

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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March 21, 2017
Start: 10:13 a.m.
Recess: 1:58 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: MARK LEVINE
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Darlene Mealy
Fernando Cabrera
James G. Van Bramer
Andrew Cohen
Alan N. Maisel
Mark Treyger

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

Mitchell Silver, Commissioner
New York City Parks and Recreation

Liam Kavanagh, First Deputy Commissioner
New York City Parks and Recreation

Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations
New York City Parks and Recreation

Heather Lubov, Executive
City Parks Foundation

Lynn Kelly, Executive Director
New Yorkers for Parks

Joe Puleo, President
Local 983

Josie Bennett, President
Local 1505

Pamela Pettyjohn, President
Coney Island Beautification Project

Daniel Marks Cohen, President
Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground

Nora McCauley
Love our Pool

Lee Levine
Love our Pool

Aziz Dehkan, Executive Director
NYC Community Garden Coalition

Edward Janoff, Director of External Affairs
Madison Square Park Conservancy, Manhattan

Marie Winfield, Community Board 11
Vice Chair, Environment, Open Space & Parks Committee

Kelly Vilar
Let's Rebuild Cromwell Community Coalition

Virginia Ribot Community Organizer
El Puente

Edna Figueroa
El Puente

Paulette Spencer
Community Engagement Policy Analyst
Bronx Community Health Network
Bronx REACH CHAMPS for Parks and Open Space

John Butler, Ecological Project Manager
Friends of Van Cortlandt Park

Judith Calamandre

Regina Clark

Fritz Mueller

Dr. Cary Goodman

Claudia DiSalvo, President
Community United to Protect Teddy Roosevelt Park

2 [sound check, pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good morning
4 everybody. We're going to get started. Welcome,
5 Commissioner Silver, and members of the
6 Administration. This is a busy day around City Hall
7 with multiple simultaneous committee hearings. So my
8 colleagues will likely be streaming in and out, but
9 we expect an exciting morning as we delve into our
10 city's Parks Department budget, and I do want to
11 welcome you to our hearing on the Fiscal Year 2018
12 Preliminary Budget and the Fiscal Year 2017 Mayor's
13 Management Report for the Department of Parks and
14 Recre--Recreation. My name is Mark Levine and I am,
15 of course, the Chair of the Parks and Recreation
16 Committee of the City Council. In keeping with the
17 budget process mandated by the City Charter that will
18 ultimately lead to the adoption of the Fiscal Year
19 2018 Budget, today, we will hear testimony from the
20 Department of Parks and Recreation on its Expense and
21 Capital Budgets for Fiscal Year 2018.

22 Park Use in New York City is surging.
23 There are now 42 million per year in Central Park
24 alone double the number who visit Disney World every
25 year. Over seven million people visit the High Line

2 annually, five million visit Bryan Park every year,
3 and on a peak summer weekend 127,000 people visit
4 Brooklyn Bridge Park. These trends are repeated
5 throughout every borough in parks large and small,
6 but I'm sorry to say that our Parks Department budget
7 is not keeping pace. After decades of decline
8 relative to total city spending, the Parks Budget as
9 currently proposed by the Administration is set to
10 fall yet again in the coming year. It would fall to
11 just 0.58% of the total budget in the Mayor's
12 Proposed Plan with drop in dollar terms of \$19
13 million, and most worrisome of all a net drop in
14 staff or 175 full-time employees. For the third year
15 in a row, the Mayor's Budget fails to baseline \$9.7
16 million for critical