways: we've allocated \$40 million of Mayoral funding to construct a set of eight showcase projects receiving large-scale capital redesigns, we dedicated an additional



\$10 million to help expand the scope of some existing capital projects already in process, and when and where appropriate, we are seeking to incorporate this design philosophy into new everyday capital projects. Design on the showcase projects should conclude by the end of this calendar year, and we look forward to introducing these reimagined spaces to the public by early 2020.

Given the needs of a fast growing city, a commitment to equity also means we need to continue improving our parks and playgrounds in all neighborhoods by updating aging infrastructure and adding green space to areas most in need. In August 2016, Mayor Bill de Blasio and members of the Council joined NYC Parks in announcing an investment of \$150 million for major improvements at five large parks, one in each borough, known as the new Anchor Parks Initiative. These parks act as anchors to their surrounding communities by providing large, diverse recreational resources. Through Anchor Parks, we will invest in new resources like soccer fields, comfort stations, running tracks and walking paths, transforming these parks for the 750,000 New Yorkers who live in the neighborhoods that surround them, and make these older parks feel new again.

Each of the Anchor Parks is a key community asset and the \$30 million in Mayoral funding for each site will make a major impact. We are happy to share with you today that all of five of our Anchor Parks projects are well into design for their initial phases, and have benefitted from wellattended public input meetings, so that the priority improvements at each park can be shaped by the local residents that know these parks best. We anticipate completing design by the end of 2017 and getting construction underway by late next year.

But beyond making significant capital improvements to our parks and facilities, we are working to improve our management practices to ensure cleaner, safer, and more enjoyable park experiences for all New Yorkers.

Our dedicated maintenance and operations staff do their best to keep our parks in the best condition possible, and new programs are making their work more efficient every day. You may recall that in recent years, we expanded our "Operations for the 21st Century" pilot, aka Ops.21, to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of our mobile cleaning crews citywide. With new performance guidelines, the pilot yielded 500 extra hours of cleaning time each day—the equivalent of an additional 63 full-time staff. Complementing these performance guidelines, we



launched a new playground repair and inspection program, deployed additional cleaning and horticulture staff at peak and weekend times, and recruited new seasonal "Step-In" staff to make sure our parks and playgrounds stay clean while we simultaneously expand our focus to our beaches and pools. But we continue to seek to innovate. In this past year, through a successful partnership with the Central Park Conservancy, Crotona Park in the Bronx was the site for a trash management pilot program overseen by our Innovation & Performance Management team, which produced impressive results. We are also pleased to announce the creation of a new senior management position, a Chief Operating Officer, to oversee our Borough and Citywide Maintenance and Operations teams, and help us continue finding smarter ways to marshal our resources. Lastly, as more and more people rely on smartphones to access information, we are working on the mobile optimization of our agency website, to make sure that New Yorkers and visitors can have up-to-date information about our parks and programs at their fingertips.

At the same time, we are using technology to collect previously unavailable information that can help us make better decisions about our resources. In one pilot program, we have placed Soofa Benches— solar-powered smart benches—throughout Highbridge Park in Manhattan and the Bronx to gather visitation data to create better maintenance schedules, programming opportunities and park designs. The use of technology, and the exciting initiatives that support it, can greatly improve our ability to care for our parks.

With this data in hand, NYC Parks will be even stronger stewards of our thriving urban forest and natural areas. Our street trees create a tree canopy that reduces both air pollution and the heat island effect. Over 10,000 acres of natural areas throughout the City, including forests, wetlands, and dunes, provide both protection from the elements and a unique opportunity for New Yorkers to connect to our natural environment, which also includes abundant wildlife—over 600 species to be exact. This past year, NYC Parks helped launch WildlifeNYC, a campaign to increase public awareness about urban wildlife in the city, from soaring hawks to curious coyotes, to help New Yorkers live safely and harmoniously with the wildlife that call New York City home.

In 2016, NYC Parks also completed our ambitious TreesCount! program, which surveyed and cataloged street trees in all five boroughs. Over 2,000 trained volunteers participated in the survey, using mobile devices to map 130,000 city blocks containing 666,134 street trees of 132



different species. Utilizing this data, we launched an online Street Tree Map which brings New York City's urban forest to your fingertips. The map allows every New Yorker to access information about every street tree in New York City and allows users to mark trees as favorites, share them with friends, and record their caretaking and stewardship activities. The Street Tree Map tells the story behind every street tree in New York City, encouraging more educational and stewardship opportunities. Furthermore, through a partnership with the City Council, we are exploring how to post more information about our street tree maintenance efforts online. Information such as tree pruning and tree planting schedules will give New Yorkers greater transparency into our forestry operations and will connect them to our urban forest like never before.

But a healthy tree canopy is just one element of creating a strong and resilient New York City. The devastating impact of Hurricane Sandy illustrated the importance of our city's coastlines, including the 156 miles managed by NYC Parks, which accounts for 25% of the city's coastlines. Parks and green space absorb stormwater. Dunes and wetlands protect our coastlines. Together they create the critical infrastructure needed to keep our neighborhoods strong and resilient.

Since 2012, we have established new coastal dunes, rebuilt the Rockaway boardwalk, and continued to restore our wetlands, all of which help to protect our communities. In collaboration with city, state, and federal partners, we replenished beaches and are renovating facilities to better withstand flood hazards. We are also collaborating on the design and implementation of integrated flood protection systems, along the coast of Staten Island as well as a 2.4-mile stretch of Manhattan's East River Waterfront.

NYC Parks is protecting inland communities with new green infrastructure, natural elements or engineered systems that manage stormwater. Through a network of forests, wetlands, street trees, and greenstreets, we are encouraging stormwater management that relies on plants and trees, rather than sewers and rivers. In partnership with the Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Transportation, NYC Parks is expanding bioswales and permeable paving in neighborhoods that experience flooding during rainstorms.

As the Commissioner noted earlier, we remain laser-focused on improving the efficiency of our capital process and we saw tangible results in 2016. Comparing projects that completed design



in Fiscal Year 2015 to Fiscal Year 2016, we were able to reduce the average time period for design by 54 days, nearly 2 whole months. In past years only 20% of our project designs were being approved by the Public Design Commission on their first submission, but that approval rate is now 83%. We automated and standardized the process to compile our contract books, which used to take two weeks and now can be done in only two <u>hours</u>. In Fiscal Year 2015, the agency processed 407 change orders, which can delay construction considerably. After a dedicated effort, in Fiscal Year 2016 we reduced the number of change orders by 78%, from 407 to 90, and nearly a quarter of our Fiscal Year 2016 construction projects were completed over 30 days earlier than their scheduled construction completion date. The average construction project in Fiscal Year 2016 took 99 fewer days than in Fiscal Year 2015. Keep in mind, these improvements are all taking place in the context of the highest volume of individual projects ever seen by the agency—as we mentioned earlier, over 500 separate capital projects currently underway.

As our agency-wide efforts and initiatives look to support sustainable and equitable park development, on a day-to-day basis, we rely on our expert staff and our partners to invigorate our parks and public spaces through our Placemaking efforts and creative programming, thanks in large part to support from Council Members. Throughout 2016, our Shape Up NYC classes turned parks in all five boroughs into fitness studios. Park events like Winter Jam, Fall Field Day and Street Games transformed our parks into winter wonderlands and playful destinations. In our playgrounds, more than 660,000 kids participated in our Kids in Motion program, and in our outdoor "theaters", we screened almost 500 movies for thousands of New Yorkers. Our Urban Park Rangers led hiking, canoeing, and birding outings, giving nearly 45,000 New Yorkers the opportunity to explore the natural beauty of our city. Through our public art program, 81 temporary installations were on view in our parks, and in partnership with UNIQLO, \$200,000 in grants will allow local artists to showcase their work in park spaces that have been historically underserved by cultural programming. In addition, maintenance was performed at more than 500 Parks monument sites throughout the city, helping to keep these historic and important assets in top form. In our pools, almost 32,000 children and adults participated in Learn to Swim programs and at our public beaches, our committed lifeguards helped protect New Yorkers as we again prevented any drowning fatalities during our beach season. At our recreation centers, veterans and people with disabilities can now purchase an annual membership for \$25 per year, while we reduced the fees for tennis permits in half.



All of these efforts are driven by our commitment to robust community engagement, and we are grateful for the thousands of volunteers and dozens of non-profit partners who work side-by-side with NYC Parks staff to care for our parks. We recognize thriving parks and open spaces require not only dedicated staff, but also strong nonprofit partners, and enthusiastic volunteers, who make our parks beautiful and active centers of community life.

Partnerships for Parks, our public-private program managed jointly with the City Parks Foundation, supports a growing network of individual advocates and organizations dedicated to their local neighborhood parks and green spaces. Partnerships for Parks equips local leaders with the skills and tools needed to transform neighborhood parks and green spaces into dynamic community assets. In 2016 alone, Partnerships for Parks supported over 700 community groups and encouraged close to 25,000 volunteers to participate in stewardship projects in hundreds of parks. GreenThumb, our community garden program, is the nation's largest urban gardening program, assisting over 600 community gardens, including 41 new community gardens in 2016. This expansion is thanks in large part to the permanent transfer of 34 previously-temporary community gardens to our GreenThumb program, the largest single addition of permanent community garden space in more than a decade. GreenThumb works with nearly 20,000 garden members across New York City through education workshops and events. Thousands of members and volunteers donate nearly one million hours each year to community gardens that provide New Yorkers with access to safe, open spaces, and fresh, healthy food. In fact, this Saturday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, GreenThumb will be holding its annual GrowTogether Conference focusing on how to sustain our community gardens. We hope you are able to join us for what should be a wonderful day.

Our non-profit partners, such as conservancies, cultural organizations, zoos, environmental centers, historic houses, and community-based organizations, help provide a diversity of activity and support for our parks. In 2016, several of these partners continued their efforts to enhance the Community Parks Initiative, and as of this date are on track to meet or exceed their initial commitments. A few examples: the Prospect Park Alliance has led design and public engagement efforts on two CPI parks. The Randall's Island Park Alliance has helped improve and program Thomas Jefferson Park and is now working to organize community stakeholders along the East River Esplanade. The Central Park Conservancy has undertaken 25 renovations at 15 different parks, helped train 68 CPI gardeners, and provided expertise towards our new waste management pilot for Crotona Park in the Bronx.



The progress we have made in recent years is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our Parks employees and thousands of volunteers, partners and park users. In accordance with Mayor de Blasio's vision for parks equity, they have all played vital roles in making our Parks, and by extension our city, greener, healthier and more beautiful.

I'll now ask Commissioner Silver to offer some closing thoughts.

Thank you. We understand that our parks are an essential part of our urban fabric: anchoring neighborhoods, enriching lives, and supporting communities. In nearly every measurable way, NYC Parks has thrived these past three years. The Parks Without Borders initiative and Summit set forth a new vision for parks across our city and around the world; the Community Parks and Anchor Parks Initiatives are bringing hundreds of millions of dollars in capital investment to renew precious neighborhood assets; our coastal resiliency work has brought beachgoers back to our beaches in droves; and the scores of targeted initiatives and improvements across our system brought immediate impact to everyday park users. These actions provide a deep and solid foundation upon which to grow. We are now able to bring greater equity and innovation, more advanced planning and placemaking, and a higher standard of care to every single one of our sites. Our park system is strong, and growing stronger.

Thank you for allowing us to testify before you today and for your dedication to providing great parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers. We look forward to continuing to work with the Mayor and the City to create a bright, green future with a more equitable and innovative park system. We value your partnership and thank you for your support of our agency. Now, we would be happy to answer any questions that you may have. T 212.360.1305 F 212.360.1345 City of New York Parks & Recreation

The Arsenal Central Park New York, NY 10065 www.nyc.gov/parks

March 21, 2017

Dear Friends:

I am pleased to share with you NYC Parks' *Report on Progress 2014-2016*, which highlights new NYC Parks' initiatives, progress, and accomplishments.

This report celebrates the achievements of NYC Parks and the work of our dedicated staff, partners, and volunteers to ensure that our parks and public spaces thrive. Since 2014, we have launched new programs to improve neighborhood parks and playgrounds, renovate the larger parks that anchor communities, and transform the edges, entrances, and sidewalks surrounding parks to help make them more open and welcoming. We have also restored miles of beaches and boardwalks, reached our goal to plant one million new trees citywide, served thousands of New Yorkers through public programming, and leveraged new technologies and data-driven approaches to improve service.

In the coming years, we will celebrate groundbreakings and ribbon cuttings through our the Community Parks Initiative, which is investing in neighborhood parks and playgrounds; the renovations of five Anchor Parks across the city, which will serve more than 750,000 New Yorkers; and continued improvements to the already exceptional of maintenance, enforcement, recreational and educational programs.

Thanks to your enduring support and dedication, I know we will continue to bring the benefits of parks and public spaces to residents and visitors alike.

See you in the parks!

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Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP









This page: Hunter's Point South Park, Queens, Cover: Shoelace Park, Bronx.

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### <u>Welcome</u>

#### Dear Friends,

To create a fairer, stronger city, we need a resilient and world-class parks system that all New Yorkers can enjoy. Parks are everything to so many New Yorkers who can't afford a vacation. Parks are where they see nature, relax, and spend time with family. Yet for too long, less-advantaged neighborhoods received the least in parks investment.

In 2014, we released our Framework for an Equitable Future, a roadmap to creating and restoring public spaces in all five boroughs and reversing decades of inequity. We have committed more than \$1.6 billion to improve historically underfunded green spaces citywide through Community Parks, Anchor Parks, and other initiatives.

Neighborhoods across town are already seeing major changes. We've revamped playgrounds, basketball courts, ball fields, and community gardens in dozens of parks. We've made free fitness programs like Shape Up NYC and Kids in Motion available to more than a million kids and adults. We are constantly working to use technology to connect New Yorkers with their public spaces through interactive maps, construction updates for all major park improvements, and opportunities to comment on our efforts.

This report details our accomplishments and the many ways our administration, NYC Parks, and Commissioner Mitchell J. Silver are working to build a brighter, greener future for every New Yorker in every zip code.

Thanks,

Bill de Blairs

**Bill de Blasio** MAYOR City of New York

YC Par Martin Luther King Jr. Park, Manhattan.

### Introduction

N ew York City's parks are the physical, cultural, and ecological hearts of neighborhoods. They provide space for residents to relax, play, and connect with one another. And with 29,000 acres citywide, nearly every neighborhood has a park, playground, garden, or plaza to call its own.

Our parks are an essential part of New York's social and physical infrastructure. Active, inclusive, and lively public spaces can transform neighborhoods, serving as catalysts for community engagement, development, and resiliency. Diverse ecological systems support both recreational activities and protection from the elements.

Since 2014, NYC Parks has made significant investments to transform high-need parks citywide. We are also enhancing our planning and community engagement efforts, expanding free programming, planting new trees and gardens, and improving the resiliency of our coastlines. We continue to collect new data and use new technologies to help direct resources and deploy staff where they are needed most. And thanks to knowledgeable and dedicated employees, partners, and volunteers, we are bringing the benefits of parks and public spaces to more New Yorkers than ever before.

### Our park system spans 29,000 Acres

#### Vision and Mission

In 2015, we revised our vision and mission statements to reflect NYC Parks' innovative and inclusive approach to ensuring that our parks serve all New Yorkers.

At NYC Parks, we seek to create and sustain thriving parks and public spaces. To achieve this, we work to:

Plan resilient and sustainable parks, public spaces, and recreational amenities.

Build a park system for present and future generations.

📫 Care for parks and public spaces.

Macombs Dam Park, Bronx.

# An outstanding city starts with outstanding parks and public spaces."

Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP Commissioner, NYC Parks



### Our Strategy

N YC Parks is dedicated to creating and maintaining thriving parks and public spaces. Parks sustain healthy communities, connect neighborhoods, and improve quality of life for all New Yorkers. To realize a bright, green future for our parks, we are working to be more innovative, inclusive, and resilient.

NYC Parks has identified four interconnected priorities that reflect our commitment to vibrant communities, a healthy environment, innovation, and equity.

#### **NYC Parks Priorities**

**Equity:** Prioritizing an equitable distribution of resources and programming, and enhancing our outreach efforts to increase community participation and feedback.

Planning and Placemaking: Developing new experiences and ways to engage with New Yorkers in building and enriching our parks.

Innovation and Technology: Applying technology and data-driven approaches to improve our efficiency and decision-making processes.

Caring for Parks: Making an important transition from maintaining to caring for our parks by engaging broader and more diverse stakeholders.





#### A Bright, Green Future

NYC Parks' Framework for an Equitable Future, released by Mayor Bill de Blasio and Commissioner Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP, in October 2014, details our commitment to creating thriving public spaces for all New Yorkers.

The Framework presents a series of initiatives to support sustainable and equitable park development. It also launched the Community Parks Initiative, the cornerstone of our equity agenda, which brings new capital investment, maintenance, programming, and partnership development to high-need neighborhood parks in dense and growing communities.

The Framework was designed to help us deliver meaningful improvements to our parks and public spaces. Using the Framework, we are improving the connection between NYC Parks and communities, applying more transparent processes, and using innovative and data-driven approaches to planning and caring for our parks. As a result, New Yorkers will have greater access to clean, beautiful, and well-designed parks.

## Framework for an Equitable Future



NYC Parks' Framework for an Equitable Future identifies nine initiatives that support a more inclusive and forward-looking park system:

#### Community Parks Initiative Ongoing

Designing or contracting for renovations at 56 parks. Completed 85 improvement projects and served 1 million children through expanded summer programs.

#### Programming for Neighborhoods in Need Ongoing

Launched interagency partnerships to expand recreational programming.

#### Standardized Maintenance Ongoing

Improving crew training, assignments, and routing. Created expert playground maintenance team.

#### Streamlined Capital Process and Online Tracker *Complete*

Completed analysis to increase efficiency and developed an online tracker. Increased vendor outreach and established engineer training.

#### Parks Needs Assessment Launched

Developing a new program to collect data on the state of park assets. Began inspections for select assets.

### Parks Usership Program

Developing a new program to collect data on park use and attendance.

### Parkland Expansion

Opened 12 Schoolyards to Playgrounds sites. Continuing to acquire and develop private land.

### Recreation Center Renovations

Designs underway for infrastructure improvements, architectural enhancements, and other upgrades at 11 buildings.

#### Regional Parks Strategy Ongoing

Announced \$150 million investment to transform five large anchor parks serving more than 750,000 New Yorkers.

This page: In August 2016, NYC Parks broke ground on Thomas Boyland Park in Brooklyn, the first Community Parks Initiative renovation, two months ahead of schedule. Facing page: NYC Parks released its Framework for an Equitable Future in 2014.

#### **Community Parks Initiative**

The Community Parks Initiative (CPI) is strengthening parks and public spaces in under-resourced and high-poverty neighborhoods through a five-year, \$285 million capital program. The program is transforming more than 67 sites citywide. As part of CPI, we are renovating small parks and playgrounds, making targeted improvements, and installing green infrastructure. We are also expanding programming, enhancing outreach and engagement, and building new community partnerships.

NYC Parks is working with communities to reimagine and rebuild neighborhood parks. Through outreach, scoping sessions, and other meetings, we are consulting with local residents to understand their vision and to identify key features, needs, and programming interests. We are also supporting the growth of local parks groups to sustain community involvement.



We used a data-driven approach to select the CPI sites. Starting with the parks that received less than \$250,000 of capital investment over the past two decades, we analyzed demographic data and trends to identify neighborhoods with greatest need. We then reviewed inspection data and conducted on-the-ground surveys to select parks that could provide a range of recreational opportunities and are integral to neighborhoods.  $\odot$ 

#### Over 1 Million Children Participated in Kids in Motion sites in CPI neighborhoods and Summer Sports Experience programs in 2015 and 2016



2,400 Community Stakeholders Have participated in public input meetings across the city



#### \$50 Million

In green infrastructure funding allocated by the NYC Department of Environmental Protection

#### Vibrant Public Spaces

NYC Parks relies on expert staff and creative programming to bring our parks and public spaces to life. Shape Up NYC classes turn parks into fitness studios. Park events like Winter Jam transform Central Park into an urban ski resort. Alley Pond Park provides a beautiful backdrop for both team building and individual growth with its supervised adventure course. Thousands of playgrounds and dozens of recreation and nature centers expose people to parks resources and help visitors make the most of their parks.

Our Urban Park Rangers lead hiking, canoeing, and birding outings year-round. Recreation staff offer sports activities and Learn to Swim classes, while staff at Computer Resource Centers provide programs to improve technical skillsets. Our 36 recreation centers have more than 162,000 members who visited more than 4.2 million times in fiscal year 2015. We host more than 15,000 special events annually, from our Street Games event and SummerStage concerts to races and food festivals.

Participation in our programming increases each year. With the support of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and private donors, we now offer on average 275 free fitness classes each week through the Shape Up NYC program, including 20 bilingual classes. In partnership with the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the New York City Housing Authority, NYC Parks expanded the Kids in Motion program, which had more than 660,000 visits across 102 sites citywide in 2016. And in collaboration with the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, we screened 461 movies at free events in neighborhoods across the city.

#### **Art and Antiquities**

Our city's parks are the greatest outdoor public art museum in the United States. Since 1967, we have brought thousands of temporary public pieces to the parks, featuring renowned and emerging artists. Our Citywide Monuments Conservation Program, a public-private partnership now in its 20th year, cares for more than 845 monument sites, from the Chief Nimham Memorial in Van Cortlandt Park to the Washington Square Arch. Since 2014, we installed seven new permanent works of art, published the Artist's Guide to NYC Parks Public Art Sites, produced an online map of public art and monuments, curated 12 new gallery exhibitions, and brought on our first-ever historian-in-residence.

Clockwise from top left: Claremont Pool, Bronx; Raptor Fest at Prospect Park, Brooklyn; the Summer Sports Experience jamboree at Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center, Bronx; a Junior Knicks basketball tournament at Brownsville Recreation Center, Brooklyn; Skycycles by Paul Villinski at Ocean Breeze Track and Field Athletic Complex, Staten Island; Fall Field Day at Highbridge Park, Manhattan.

60 Camping Trips Hosted by the Urban Park Rangers in 2015 and 2016



**111 Public Art Exhibitions** Across the city's parks in 2015 and 2016

31,832 Children and Adults Participated in our Learn to Swim programs in 2016

**3,500 People** Attended the first-ever Fall Field Day event in Highbridge Park in 2015



















Clockwise from top: Volunteers plant trees at Rockaway Community Park, Queens; sunflowers in a GreenThumb garden; a Shape Up NYC class at Gertrude Ederle Recreation Center, Manhattan. 41 GreenThumb Gardens Opened in 2016

**34 Chicken Coops** House 120 chickens in GreenThumb gardens





#### **Community Engagement**

Parks staff engage with the community on many levels: Our Recreation staff play basketball with teens and kids, while our Urban Park Service and Parks Enforcement Patrol officers keep our patrons and our parks safe. Dedicated volunteer coordinators lead fun and educational park activities, like TreesCount!, a citizen science project that worked with over 2,000 volunteers to map and collect data from more than 666,000 street trees across New York City.

The input and support of our users is essential to making sure that our parks meet the needs of all New Yorkers. The park design process begins with the community input meeting. In these meetings we talk to the children, adults, and families who know their parks the best—and know what can make them better. This valuable feedback helps guide the future design of parks. We have increased our outreach efforts, changed the time and format of our community input sessions, and created new online tools, making it easier to share ideas. The more feedback the better!

#### NYC PARKS PARTNERS

Thriving parks and public spaces require dedicated staff, strong nonprofit partners, and enthusiastic volunteers to make our parks beautiful and active centers of community life. Key partners in this effort include:

**Partnerships for Parks,** a public-private partnership with the City Parks Foundation that supports a growing network of leaders who care and advocate for neighborhood parks and green spaces. Partnerships for Parks engages over 1,000 groups year-round.

**GreenThumb,** the nation's largest urban gardening program, assists over 600 gardens and nearly 20,000 garden members across New York City through education workshops and events. Thousands of members and volunteers donate nearly 1 million hours each year to community gardens that provide New Yorkers with access to safe, open spaces and fresh, healthy food.

Nonprofit partners, such as conservancies, cultural organizations, zoos, environmental centers, historic houses, and communitybased organizations, bring a diversity of activity and support. Twenty of these partners, including Prospect Park Alliance and the Bronx River Alliance, have management or maintenance and operations agreements with us.

185,000 Visits To Shape Up NYC classes in 2016



**50,000 Volunteers** Engaged through Partnerships for Parks since 2014

### By the Numbers







### **Report on Progress**

W ith increasing frequency, parks and open spaces are playing a more central role in the development and evolution of cities. NYC Parks is enthusiastically embracing this responsibility: Over the past two years we have secured extraordinary new investments for our parks and public spaces, and have improved our agency's processes. Through smart staffing practices, and with the support of new technologies and data collection efforts, we are increasing effectiveness, transparency, and accountability. The benefit of these changes? A cleaner, safer, and more enjoyable park experience for you and your community!





16.4% Increase in NYC Parks' Budget Over the past two years

Canoeing on the Bronx River.



**66** Parks are not optional. They are an essential part of our city's infrastructure."

-Signe Nielsen Mathews Nielsen Landscape Architects, P.C.

#### **Caring for Parks**

Expert staff and volunteers dedicate their time and passion to caring for parks, working together to improve, clean, and beautify our public spaces. By better understanding how our parks are used, implementing new ways to track our spending, and providing our staff with necessary resources, we are repositioning ourselves to better care for parks.

#### EFFICIENCY

NYC Parks manages upward of 500 major construction and design projects at a time, ranging from full-scale reconstructions to resiliency upgrades and green infrastructure installations. The techniques and methods we use to plan, build, and care for our system must be carefully coordinated and highly efficient.

In June 2014, NYC Parks started looking closely at our site assessment, design, procurement, and construction processes. We improved coordination and management procedures and brought transparency and accountability to the process by launching an online tracker that shows the status of each capital project. We streamlined the design process, increased outreach and engagement efforts with our vendors, and reduced the number of change orders. These changes have already reduced the overall completion time of projects by an average of five months.

#### EFFECTIVENESS

From 2013 to 2015, NYC Parks expanded its Operations for the 21st Century pilot to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of our mobile cleaning crews citywide.

With new performance guidelines, our mobile crews have been able to clean parks more efficiently through smarter resource management and optimized routes. This has yielded 500 extra hours of cleaning time each day—the equivalent of an additional 63 full-time staff! Complementing these performance guidelines, we launched a new playground repair and inspection program and deployed additional cleaning and horticulture staff. These efforts are paying off with cleaner, better maintained parks and playgrounds.



#### Employee Profile: Karen Pedrosa

Karen is the Deputy Chief of Recreation in the Bronx. She has been working for NYC Parks for 12 years and has dedicated her life to giving back to the Bronx community. Nicknamed "Mom" by the kids she works with, Karen has been a mentor to many children. One of them, Tina Charles, started on Karen's basketball team in Roberto Clemente Park and went on to play center for The New York Liberty and earn two Olympic gold medals.





Clockwise from top: Aquatics staff at Liberty Pool, Queens; playground repair at Kissena Park, Queens; monuments conservation artisans apply a protective coating to Marshall Fredericks' Freedom of the Human Spirit (1964) in Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Queens.



#### **SMARTER PARKS**

Through our tech and data initiatives, we are using technology to collect previously unavailable information to improve our ability to care for our parks. One pilot has placed Soofa Benches—solarpowered smart benches—throughout Highbridge Park in the Bronx and Manhattan. Working in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Technology and Innovation, we are using the Soofa benches to count park visits by tallying Wi-Fi-enabled mobile devices. We can use this data to create better park designs, maintenance schedules, and programming opportunities.





#### **Connecting with NYC Parks**

More than 310,000 users connect to NYC Parks through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Periscope, and Snapchat to learn about activities and events. Our new live broadcasts showcase unique park sites, including a tour of the arch at Brooklyn's Grand Army Plaza with Commissioner Silver and a hike along the historic Old Croton Aqueduct in the Bronx with our Urban Park Rangers.

Left: A still image from a Periscope broadcast at the Lunar New Year celebration in Sara D. Roosevelt Park, Manhattan. Top: A new Soofa bench in Highbridge Park, the Bronx.



Number of NYC Parks' social media followers:

50,900 on Instagram

151,000 on Twitter

**21,100 on Periscope** 



#### **Employee Profile: Gar Mint Huang**

Gar Mint has been a day camp director and water aerobics instructor at Tony Dapolito Recreation Center in Manhattan for four years. Last summer, he led a class for adults aged 65 to 90, using techniques he learned from the American Red Cross and through his own research. His classes offer adapted exercises for seniors with differing physical needs. Gar's students found his enthusiasm infectious and thanked him by declaring Aug. 26, 2016, Gar Mint Huang Day!

#### Strengthening Natural Resources

In addition to caring for thousands of parks, playgrounds, ballfields, and more, NYC Parks is the steward of a thriving urban forest and diverse ecosystem. Our trees create a tree canopy that reduces both air pollution and the heat island effect. Over 10,000 acres of natural areas, including forests, wetlands, and dunes provide both protection from the elements and an opportunity to connect to our natural environment.

#### TREESCOUNT!

In 2015, NYC Parks launched TreesCount! to survey and catalog street trees in all five boroughs. Over 2,000 trained volunteers participated in the survey, which was completed in 2016. Using the TreeKIT application, tree counters collected information on their mobile devices, mapping 130,000 city blocks containing 666,134 street trees of 132 different species. As with the two previous street tree censuses, this most recent TreesCount! collects data that will help to create a spatially accurate digital map of trees and help us direct new trees to areas where they are needed most. We have also launched an online Street Tree Map that tells the story behind every street tree in New York City, encouraging more educational and stewardship opportunities.

#### NATURAL AREAS ASSESSMENT

In partnership with the Natural Areas Conservancy, NYC Parks completed an ecological assessment of natural areas in 2015. This assessment provides a clearer understanding of the structure, composition, and condition of our forests, salt marshes, and freshwater streams. Partnerships with organizations like the Natural Areas Conservancy help us to identify areas that need attention and allow us to pursue a more proactive and equitable approach to supporting our natural resources.

#### MILLIONTREESNYC

In November 2015, the MillionTreesNYC initiative met its goal of planting 1 million trees in New York City two years ahead of schedule, expanding our urban forest by nearly 20 percent. The City of New York planted 700,000 trees in parks and other spaces, while private entities, homeowners, and community organizations planted an additional 300,000 trees. Since its launch in October 2007, public, private, and nonprofit organizations have rallied nearly 50,000 volunteers to help plant trees. Our trees provide economic, environmental, and health benefits to all New Yorkers while also creating a more sustainable urban environment. Our urban forest is a valuable asset we must protect and preserve.

> 309.4 Miles In the citywide network of mapped trails



**132 Tree Species** Identified in the city through the 2015 TreesCount! census









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Clockwise from top left: Volunteers map street trees in the Bronx; the one millionth tree is planted in Joyce Kilmer Park, Bronx; the NYC Parks online Street Tree Map in action; a restored marsh in Marine Park, Brooklyn.
# **Upcoming Projects**

From caring for our urban forests to understanding the needs of our visitors, NYC Parks is always improving. Several projects underway are dedicated to collecting new data to inform park planning, educating the public on emergent urban wildlife issues, and better supporting our employees.

**Needs Assessment** is an ongoing effort to collect data on the state of our parks and park assets. This information will help identify capital needs and determine funding priorities for our parks and recreational facilities. This assessment is complemented by other surveys and data-collection efforts, including TreesCount! and a LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) survey, which will produce elevation and land cover maps that inform coastal restoration efforts, green infrastructure planning, emergency preparedness, and land-use planning.

**The Wildlife Unit** is a newly created office that supports the recently launched WildlifeNYC campaign. In partnership with the Mayor's Office and other agencies, this unprecedented citywide effort teaches New Yorkers how to coexist with urban wildlife through education, public policies, and management plans. The Wildlife Unit will address emergent wildlife issues such as increasing



# Capital Design Projects Completed 127 in Fiscal Year 2015 133 in Fiscal Year 2016

Capital Construction Projects Completed 84 in Fiscal Year 2015 97 in Fiscal Year 2016

Total Number of Active Capital Projects 398 in Fiscal Year 2015 463 in Fiscal Year 2016

Elementary school students at Ocean Breeze Track and Field Athletic Complex, Staten Island.



populations of white-tailed deer and eastern coyotes, as well as protect endangered and threatened species like the piping plover. It will also promote educational, recreational, and research opportunities that celebrate the diversity of our urban wildlife.

**Employee Engagement** and trainings are key to ensuring that our staff are able to plan, build, and care for our parks. In December 2014, we conducted the first-ever NYC Parks Employee Survey to identify ways to support our staff and improve internal communication. Since then, we have developed a new Intranet site, which is available to employees on mobile devices and home computers, revived the annual award ceremony, and introduced recognition coins to promote camaraderie and provide on-thespot recognition.

**Park Usership Program** measures how our parks are used and how often they are visited. This data will inform the design of our capital projects, guide our allocation of staff and resources to improve park operations, and direct long-range park planning.







# **Resiliency and Sustainability**

The devastating impact of Hurricane Sandy illustrated the importance of our city's coastlines, including the 156 miles managed by NYC Parks. Parks and green space absorb stormwater. Dunes and wetlands protect our coastlines. Together they create critical infrastructure to keep our neighborhoods strong and resilient.

Since 2012, we have established new dunes, rebuilt the Rockaway boardwalk, and continued to restore our wetlands, all of which help to protect our communities. In collaboration with city, state, and federal partners, we replenished beaches and renovated facilities to better withstand flood hazards. We are also collaborating on the design and implementation of an integrated flood protection system along a 2.4-mile stretch of Manhattan's East River Waterfront.

NYC Parks is protecting inland communities with new green infrastructure, the natural elements and engineered systems that manage stormwater. Through a network of forests, wetlands, street trees, and greenstreets, we are designing a stormwater management system that relies on plants and trees, rather than sewers and rivers. In partnership with the NYC Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Transportation, NYC Parks is expanding bioswales and permeable paving in neighborhoods that experience flooding during rainstorms. NYC Parks is also experimenting with green roofs, including our own 29,000-square-foot green



roof on Randall's Island, which serves as a working laboratory for green roof design and construction.

To ensure a safe and resilient city, we are working with the Mayor's Office of Recovery and Resiliency and other partners to plan for New York's future. Through innovative, informed, and thoughtful collaborations, NYC Parks is designing solutions to safeguard New Yorkers and the parks they love. Clockwise from top left: Gerritsen Creek restoration after Hurricane Sandy, Brooklyn; the green roof on Randall's Island; a constructed oyster reef in Soundview Park, Bronx; bioswales in the Bronx.









# **Coastal Protection and Recreation in Rockaway**

In 2012, sections of Rockaway's 5.5-mile boardwalk, spanning from Beach 19th Street to Beach 126th Street in Queens, were severely damaged by Hurricane Sandy. Following the storm, the Army Corps of Engineers returned 3.5 million cubic yards of sand to the beaches. NYC Parks and partner agencies then constructed 6 miles of dunes and planted them with grasses for protection from future storms. To date, 80 percent—4.2 miles of newly constructed boardwalk is open to the public. The remainder of the boardwalk is anticipated to be completed by Memorial Day 2017.

The new Rockaway boardwalk sets a global standard for resilient shoreline design, while providing the community with a beautiful, functional beachfront. As part of the City's \$20 billion comprehensive climate change resiliency plan, the boardwalk was integrated into a multilayered system of coastal protection. In addition to planted dunes along the beach, the boardwalk was constructed with a steel-reinforced concrete deck affixed to steel supports, elevating it above the 100-year flood plain. A concrete retaining wall under the boardwalk helps to further fortify the beach and protect the community.

NYC Parks also worked with residents to develop a conceptual plan for recreational amenities throughout the Rockaway peninsula. Much of the new boardwalk's appearance, including its sand-colored decking, brightly colored ramps, and designated bike lane, was determined through a series of collaborative design sessions with Rockaway residents. As sections of the boardwalk have opened, New Yorkers have jumped at the opportunity to enjoy Queens' newest beach. Thriving concessions up and down the boardwalk offer beachgoers food and entertainment options as diverse as the borough itself. In September 2016, residents celebrated their refurbished boardwalk with the second annual Poseidon Parade.



Clockwise from top: Volunteers help to clean the beach after Hurricane Sandy; boardwalk repair; the renovated Beach 30th Street Playground; a Rockaway community visioning session; the new boardwalk.













# A Look Ahead

Our parks are an essential part of our urban fabric, anchoring neighborhoods, enriching lives, and supporting communities. Together, parks, streets, sidewalks, and natural habitats make up more than 40 percent of New York City. Our newest initiatives focus on designing and building holistically, with the entire public realm in mind.

In 2015, Mayor de Blasio released OneNYC: The Plan for a Strong and Just City, which provides a blueprint for preserving and enhancing New York City's global role. OneNYC contains more than 200 initiatives that take an integrated approach to promoting the city's growth, equity, sustainability, and resiliency. As part of OneNYC, NYC Parks pledged to plan for the city's open spaces as a unified system, launching new programs to study and invest in aging infrastructure.



#### **Parks Without Borders Summit**

In May 2016, we held a summit on the future of parks and public spaces attended by more than 400 public, private, and nonprofit leaders. Organized in collaboration with The New School, the Parks Without Borders Summit offered a vision for parks that are welcoming and accessible. Participants reflected on park equity and community engagement, considered the potential of data and technology, and identified opportunities for parks to improve public health and resiliency through innovative design and placemaking. The summit offered inspiration about the power and potential of parks and public spaces to support vibrant, dynamic, and resilient communities. The Parks Without Borders discussion series continues these conversations with events throughout 2017.





**66** New Yorkers believe in parks without borders because we believe in a city without borders."

Paul Goldberger, The New School



Clockwise from top: Charles Ginnever's Medusa and High Rise exhibit in Riverside Park, Manhattan; visitors in Freshkills Park, Staten Island; winter in Fort Tryon Park, Manhattan.



# **Parks Without Borders**

Parks Without Borders is a new vision for better connecting parks and public spaces to their communities. This approach redesigns the areas where parks meet streets and sidewalks.

As part of OneNYC, Mayor de Blasio dedicated \$50 million to the program to:

- Make parks more accessible and welcoming to everyone
- Improve neighborhoods by extending the beauty of parks out into communities
- Create vibrant public spaces by transforming underused areas

Parks Without Borders will create more welcoming entrances, make park boundaries greener and more comfortable, and enhance sight lines to improve safety and accessibility. Rethinking and redesigning these spaces will create new centers of community activity out of the underused areas next to parks.

With input from thousands of New Yorkers, NYC Parks selected eight showcase projects. In May 2016, we announced that these eight sites will share \$40 million in capital funds to realize the Parks Without Borders vision. An additional \$10 million will be used to incorporate these design concepts into ongoing projects, including renovations at 32 Community Parks Initiative sites and 19 other projects. In the years ahead, we will continue to incorporate the Parks Without Borders approach into our design process.

A rendering of the new design of Travers Park in Queens incorporates Parks Without Borders concepts. Eliminating high fences and adding amenities along the edges will allow the park to become a more engaging space.





A Parks Without Borders community forum at the Arsenal in Central Park.



#### Parks Without Borders Nominations

Parks Without Borders launched in November 2015 with a call for community input. Over three months, we held 37 public meetings, briefed community boards and elected officials, and launched an interactive website.

Our in-person meetings and online survey asked residents to focus on park entrances, edges, and park-adjacent spaces. New Yorkers offered more than 6,100 suggestions for improving 692 parks in all 59 Community Districts, more than a third of our parks and playgrounds citywide. This feedback helped us select eight Parks Without Borders showcase projects.



**6,176 Community Suggestions** Submitted for Parks Without Borders projects

### Anchor Parks and Parkland Expansion

To meet the needs of a growing city, we will continue to improve parks and playgrounds in all neighborhoods by updating aging infrastructure and adding green space. We will also look for opportunities to expand our parks by adding new parkland and developing creative partnerships that increase access to open spaces.

In August 2016, Mayor de Blasio, Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, and Commissioner Silver announced an investment of \$150 million in major improvements at five large parks under the new Anchor Parks Initiative. These parks act as anchors to their surrounding communities by providing large, diverse recreational resources. Through Anchor Parks, we will invest in new resources like soccer fields, comfort stations, running tracks, and walking and jogging paths, transforming these parks for the 750,000 New Yorkers who live in the surrounding communities.

Today, 81 percent of New Yorkers live within a halfmile walk to a park. To further increase access, we will continue to rely on data-driven strategies and community engagement initiatives to identify and invest in underserved neighborhoods. To ensure that new and growing communities have access to parks, we are expanding the successful Schoolyards to Playgrounds program and recently opened 12 new sites for community use during non-school hours. In the years ahead, we will work to acquire and develop private land and grow our efforts to collaborate with public agencies to identify opportunities to improve, formalize, or create new open spaces.





# The Future of Parks

N ew York City is a beacon of opportunity, tolerance, and liberty—a place where you can be yourself, even with millions of people around you. Our parks are where our city's ideals meet the streets, where people of different backgrounds and with different beliefs come together and learn from one another. If New York is where living means striving, our parks are where living means thriving.

In nearly every measurable way, 2015 and 2016 were thriving years for NYC Parks. The Parks Without Borders initiative and summit set forth a new vision for parks across our city and around the world; the Community Parks Initiative brought \$285 million to renew precious neighborhood assets; our coastal resiliency work brought beachgoers back to the Rockaways in record numbers; and the scores of targeted initiatives and improvements across our system brought immediate impact to everyday park users.

These actions provide a deep and solid foundation upon which to grow. We are now able to bring greater equity and innovation, more advanced planning and placemaking, and a higher standard of care to every single one of our sites. We are strong, and growing stronger.

Like the city itself, the progress we have made comes thanks to many diverse people and groups. Mayor de Blasio's vision for equity and growth, more than 8,000 parks employees, and thousands more volunteers, partners, and park users have all played major roles in making NYC Parks—and our city strong, healthy, and beautiful. As we move forward, we will continue to look to our communities to help lead the way to a bright, green future.

See you in the parks,

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Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP COMMISSIONER NYC Parks





Washington Square Park, Manhattan. All photos by NYC Parks.



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**City of New York Parks & Recreation** Bill de Blasio, Mayor Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP, Commissioner



#### Testimony of Heather Lubov, Executive Director, City Parks Foundation Tuesday, March 21, 2017 NYC Council Parks Committee FY2018 Preliminary Budget Hearing

Thank you Chairman Levine and members of the committee. I'm Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks Foundation, the only independent, nonprofit organization whose mission is to offer programs in public parks throughout New York City, with a goal of transforming parks into vibrant community centers. We work in every council district, bringing sports, arts, education and community development programs to more than **350 parks**, **recreation centers**, **and public schools** across New York City, reaching **425,000 people** each year.

This year, thanks to the Council's Leadership Expense funding, we offered track and field instruction to nearly 1,700 kids in 12 parks, bringing high-quality lessons into neighborhoods where few organized athletic opportunities exist. Leadership funds also allowed us to connect more than 2,400 students to experiential learning in parks, gardens, forests and coastal areas to nurture a lifelong relationship between youth and the environment. I also want to thank members for providing discretionary funding for CPF programs in your districts and the Council for the \$2.6M capital appropriation for SummerStage in Central Park, which is currently in its design phase.

The Council's **Parks Equity Initiative** and NYC Parks' Community Parks Initiative has allowed us to grow **Partnerships for Parks**, the public-private program we jointly manage with NYC Parks. For more than 20 years, Partnerships for Parks has supported and championed an ever-growing network of volunteer groups caring and advocating for neighborhood parks. In the past three years, with new funding, we've been able to support 37% more groups citywide, we've tripled the number of community visioning consultations and skill building workshops, and we've increased the number of *It's My Park* projects by more than 60%. These groups are comprised of volunteers who have a myriad of work and family obligations, but who find the time to give back to and improve their communities. The Council's **Parks Equity Initiative** funding is the <u>key</u> to making sure that these groups are successful, that their work is sustainable in the long term.

We are proud to directly address this administration's strong focus on equity and supporting NYC Parks' emphasis on community parks and under-served communities. We are committed to delivering the most responsive service. To that end, with the recent growth in the Partnerships program, we have improved how we identify and build new groups and coalitions in the neediest parks, and also how we provide more advanced support to our long term groups. But at the most basic level, the more staff we have on the ground, the more groups we will be able to serve. To that end, we would strongly recommend adding new outreach coordinators, allowing us to continue building new groups every year, while supporting the growing number of existing groups.

Each year, City Parks Foundation provides \$12 million worth of programming to New Yorkers, all funded with private dollars. The Council's public support, through renewed Leadership funding and the Parks Equity Initiative, serves as a critical endorsement, complementing private dollars and allowing us to continue growing our community engagement tools. Our free programs are synchronized with the NYC Parks' work, but we are a non-profit organization and need the Council's assistance to continue supporting the vision for an equitable park system. Thank you again for hearing my testimony today and I look forward to working with you to continue to offer free programming to all New Yorkers.

#### ABOUT CITY PARKS FOUNDATION

**City Parks Foundation** (CPF) is the only independent, nonprofit organization whose mission is to offer programs in public parks throughout the five boroughs of New York City. At CPF, we are dedicated to invigorating and transforming parks into dynamic, vibrant centers of urban life through sports, arts, community development, and education programs for all New Yorkers. Our programs and community building initiatives -- located in more than 350 parks, recreation centers, and public schools across New York City -- reach 425,000 people each year. *Our ethos is simple: we believe thriving parks reflect thriving communities*.

Summary of City Parks Foundation FY18 Citywide Funding Requests			
Type of Request Program / Project to be Funded		Amount Requested	
City Council Speaker / Citywide Expense			
City Council Initiative	Parks Equity Initiative - Partnerships for Parks Citywide	\$500,000	

#### ARTS

**SummerStage** is the **largest free performing arts festival in New York City** representing multiple disciplines and genres including music, dance, and theater/spoken word. Both emerging and iconic artists fan out to every borough presenting 100+ arts and cultural performances annually to 300,000 audience members. SummerStage is programmed by our team of talented curators to speak to the unique interests of New York's diverse communities. SummerStage also includes the popular *Charlie Parker Jazz Festival*, a music-filled weekend that takes place each August, with free performances in Tompkins Square Park in the East Village and in Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem, the neighborhoods where Parker lived and worked. The festival, celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, assembles some of the finest musicians in the world who reflect on Parker's musical individuality and genius, to promote appreciation for this highly influential and world-renowned artist.

More than six million New Yorkers have been entertained and enlightened over the last 30 years through this storied festival, which has featured such iconic talent as Curtis Mayfield, David Byrne, Max Roach, Patti Smith, Gil Scott Heron, James Brown, Pete Seeger, Jimmy Cliff, and Hugh Masekela. SummerStage has been an incredible springboard for emerging talent who have enjoyed great success in recent years such as Vampire Weekend, Alabama Shakes, The Black Keys, and Sharon Jones & the Dap Kings. But perhaps most important to our mission is that SummerStage is inspiring our audiences to visit new green spaces - nearly 1 in 3 survey takers said it was their first time visiting the park hosting SummerStage.

This year we are launching a new five-week **Arts Education** program to offer experiential study for 180 youth to engage directly with artists and performers in partnership with the Center for Arts Education for curriculum development and teaching artist identification. Our Arts Education program will focus on sustained youth engagement through a series of workshops, artist Testimony of Heather Lubov, Executive Director City Parks Foundation NYC Council Parks Committee FY2018 Preliminary Budget Hearing Page 3 of 6

interactions, SummerStage performances, and follow-up sessions. The program will culminate in a SummerStage Central Park matinee performance for kids only. We are also developing family-friendly pre-show workshops at many SummerStage locations featuring dance classes, beatboxing, how to DJ, and Latin percussion sessions. The PuppetMobile will travel across the five boroughs this spring through fall to show *Cinderella Samba* and we will offer puppet-making workshops. Last year, we hosted more than 100 PuppetMobile performances for nearly 12,000 New Yorkers across the five boroughs. In Central Park, the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre is currently showing "The Princess, Emperor, and the Duck." Last year, the Swedish Cottage hosted nearly 600 performances and served 21,000 audiences.

#### SPORTS

More than 12,000 youngsters and 1,100 seniors enjoy our free **golf**, **soccer**, **tennis**, **track** & **field**, and **fitness** programs every year in 60+ park locations citywide. Our sports programming brings high-quality instruction and equipment into neighborhoods where few organized athletic opportunities exist. We encourage youngsters to engage in a sport for life, teaching them both the hard skills required of the game, and also the life-skills that come along with each sport -- integrity, sportsmanship, confidence, and perseverance.

**CityParks Tennis** provides free equipment and instruction to more than 6,000 youth ages 5-16, twice a week, for six weeks every summer. This free program lets young people learn the sport and progress through three levels of instruction, with additional opportunities to build their knowledge and skills through tournaments, clinics, and an advanced training academy. Hundreds of graduates have won college scholarships, achieved regional and national rankings, and a talented handful has even played at the US Open.

**CityParks Golf** brings free instruction to 780 youth ages 5-16 each year. In addition to beginner and intermediate lessons, we offer an advanced youth training program under the direction of PGA professionals, supplemented by instructional clinics with professional players and advanced tournament play. By offering free instruction and access to equipment in communities across the five boroughs, CPF has been able to introduce thousands of kids to the game, who would not otherwise have the opportunity. The **CityParks Junior Golf Center** is a state-of-the-art facility in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn that provides free golf instruction to 2,600 kids each year, ages 7-17. Completely free of cost and only open to juniors, the *Junior Golf Center* is first comprehensive facility of its kind in the nation, and features a six-hole golf course, practice putting green, chipping green with sand trap, covered driving range, and a clubhouse with classroom space.

**CityParks Track & Field** offers free instruction and use of equipment in a variety of track and field events, including short distance running with hurdles, the javelin, and long jump, to more than 1,700 youth ages 5-16 every summer. The program culminates with a citywide track meet held at Icahn Stadium, the world class sports complex on Randall's Island, where our young athletes compete individually and in teams representing their home park in six track and field events. This year, we're adding youth sports programs during the fall and spring and providing paid internships for high school students.

**CityParks Soccer**, launched in 2015 in collaboration with the NY Football Club (NYFC), trains kids ages 8-12 in 11 low income neighborhoods, serving nearly 250 youth. Players split into teams

Testimony of Heather Lubov, Executive Director City Parks Foundation NYC Council Parks Committee FY2018 Preliminary Budget Hearing Page 4 of 6

for fun, "street soccer" style games. The format is designed to promote camaraderie, creativity and player ownership of the game.

Get Up & Go was created in 2015 in support of the Community Parks Initiative. This fun and educational fitness program for 150 youth ages 6-12 takes place on 10 ballfields and playgrounds and incorporates core skills such as running, jumping, throwing and strength training with weekly contests, races and obstacle courses.

**CityParks Seniors Fitness** offers a series of spring and fall classes introduce more than 1,100 seniors ages 60 and over to athletic activities in a supportive and social environment. The program consists of free tennis instruction, yoga, or fitness walking. Beyond promoting fitness and well-being, the program encourages seniors to enjoy and use their local parks.

#### EDUCATION

CPF's environmental education efforts reach 2,400 young people in New York's high-needs communities through school-day, after-school, and summer programming. We provide sequential environmental science programs - from elementary to high school - that increase participants' knowledge of urban ecology (garden, forest, water, and marine). Our goal is to make a deep, sustained impact on science learning while nurturing a positive, lifelong relationship between the natural world and the youth we serve. We teach kids - at an early age - why parks are important and turn them into lifelong park users.

We offer five programs that aim to create the next generation of environmental stewards: **Coastal Classroom**, which introduces our aquatic ecosystem and marine ecology through hands-on water-based learning in parks along the waterfront; **Green Girls**, which offers middle school girls fun-filled outdoor adventures in parks and waterways, encouraging them to realize their potential to create change within the natural environment and their own lives; four **Learning Gardens**, outdoor classrooms, located in some of NYC's most densely populated neighborhoods, that offer teachers and students a laboratory to learn about urban ecology and food justice; **Seeds to Trees**, which introduces school children to hands-on science and nature through classroom activities and field experiences; **Teen P.A.S.S.**, an enriching after-school program to three locations, offering science, technology, media arts, and healthy living instruction along with academic support, and homework help. In addition, we provide in-depth professional development for public school teachers to increase their capacity to provide engaging STEM-based lessons and are now host to 45 high school interns who provide peer mentoring in our programs.

Our education initiatives offer sustained contact through multiple sessions, and the results of routine program evaluation have consistently demonstrated that our programs markedly improve participants' academic skills and support teachers' professional development.

Testimony of Heather Lubov, Executive Director City Parks Foundation NYC Council Parks Committee FY2018 Preliminary Budget Hearing Page 5 of 6

#### ABOUT CPF PARKS ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

**Partnerships for Parks** (PfP) is a joint program of CPF and NYC Parks. Each year PfP supports and empowers a growing network of community groups and volunteers dedicated to promoting their local parks and improving the surrounding communities. This award-winning program is inspired by the belief that active, involved communities are essential to vibrant parks, thriving neighborhoods, and a healthy city. Through direct engagement, intensive training and technical assistance, and practical toolkits, we enable citizens to play an active and effective role in decisions regarding their local green spaces.

For many, the entry point to engage volunteers in park improvement efforts is a community-led park cleanup, which invites volunteers to paint park benches and fences, plant bulbs, remove debris, and beautify local parks. In the past year, more than 1,000 clean-up events in parks have engaged nearly 30,000 volunteers.

PfP employs 16 Outreach Coordinators that identify individuals and local organizations across all five boroughs who are interested in getting involved in improving their local parks. Outreach staff serve as liaisons between Parks employees, community leaders, and local decision makers; and connect volunteers to projects, supplies, grant opportunities, and other PfP resources. During the past year, our Outreach Coordinators identified 241 new groups and helped sustain 524 <u>existing</u> groups. Our most intensive outreach effort is Catalyst, a multi-year program that assigns a full-time outreach coordinator to focus community development efforts in 4-6 parks in a 1-2 year period in historically underserved and densely populated communities.

To support our outreach, PfP provides almost 400 community volunteers with leadership training in forming successful local organizations that advance park revitalization in their own neighborhoods. For individuals looking to further hone their skills, we offer an intensive 6-month training and mentoring program that helps volunteers to focus on a specific challenge and design a detailed workplan to reach their goals. Trainings are offered around the city and via webinars. PfP also facilitates long-term community visioning for parks and community members through nearly 50 trainings and public engagement events every year, empowering residents to participate in the design of and programming within their park

To grow and support the sustainability of the park groups with whom we work, we operate a small capacity-building grants program for groups interested in undertaking small projects in their local parks. Last year we distributed more than \$100,000 to 112 park groups to support events, programming, outreach, communication, and group development. In FY 2017 thus far, we have distributed more than \$100,000 to 68 park groups. Not only does a grant help provide needed dollars for a project, the process of building a project budget and workplan helps volunteers to build their own management and leadership skills.

Testimony of Heather Lubov, Executive Director City Parks Foundation NYC Council Parks Committee FY2018 Preliminary Budget Hearing Page 6 of 6

OUTREACH	NYC FY14	NYC FY15	NYC FY16	NYC FY17 (July-Feb)
Groups continuing engagement	427	487	524	507
New groups identified	<u>131</u>	<u>193</u>	<u>241</u>	<u>218</u>
TOTAL Groups Engaged	558	680	765	725

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE	NYC FY14	NYC FY15	NYC FY16	NYC FY17 (July-Feb)
Public trainings	8	18	29	24
Public training attendees	NA	NA	395	245
Fellowship graduates	10	25	33	40
People Make Parks Visioning - group consultations and training	10	15	48	24
Groups using fiscal sponsorship	42	45	49	50
Group websites and publications	10	15	15	4

IT'S MY PARK - CLEAN UPS	CALENDAR 2014	CALENDAR 2015	CALENDAR 2016	CALENDAR 2017 (Jan-Feb)
# Projects	638	1,043	1,031	13
Total project hours	2,230	3,300	3,236	43.5
Attendance	25,454	29,770	24,541	322

CAPACITY FUND GRANTS*	NYC FY14	NYC FY15	NYC FY16	NYC FY17 (July-Feb)
New grants awarded	\$71,500	\$159,500	\$109,250	\$100,150
# of groups receiving grants	52	72	112	68
Average grant size	\$1,400	\$2,215	\$975	\$1,479

\*Additional grant funding distributed via the Inwood Parks Grant program.



# New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation Preliminary Budget Hearing – Parks and Recreation March 21, 2017 Lynn Kelly, Executive Director

Hello. I am Lynn Kelly, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. I want to thank the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation for inviting us to speak on the fiscal year 2018 Preliminary Budget. The Parks Department has continued to make meaningful investments in park improvements over the past few years, but New Yorkers for Parks remains concerned that there is not a commensurate amount being allocated to the agency to ensure that these capital improvements will remain in a state of good repair for years to come.

We understand the Administration's conservative budget approach this year, considering the extensive cuts facing New York City from Washington, but we urge the City to not lose sight of the importance of our communal open and green spaces during these times. We learned last week that there are potentially devastating cuts facing the GreenThumb Community Garden division of NYC Parks. As proposed in the federal budget, the Community Development Block Grant program would be cut <u>entirely</u>. This would mean GreenThumb would lose up to one third of their entire staff, and a significant portion of their expense funding, totaling approximately \$1M. We urge the City Council and the Administration to consider allocating this funding to GreenThumb in light of the proposed cuts. This 40-year-old program has provided so much to NYC at a relatively low cost, and we firmly believe that they cannot lose the funding that is currently on the chopping block in Washington.

One of the most critical additions we believe needs to be <u>baselined</u> in the budget is the restoration of \$9.6M to retain 100 City Park Workers and 50 Gardeners throughout the city. NY4P has advocated for these staff lines for the past two budget cycles, and we find ourselves again fighting to keep these 150 vital maintenance and operations lines. We cannot keep relying on the Council to add this funding, and it leaves 150 New Yorkers unsure of their employment status yet again. These park workers help keep our neighborhood parks well-maintained, and are dedicated to Community Parks Initiative sites in all five boroughs. As the Administration has allocated tens of millions of capital dollars to rebuild parks in CPI zones, we see a lack of commitment to the staff members who help keep these CPI sites in good repair for New Yorkers who rely on these parks. We commend the Council for its ongoing commitment to keep these staff lines in place, but we urge the Administration to baseline these positions. This modest investment in the 'infrastructure of people,' will go a long way in caring properly for our parks and playgrounds.

In line with investing in the people that care for our parks, we encourage the Council and Administration to add funding to increase the staff for Partnerships for Parks. It is well known that the current staff is stretched thin. A budget allocation of just under \$1M would allow for 10 new Outreach Coordinators, and 5 new Volunteer Program Assistants. The good news is that over 500 park volunteer groups exist in NYC, and another 250 potential community groups have been identified. The bad news is that each current Outreach Coordinator is responsible for supporting approximately 40 to 50 groups, and this is an untenable lift. We hear time and again from community groups that Partnerships for Parks' support is simply put - their life line - crucial to their long-term maintenance and advocacy efforts for their local parks, and we believe everyone should benefit from the

expert guidance and program opportunities that Partnerships staff can provide. In order for Partnerships to reach its full potential of supporting community groups, we ask that this funding be added and baselined to the budget.

We would like to see an allocation in this year's budget of \$3M to allow for 50 new Urban Park Rangers. The Rangers program provides our city parks with ambassadors to the natural world, a pressing need as the realities of climate change become more and more clear. As New York City grapples with how to adapt to a changing climate, the Ranger program can provide educational opportunities to the children of New York, helping to promote awareness of the environmental issues facing our parks and green spaces, and providing valuable programming opportunities to schools and community organizations citywide. An additional benefit is that Rangers are empowered to help enforce park rules and regulations, and can provide these services in parks where PEP officers may not be able to reach. Did you know that many of the long-time staff members at NYC Parks started their careers as Rangers? This creates an important pipeline for the next generation of parks staff.

On the capital budget, we are pleased to note the Administration's commitments in the Preliminary Budget, many of which would provide funding for the kinds of infrastructure improvements that aren't as easy to fund through discretionary allocations such as retaining walls, comfort stations, park bridges, HVAC and boiler systems. We are pleased to see the allocation of \$82M committed toward new street tree plantings citywide. We know that increasing the size of our urban canopy pays dividends in long-term public health benefits, from cleaning our air, helping to capture our storm-water, and providing New Yorkers with small moments of mental respite from our dense, urban environment. In light of the recently completed Tree Census, we believe NYC Parks has the data they need to effectively bolster our urban canopy, and we commend the Administration's support of these efforts through funding for new plantings. We also know that our existing canopy needs ongoing care to remain healthy – we support an expense commitment of \$2.7M to bring the agency back to its ideal seven-year pruning and inspection cycle for our street trees, as well as the removal of tree stumps, many of which have languished for years.

Before I end my comments today, I want to take this moment to encourage both the Council and Administration to still think creatively and boldly about the future of NYC Parks. While it may be likely that funding will be restricted out of Washington, we also know that our city's population is continuing to grow, as is its density. There are still communities that fall short of open space access, but there are also forward thinking park proposals to balance density and have positive impacts on public health such as BQ Green, Queensway and Daylighting Tibbets Brook. We support these visionary efforts to create new green space while also mitigating critical environmental factors that need to be addressed in a rapidly changing climate and city. As such, we would welcome another round of capital and expense funding commitments to build upon the Community Parks Initiative, Parks Without Borders, and the Anchor Parks program.

I want to thank the Council for inviting me to speak today. We look forward to working with the City to create a better budget for parks to benefit all New Yorkers. I am happy to answer any questions the committee might have. Thank you.

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For over 100 years, <u>New Yorkers for Parks</u> (NY4P) has built, protected, and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. www.ny4p.org

March 3, 2017

#### Written Testimony for New York City Council Parks and Recreation Hearing on FY '18 Preliminary Budget

Marie Winfield winfieldmm@web.de

Vice Chair, Environment, Open Space and Parks Committee <u>eosparks.cb11@gmail.com</u> Community Board 11M - East Harlem

My name is Marie Winfield and I am here to testify on behalf of Community Board 11 in Manhattan, as Vice Chair of the Environment, Open Space and Parks Committee. As the East Harlem neighborhood has been slated for rezoning under the Mayor's housing plan, concerns around the built environment, our open space and parks portfolio become even more pressing. Identified as a Community Parks Initiative zone by DPR, East Harlem remains a neighborhood where our parks, playgrounds and waterfront areas have not seen the needed investment in infrastructure to accommodate the existing community, much less the increased density planned by an eventual upzoning. Our parks and playgrounds serve the most vulnerable populations in our city's public schools, where most East Harlem schools have a sizable number of homeless children attending — estimated at over 2000 children, the largest percentage at over 40% of the school population at PS 38 on East 103rd Street. We have a moral obligation to ensure that there are spaces where children can be children, experience play and a sense of childhood in safe, rehabilitated spaces.

Our long-standing budget priorities reflect that and we recommend a comprehensive plan for funding these priorities in this budget cycle, as noted in our submitted budget response this year, which is attached to my written testimony (see below). There are several projects that stand out that we would like to advocate for funding in this year's budget, namely **an increase in DPR staffing to improve upkeep, maintenance and safety, Poor Richard's Playground rehabilitation, Eugene McCabe field turf rehabilitation, as well as increase in funding for Street Tree Maintenance and Green Thumb staffing for our local community gardens.** 

**Poor Richard Playground** This large, multi-use site is the nexus of recreation space for many neighborhood schools and community residents. This site abuts Franklin Plaza and five adjacent schools. **We urge for FY 18 capital funding** to ensure the rehabilitation of this important asset to the community.

In addition to the priorities I've just mentioned, we support the Parks Department and our government agency partners in their consideration of the urgent need for capital funding to renovate **P.S. 155 playground, Thomas Jefferson Park playground, Mae Grant (known as "Black Park"), and Sunshine Playground** and to move forward on allocating funding to these much-needed capital projects. Our schools, neighborhood residents and non-profit partners heavily use all of these sites for programming and general recreation. While our community is thankful for the Community Parks Initiative sites currently under design, procurement, and construction in our neighborhood, there is much more to be done and we will continue to advocate and work along side you in this process. Thank you for your time and consideration.

#### FY '18 Budget Responses Community Board 11 Department of Parks and Recreation

Our long-standing budget priorities – increase in PEP/Rangers, DPR maintenance and programming staff, East River Esplanade/Harlem River Greenway infrastructure, Marcus Garvey Fire Watchtower and Pier 107 rehabilitation, and comfort stations in our heavily used parks – remain all highly important needs as indicated in our previous Statements of District Needs, the East Harlem Neighborhood Plan and New York City resiliency initiatives. We recommend a comprehensive plan for funding these priorities starting with the FY '18 budget cycle.

The following projects within our budget priorities have been identified as the most viable for funding in the FY '18 budget, while serving our community's greatest needs.

#### DPR Staffing (District-wide) 311201838/842/852/867E

Notably, East Harlem will lose three playground associates (Cherry Tree, Poor Richard's and Thomas Jefferson Park), which are currently funded through an agreement with MTA around Second Avenue Subway staging. This funding will end shortly. We recommend baselining these 3 Playground Associates into the FY 18 DPR expense budget to avoid the loss of these positions in a future fiscal year.

#### Poor Richard's Playground (E 109th St./3rd Ave) 311201822C

This large, multi-use site is the nexus of recreation space for many neighborhood schools and community residents. This site abuts Franklin Plaza and five adjacent schools. **We recommend FY 18 capital funding in the Mayor's, City Council Speaker's and Manhattan Borough President's discretionary budgets** to ensure the rehabilitation of this important asset to the community.

#### Eugene McCabe Field (E 120<sup>th</sup> St./Park Ave) 311201815<del>C</del>

This field is located next to P.S. 79, a school that services many children with special needs, where instructors have indicated an interest in using the field if it were in better condition and easy to schedule time for school use. We recommend <u>expense funding</u> in FY 18 for the Inhouse rehabilitation of the field by DPR, through the incoming councilperson in District 9 and the Borough President's Office. Funding this project under expense budgets would reduce the costs significantly than if allocated as a capital project (more than five times the expense funding).

311201849E

#### Street Tree Maintenance (District-wide)

The success of the Million Trees program has created a huge street tree infrastructure without adequate resources for communities to care for these trees. NYC DPR needs expense funding in FY '18 to hire out for contracts for street tree maintenance and/or to hire additional Forestry staff so that communities without the volunteer maintenance capacity do not lose the environmental benefits due to lack of care.

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#### • Green Thumb staffing (District-wide)

#### 311201868E

Given the increase in construction and a proposed rezoning, we are concerned with the current level of staffing at Green Thumb in order to provide oversight and services to our community gardens, specifically the transition of the East 111<sup>th</sup> Street gardens within the SustaiNYC development project. We recommend greater funding for Green Thumb programming and staffing in the FY '18 budget.

We also support the Parks Department and our government agency partners in their consideration of the urgent need to renovate **P.S. 155 playground, Thomas Jefferson Park playground, Mae Grant ("Black Park"), and Sunshine Playground** and to move forward on allocating funding to these much-needed capital projects. Our schools, neighborhood residents and non-profit partners heavily use all of these sites for programming and general recreation. We are happy to advocate for these capital projects alongside your efforts, in addition to our stated budget priorities.



March 21, 2017 Re: Preliminary Budget Hearing- Parks and Recreation

Good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is John Butler and I am the Ecological Project Manager of the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park. First of all, on behalf of the staff and Board of the Friends, I want to thank our Councilman Andrew Cohen for his vital support of the Friends and Van Cortlandt Park. Also, we are thankful for the support we have received from the Parks Chair Councilman Levine. Both have been tremendously supportive of our efforts to Daylight Tibbetts Brook.

The Friends is an independent community based organization which actively promotes the conservation and improvement of Van Cortlandt Park through environmental education and restoration and enhancement of the Park. We were founded in 1992 in response to a *New York Times* article describing the impact of declining budgets for parks like Van Cortlandt that lacked wealthy benefactors. It is unfortunate, that 25 years later, the Parks Department is still not adequately funded.

With the largest NYC park, Pelham Bay and the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest park, Van Cortlandt, the Bronx has more parkland than any other borough. But we often wonder if we are getting our fair share of the budget to maintain these parks and keep them at the level that Bronxites deserve. The Friends of Van Cortlandt Park would happily join you to urge Mayor de Blasio to increase funding for NYC Parks, especially those in the Bronx. Now that NYC Parks has approved a comprehensive Master Plan for the first time in the park's history, the opportunity to solve the inequitable funding situation in Bronx parks has never been greater.

For the upcoming fiscal year, the Friends would like to request funding for the following: 1.) Daylighting Tibbetts Brook- NYC Parks is in the process of designing Phase 1 of this project which involves Wetland Restoration within Van Cortlandt Park to begin decreasing the amount of brook water entering the City's sewer system. Daylighting Tibbetts Brook has been a potential project for 20 years and we've made tremendous progress over the last couple years. We need to keep the momentum going and begin Phase 1 ASAP. Since December 2015 The Friends have been monitoring the water quality of Tibbetts Brook and its importance to the biodiversity of New York City.

2.) The Friends have a Trails Plan for Van Cortlandt Park which has been incorporated into the Park's Master Plan. Our plan will turn the 20 plus miles of hiking trails in the Park into a hiking destination in New York City. While we have made significant progress, there are still a few larger projects that we cannot finish with our staff and volunteers, we ask for city budget appropriations to assist in finishing the remaining work in the Trails Plan.

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHRISTINA A. TAYLOR 3.) Maintenance funding! We strongly believe that NYC Parks is not funded at a level needed for the agency to properly maintain and care for all of its parks. Each year, we see funding allocated for Capital Projects to build new playgrounds, repair sports fields, and install bathrooms. But we don't see an increase in maintenance funding to keep what we already have in good shape. Instead, after a few years of little maintenance, they fall into disrepair and need new capital funding to restore them. This can be avoided with ongoing maintenance. The budget should allocate more money to dedicated maintenance staff, PEP officers and other staff for the park.

The Friends of Van Cortlandt Park fully support the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and its efforts to maintain and improve all parks in NYC. It is important to the future of our borough that we fund our Parks.

# STATEMENT TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL, COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION BY PAULETTE SPENCER, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND POLICY ANALYST BRONX COMMUNITY HEALTH NETWORK, March 21, 2017

My name is Paulette Spencer. I am the Community Engagement and Policy Analyst for the Bronx Community Health Network (BCHN), Bronx REACH CHAMPS Project on Parks and Open Spaces project. REACH stands for Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health and the program is funded through a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Bronx Community Health Network is a 501-C3 federally funded health center, where we provide subsidized primary and preventive medical care in 12 clinics run by Montefiore Medical Center and the Acacia Network in the Bronx, and 6 clinics in public schools. Our services are available to community residents regardless of their ability to pay. In addition, through our Community Health Worker, Health Educator and Patient Navigator programs, we increase access for community residents to social services and address health literacy in our communities.

Bronx REACH CHAMPS (BRC) for Parks and Open Spaces, in partnership with New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P) and the Montefiore Office of Community and Population Health, is taking steps to increase physical activity in Bronx parks by making parks more accessible to community residents and thereby improve health outcomes.

From May to August 2016, the 34-member strong Coalition of Community Partners for Parks and Open Spaces brainstormed to increase access to Bronx parks. The outcome included the park workshops and a series of colorful, informative parks visitors guides, prepared by NY4P, including a park map, a description of park facilities and instructions on obtaining park permits.

In late summer of 2016, park visitors found a space for mental relaxation, educational resources on nutrition and food demonstrations, and physical fitness in seven central and northeast Bronx parks -- including Shoelace, Seton Falls, Poe, St. James, Devoe, Soundview and Aqueduct Walk parks. During these activities, our community health workers and patient navigators were onsite to give referrals to park visitors for health insurance and other social services. Through our mental relaxation and gentle exercise workshops and our physical fitness sessions, parents exercised with their children.

As of December 2016, BRC for Parks and Open Spaces has enhanced and improved park access, impacting 200,000 residents.

To measure current park usage, NY4P conducted an assessment in BRC parks in July and August 2016 to count park visitors and describe their activities.

BRC is taking steps to strengthen existing programs in the long term by sustaining community resident-led, park-based activities and advocacy. In order to insure that community residents lead efforts to advocate for city support for Bronx Parks, New Yorkers for Parks is providing training to presidents of parks' friends organization, Community Board members in using the measurement tool so that they can generate their own data on park usage. This each-one-teach-one approach to enhance and sustain parks programs will take hold and have life of its own in 2017.

We are requesting your support in our endeavors for Bronx REACH CHAMPS for Parks and Open Spaces to improve Bronx health outcomes by increasing access to our beautiful parks.

Thank you.

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### TESTIMONY OF DR. CARY GOODMAN

# NYC COUNCIL BUDGET HEARING COMMITTEE ON PARKS & RECREATION MARCH 21, 2017

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and committee members -

I am Dr. Cary Goodman, and I am here to call for the resignation of Parks Commissioner Silver. Mitchel Silver has abdicated his responsibilities – established by the City Charter, Chapter 21, Section 533. The Charter, referring to the parks commissioner, says it shall, " be his or her duty to manage and care for all parks."

However, Commissioner Silver has collaborated with the American Museum of Natural History in a plan to bulldoze Margaret Mead Green and annex another portion of Teddy Roosevelt Park. TR Park is a 17 acre neighborhood, public park on the Upper West Side. It is home to the museum, which already occupies more than half the land with more than two dozen buildings. Another of the Commissioner's responsibilities under the Charter is, "to plant and maintain trees." But, the museum wants to clear cut thirty trees and erect a gigantic, fossil-fueled building which will spew millions of metric tons of pollution into our air each year .This in a time of global warming.

Unfortunately, the museum's plan is funded, in large part by the City Council, which has already appropriated nearly \$100 million for the proposed expansion. This at a time when the parks department budget is being cut, where homelessness is rising and where the incumbent from CD 6, Helen Rosenthal, is requesting another \$9 million.

Despite his support for the parks equity initiative, Commissioner Silver has turned a blind eye to the unfairness of putting another museum building in one of the city's richest and whitest neighborhoods. Wouldn't a new center make more sense in a neighborhood which wasn't already overflowing with cultural riches like Lincoln Center, the NY Historical Society, the Mannes School of Music and the Manhattan Children's Museum? Wouldn't it make more sense to build it in an under-served community?

Wouldn't it make more sense to put it anywhere else but a NYC public park? I believe that the Commissioner's endorsement of this misguided plan further contradicts the charter where he is charged with," maintain(ing) the beauty of all parks."

Sadly, Commissioner Silver has ignored the voices of more than 4,000 Upper West Side residents and propelled this toxic project forward. Therefore, I am urging this committee to freeze the funding for this project and to request the Commissioner's resignation unless he rejects this plan.

Thank you.

# FOR THE RECORD



My name is Meredith Danberg-Ficarelli, and I am a Lower East Side resident and a member of the East Side Outside Community Garden, a Green Thumb garden on 11th Street between Avenue A and First Avenue. Our community garden land was a bus depot before it was a garden, and has been a green space in the community for the last four decades. Participation and care for the space has ebbed and flowed over that time, while the plum tree planted in the 80's continued to bear fruit.

Our Green Thumb affiliation is brand new, and the relationship has already been incredibly rewarding to us. Our community is a melting pot of local parents, members of religious communities, long-time residents, and new East Village transplants, all excited to improve the health of the community from within. Green Thumb met with us to walk us through the requirements of garden membership and to understand the benefits of being a Green Thumb garden, which include receiving educational resources and equipment from the city to ensure that our garden is a safe and productive space for the entire community.

At Green Thumb's recommendation, we had monthly meetings through the winter to discuss the structure of our community organization, develop bylaws, and create a strategy to engage with the local community around composting, urban agriculture, and urban ecological education. We learned from Green Thumb that all food should be grown in raised garden beds to maintain healthy soils and ensure contaminant-free fresh foods, and appreciate the guidance that Green Thumb provides on all questions we have about maximizing the community benefit gained from our space. We are already planning Green Thumb events in the garden space to teach the local community about the importance of pollinators and biodiversity, and we look forward to April 1st when our open hours begin, when we can open the garden gates to a neighborhood seeking reprieve from the bustle of 1st Avenue.

We stand with community gardens and New York City residents in support of Green Thumb, and ask that the City to continue to fund this program that has helped us rebuild relationships through the land.

# FRIENDS OF DAMROSCH PARK 161 West 61 St. (26C) New York, NY 10023

#### CITY COUNCIL BUDGET HEARING RE: DEPT OF PARKS AND RECREATION 3/21/17

Thank you for the opportunity to express our community's opposition to the proposed funding for the expansion of the AMNH on to Parks property.

I am President of Friends of Damrosch Park. and a member of the Committee for Environmentally Sound Development. We were the lead plaintiffs that brought a suit against NYC Parks and Recreation (under Adrian Benepe), New York City (under Mayor Bloomberg), and Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (under Reyn Levy). Plaintiffs were successful in ousting the powerful conglomerate, Fashion Week, from Damrosch Park in 2014. Equally impressive, our Settlement Agreement required that Lincoln Center restore the Park.

New Yorkers were horrified to wake up one morning in 2010 to find 47 trees in Damrosch Park cut down, the famous Dan Kiley Gardens decimated, and the Park closed to the public. Shamefully, Parks Department was complicit in the destruction of those beautiful, established shade trees without any notice to the community. Trees that were listed as healthy on the Park's own web site, were criminally destroyed without so much as a mandatory forestry permit. A jewel of a Park that served the community so well was destroyed overnight while our elected officials said nothing.

Today, Park advocates oppose the destruction of another idyllic setting less than a mile away. We oppose the destruction of established trees by a Museum that exists to teach the public about the glory of our natural habitat. We oppose the taking of one spoonful of Teddy.Roosevelt Park, a little oasis that has served the community as a retreat in an overbuilt community in order to build an incongruous, massive \$350,000,000 edifice that will primarily serve as an entertainment venue purporting to be a center for innovative science.

Tþank you.

Cleo Dána, Presiden

Friends of Damrosch Park 212 262 0619 cleodg@verizon.net

#### <u>NYC Council Preliminary Budget hearing for NYC Parks</u> Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground, Daniel Marks Cohen - March 21, 2017

I am Daniel Marks Cohen and President of Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground/Amigos del Parque de Anibal Aviles, on West 108<sup>th</sup> Street between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues in the Manhattan Valley neighborhood of the Upper West Side. I am testifying to the relationship of the Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground to the Parks Department, Partnerships for Parks and City Parks Foundation. I want to state right up front that we would not exist without the generous and sustained support of Partnerships for Parks and the City Parks Foundation.

The playground honors the memory of Anibal Aviles, a gifted athlete who attended nearby Junior High School 54, where he was captain of the basketball and track teams. Raised on West 109th Street, Aviles belonged to a local Catholic Youth Organization and participated in other organized athletic programs in the neighborhood. He left school to enlist in the United States Marine Corps and fight in the Vietnam War. His brief life ended on March 5, 1966, when he was killed in action, he died a month away from his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. The park is a fitting memorial for Corporal Aviles, who played in the neighborhood as a kid and whose name graces a refuge for today's children.

I founded the Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground in July 2015, it is an all-volunteer organization. The group exists to support the playground, one of the few upper Manhattan playgrounds with sufficient shade to protect children from sun in the hot summer months. Virtually all of the neighborhood playgrounds in my community are difficult for children to use by June, as the direct exposure of the sun on the metal playground equipment makes it too hot to touch. But not Anibal Aviles. Once it gets warm enough to go outside my almost 5-year-old son is there almost every day. When we happened upon the park three years ago we noted that it was spacious but underutilized and a bit run down as it has not had a significant investment since the Dinkins administration almost 25 years ago. It was with the help of the Partnerships for Parks and City Parks Foundation that led to our creating the Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground.

From there things moved swiftly, by December 2015 we had succeeded in persuading the Parks Department to install a new child safety fence to prevent children and toys from rolling out onto the street, and several months later, in February 2016 we won a small grant for \$1,400 from the City Parks Foundation that enabled us to hold a successful "It's My Park Day" a few months later in April, over 100 people attended, including Borough President Gale Brewer. Shortly thereafter, City Parks Foundation recommended that the Friends of Anibal Aviles be featured in the City Parks Foundation's Capacity Fund Grant sponsor TD Bank's "Rooted in New York" campaign last summer featuring a local park volunteer and board member Morris Grady. More recently, in October Anibal Aviles Playground was repainted through the Parks Department's Community Parks Initiative. In December we participated in New Yorkers for Parks' "Daffodil Project" and planted 250 bulbs on the gardening area of the playground with the help of 20 children and parents from a local preschool. Our next It's My Park Day project is coming up this spring, and we expect it to be even bigger and better than last year.

But we are not done yet. We have secured a commitment from a local nonprofit to construct a public bathroom on their property, accessible to the playground, should they succeed in their ULURP application for affordable housing to be constructed next door. And we have ambitions for new playground equipment to update our existing physical structure and a minor park redesign. Much has been done, and yet much remains to do, but we know with the support of the Parks Department, Partnerships for Parks and City Parks Foundation we will get there. We could not have done it without them, and we are immensely grateful for their support. The playground would not exist in its current improved state without their assistance. Thank you.

# Testimony of Dilcy Benn, President of Local 1505 District Council 37 Before the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation FY 2018 Preliminary Budget

Good morning Chairman Levine and fellow Parks committee members. My name is Dilcy Benn and I am the President of Local 1505 representing City Park Workers (CPWs) in the NYC Parks and Recreation Department. My members work in all five boroughs conducting maintenance in all City Parks.

I want to first start out by thanking the Council for the funding in FY 2017 for the Parks Department. This funding was used to maintain the city funded lines for 100 City Park Workers and 50 Gardeners. Parks has over 39,000 acres of land, meaning that (1) one Gardener is responsible for maintaining an average of 254 acres of parkland. The Department of Parks and Recreation is woefully underfunded and we request your support in making our communities and those underserved parks in our communities beautiful.

Since the FY 2017 funding has not been baselined for FY 2018, I am urging the Council to restore and increase the funding. If this funding is not restored, there will not be enough workers in the CPW and gardener titles to perform the duties I stated above. Furthermore, the maintenance and upkeep of the parks will suffer, leading to blight and neighborhood decay.

As we approach the start of the spring season in the next several weeks, there is a lot of work to be done to prepare the parks for the thousands of New Yorkers who will be taking strolls and enjoying the warmer weather in the parks. The beautification of parks is important to all New Yorkers, as well as to the thousands of tourists, who visit these areas.

Once again, I am urging the Council to restore the additional funding in FY 18 for the CPW and gardener lines.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and I will be happy to take any questions you may have.


Coney Island Beautification Project, Inc. 3207 Mermaid Avenue Brooklyn, NY 11224 718-265-0814 <u>cibproject@aol.com</u>

#### March 21, 2017

Good afternoon:

I'm Pamela Pettyjohn, President of Coney Island Beautification Project, a volunteer community group which works closely with Partnership for Parks. Our members have a passion for assisting in the beautification and upkeep of our public spaces. Many New Yorkers are more than eager to donate their time, energy and expertise in helping in weeding, planting, painting and doing whatever it takes to maintain the aesthetics and diverse usage of the park's grounds. During our tenure working with PfP, we have become aware of the thousands of hands needed to preserve our parks and public spaces. Just look around and be amazed at the tremendous amount accomplished by volunteers every year throughout the vast acreage in each of the five boroughs.

From our very first event, the role of PfP was immeasurable; their contribution was tantamount to a successful community affair. From our initial introduction PfP supported us by providing in-depth workshops such as "How to Work with Parks and Elected Officials", "Time Management", "Networking with Other Park Leaders", "How to Apply for a 501c3", etc. PfP also connected us to financial resources i.e. applying for grants and in-kind services... "It's My Parks Day" afforded CIBP to organize approximately 10 Coney Island area schools, over 12 community groups, neighborhood businesses and several elected officials in cleaning and greening our 21 blocks commercial corridor. How grateful was our group to PfP for all of its assistance.

PfP is without a doubt an amplified city resource. It is multiplied several times by factors of its self. For each PfP worker supported by the city there is a product gain with numerous nonpaid volunteers. Community engagement and pride by the public is a non-monitory byproduct of the PfP program.

Please tally the value of the PfP program and budget it as a worthy discretionary fund budget line.

I am urging the City council to please double your contribution to PfP to fill the empty positions of the outreach coordinators so that more parks and communities can benefit from this wonderful program.

Thank You for listening and considering our appeal.

Pamela Pettyjohn, President Coney Island Beautification Project, Inc. cibproject@aol.com



MADISON SQUARE PARK CONSERVANCY ELEVEN MADISON AVENUE, 15TH FL NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10010 MADISONSQUAREPARK.ORG 212:320.7000

Hon. Mark Levine 250 Broadway, Rm. 1816 New York, NY 10007

Tuesday, March 21, 2017

#### Re: Testimony to the City Council Parks Committee FY18 Preliminary Budget Hearing Concerning the Eternal Light Flagstaff Renovation Project in Madison Square Park

Good morning Chairman Levine and esteemed members of the City Council Parks Committee. My name is Ed Janoff and I am the Director of External Affairs for Madison Square Park Conservancy - the nonprofit organization which is responsible for maintaining and operating historic Madison Square Park at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and Broadway in Manhattan.

I am testifying today asking the Council to allocate funding in the FY18 budget to improving a very important monument in Madison Square Park – the Eternal Light Flagstaff. The Eternal Light Flagstaff is a monument dedicated in 1923 to the victorious military forces of World War I. Today this flagstaff is the starting place of NYC's annual Veterans Day Parade where wreaths are laid in a ceremony paying homage to all those who have made the ultimate sacrifice defending our freedom.

The Veterans Day Parade draws New Yorkers from all boroughs, and this monument is an important heartspace for the local veterans community, which encompasses New Yorkers of every background. This location has historic significance as starting point for parades for units returning home from World War I, including marches for the fighting 69th, comprised largely of Irish-Americans, the 77th Division, led by Chinese-American color sergeant Sing Kau Kee, and the famed African-American 369th Infantry Regiment. In fact, some historians point to that parade for the 369th as the start of the Harlem Renaissance.

Unfortunately, over the many decades since the monument was erected, its frontage along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue has become blocked and crowded by park fencing and shrouded with overgrowth, hiding it from public view and creating a challenging bottleneck for the parade ceremony.

In response, Madison Square Park Conservancy in partnership with the United War Veterans Council is proposing the monument be opened up to 5th Avenue by making a prominent new entrance plaza for the Park at West 24<sup>th</sup> Street, complete with paving, benches, landscaping, and parade event infrastructure. This grand new entrance plaza would be aligned with a new, direct pedestrian crossing of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue at West 24<sup>th</sup> Street, fulfilling DOT Vision Zero safety objectives and NYC Parks' *Parks Without Borders* design principles.

The estimated cost of this project is \$2 million. Madison Square Park Conservancy is committed to privately raising at least 25% of this cost, and is already nearly reached that goal thanks to a generous commitment from New York Life Insurance Company of more than \$400,000. We are anticipating further support from Borough President Gale Brewer and are asking the City Council to allocate \$1 million to this project in FY18. This will make it possible to renovate the monument in time for the important and highly visible upcoming international centennials of the end of World War I in 2018 and the first Veterans Day Parade in 2019.

Thank you for giving me this time to speak and for your consideration.

## **Regina Karp**

## Community United to Protect Theodore Roosevelt Park

On the upper Westside of Manhattan is a very small park – Theodore Roosevelt park.

On a quiet morning in springtime it seems wonderfully at odds with the surrounding city. It pits Greensward against the city's sharp angles, green life against brick and asphalt, winding paths against the unbending streets of New York's remorseless grid – into which it has been squeezed as if in a vise. On such a favorable morning Theodore Roosevelt Park resembles nothing so much as a small defenseless principality surrounded by a predatory empire, hostile to its spirit, covetous of its green field – yet miraculously surviving nonetheless – a sort of municipal Liechtenstein.

In the least poetical of cities it makes the unexpected triumph of poetry over practicality and a certain vague sentiment over the hard calculations of interest and profit.

Its mission is so singular, so beautiful and gallant – and that is why so many New Yorkers, tourists and especially upper Westsiders have taken it to their hearts. Let us hope that this little principality can survive in the center of the Empire City.

# Dear NYC Government: We Need Our Center Back. Staten Island



# **#rebuildcromwell**

TESTIMONY AT NYC COUNCIL COMMITTEE PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING ON PARKS & RECREATION FY 2018

Testimony from the Let's Rebuild Cromwell Community Coalition on Staten Island's North Shore-Council District #49

## Kelly Vilar

Let's Rebuild Cromwell Community Coalition 3/21/2017



Testimony to the NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation Preliminary Budget Hearing Tuesday, March 21, 2017

Dear Chairman Levine and Parks and Recreation Committee Members.

My name is Kelly Vilar and I represent the Let's Rebuild Cromwell Community Coalition on Staten Island.

The Let's Rebuild Cromwell Community Coalition stands with thousands of Staten Islanders and virtually every elected official including Councilmember Debi Rose to urge our city government to rebuild the Cromwell Recreation Center. This is a major capital project that Staten Island and our city needs right now.

We need 95 million dollars to make this happen. We understand that this is a big ask, but let's first be reminded that on October 9, 2015 a 16 year old boy fell to his death playing in an abandoned building on the north shore of Staten Island. This was only a few blocks from where Eric Garner was killed. Up until 7 years ago, and a stone's throw away from these events was where Cromwell once stood. It was right at the physical center of these unfortunate events and it stood there serving the community for 73 years. Cromwell was the largest public recreation center ever on Staten Island that SERVED AN AVERAGE OF 750 PEOPLE DAILY. Youth and adults from all over the Island had frequented Cromwell Center since the 1950s. As a result of years of storm and shoreline damages, our center was demolished in 2010. Finally, all hopes of it ever being rebuilt were ravaged by Hurricane Sandy.

Right now in the very vicinity of where Cromwell Recreation Center existed, Staten Island's Northshore waterfront is experiencing the largest economic development project in 30 years and our community has broken ground on a new court house for criminals, an observation wheel for tourists, malls with high end stores for shoppers, and a luxury hotel along with exclusive waterfront apartments. But Staten Island has not broken ground on a single facility for public use on Northshore waterfront. We are not an anti-development group, we are pro-community group. We must break ground on Cromwell Recreation Center and it must be in the FY 2018 Budget and we need your help. Every child we lose because we lack positive play and recreation outlets is the slow death of our community where youth are lost to loitering in a community with the fastest growing drug and gang problem in the city.

The Let's Rebuild Cromwell Community Coalition---a group of neighbors from civic organizations, churches, community based organizations and small businesses have petitioned over 1000 people and have galvanized over 1000 others through social media to come together to say one thing---

## **REBUILD CROMWELL RECREATION CENTER!**

## Cromwell needs to be in the 2018 Capital Budget for design and construction

Cromwell was a huge facility. Unprecedented in its enormous size, it had 6 basketball courts, a gym, boxing ring, running track, weight and fitness rooms and several mixed use arts and crafts space. Cromwell had many users coming from all parts of Staten Island and the other boroughs because it had so much to offer and most of all because it was near the ferry terminal, the only major transportation hub of Staten Island.

Often it served as a latch key program for working parents as they would pick up their children from Cromwell afterschool. Other times it was a place for large cultural events involving schools and community organizations. It's history was rich... it was a place where you would see a judge who worked at the court house across the street playing a pickup game of basketball with youth from NYCHA houses from a few blocks over. It was a place where the antique shows were, where Count Bassey came and packed the house, where local teen dances were held and where Sugar Ray Leonard fought his final amateur fight. It was also the only place most people outside of Staten Island frequented for basketball tournaments, amateur fights and dances. There were countless events there dating back to Robert Moses.... All because of its close proximity to the ferry terminal.

## Senator Charles Schumer and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand both came to Staten Island in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy and said "Cromwell Center needs to be rebuilt and it was a vital resource for the community."

Today the potential for the Cromwell Recreation Center is enormous, but we need an urgent response from you that will elevate Cromwell to Capital Project status in 2018. We do not want to see another child lost because they have no opportunities for positive recreation. We do not want to see our community redeveloped with investments for everyone else but its existing and most vulnerable residents in mind. We urge you to help us get our center back. Thank you



March 3, 2017

### Written Testimony for New York City Council Parks and Recreation Hearing on FY '18 Preliminary Budget

Marie Winfield winfieldmm@web.de

Vice Chair, Environment, Open Space and Parks Committee <u>eosparks.cb11@gmail.com</u> Community Board 11M - East Harlem

My name is Marie Winfield and I am here to testify on behalf of Community Board 11 in Manhattan, as Vice Chair of the Environment, Open Space and Parks Committee. As the East Harlem neighborhood has been slated for rezoning under the Mayor's housing plan, concerns around the built environment, our open space and parks portfolio become even more pressing. Identified as a Community Parks Initiative zone by DPR, East Harlem remains a neighborhood where our parks, playgrounds and waterfront areas have not seen the needed investment in infrastructure to accommodate the existing community, much less the increased density planned by an eventual upzoning. Our parks and playgrounds serve the most vulnerable populations in our city's public schools, where most East Harlem schools have a sizable number of homeless children attending — estimated at over 2000 children, the largest percentage at over 40% of the school population at PS 38 on East 103rd Street. We have a moral obligation to ensure that there are spaces where children can be children, experience play and a sense of childhood in safe, rehabilitated spaces.

Our long-standing budget priorities reflect that and we recommend a comprehensive plan for funding these priorities in this budget cycle, as noted in our submitted budget response this year, which is attached to my written testimony (see below). There are several projects that stand out that we would like to advocate for funding in this year's budget, namely **an increase in DPR staffing to improve upkeep, maintenance and safety, Poor Richard's Playground rehabilitation, Eugene McCabe field turf rehabilitation, as well as increase in funding for Street Tree Maintenance and Green Thumb staffing for our local community gardens.** 

**Poor Richard Playground** This large, multi-use site is the nexus of recreation space for many neighborhood schools and community residents. This site abuts Franklin Plaza and five adjacent schools. **We urge for FY 18 capital funding** to ensure the rehabilitation of this important asset to the community.

In addition to the priorities I've just mentioned, we support the Parks Department and our government agency partners in their consideration of the urgent need for capital funding to renovate **P.S. 155 playground, Thomas Jefferson Park playground, Mae Grant (known as** "**Black Park**"), and Sunshine Playground and to move forward on allocating funding to these much-needed capital projects. Our schools, neighborhood residents and non-profit partners heavily use all of these sites for programming and general recreation. While our community is thankful for the Community Parks Initiative sites currently under design, procurement, and construction in our neighborhood, there is much more to be done and we will continue to advocate and work along side you in this process. Thank you for your time and consideration.

### FY '18 Budget Responses Community Board 11 Department of Parks and Recreation

Our long-standing budget priorities – increase in PEP/Rangers, DPR maintenance and programming staff, East River Esplanade/Harlem River Greenway infrastructure, Marcus Garvey Fire Watchtower and Pier 107 rehabilitation, and comfort stations in our heavily used parks – remain all highly important needs as indicated in our previous Statements of District Needs, the East Harlem Neighborhood Plan and New York City resiliency initiatives. We recommend a comprehensive plan for funding these priorities starting with the FY '18 budget cycle.

The following projects within our budget priorities have been identified as the most viable for funding in the FY '18 budget, while serving our community's greatest needs.

## • DPR Staffing (District-wide) 311201838/842/852/867E

Notably, East Harlem will lose three playground associates (Cherry Tree, Poor Richard's and Thomas Jefferson Park), which are currently funded through an agreement with MTA around Second Avenue Subway staging. This funding will end shortly. **We recommend baselining these 3 Playground Associates into the FY 18 DPR expense budget to avoid the loss of these positions in a future fiscal year.** 

• Poor Richard's Playground (E 109<sup>th</sup> St./3<sup>rd</sup> Ave) 311201822C

This large, multi-use site is the nexus of recreation space for many neighborhood schools and community residents. This site abuts Franklin Plaza and five adjacent schools. **We recommend FY 18 capital funding in the Mayor's, City Council Speaker's and Manhattan Borough President's discretionary budgets** to ensure the rehabilitation of this important asset to the community.

• Eugene McCabe Field (E 120<sup>th</sup> St./Park Ave) 311201815<del>C</del>

This field is located next to P.S. 79, a school that services many children with special needs, where instructors have indicated an interest in using the field if it were in better condition and easy to schedule time for school use. We recommend <u>expense funding</u> in FY 18 for the inhouse rehabilitation of the field by DPR, through the incoming councilperson in District 9 and the Borough President's Office. Funding this project under expense budgets would reduce the costs significantly than if allocated as a capital project (more than five times the expense funding).

Street Tree Maintenance (District-wide) 311201849E

The success of the Million Trees program has created a huge street tree infrastructure without adequate resources for communities to care for these trees. NYC DPR needs expense funding in FY '18 to hire out for contracts for street tree maintenance and/or to hire additional Forestry staff so that communities without the volunteer maintenance capacity do not lose the environmental benefits due to lack of care.

## • Green Thumb staffing (District-wide)

### 311201868E

Given the increase in construction and a proposed rezoning, we are concerned with the current level of staffing at Green Thumb in order to provide oversight and services to our community gardens, specifically the transition of the East 111<sup>th</sup> Street gardens within the SustaiNYC development project. We recommend greater funding for Green Thumb programming and staffing in the FY '18 budget.

We also support the Parks Department and our government agency partners in their consideration of the urgent need to renovate **P.S. 155 playground, Thomas Jefferson Park playground, Mae Grant ("Black Park"), and Sunshine Playground** and to move forward on allocating funding to these much-needed capital projects. Our schools, neighborhood residents and non-profit partners heavily use all of these sites for programming and general recreation. We are happy to advocate for these capital projects alongside your efforts, in addition to our stated budget priorities.

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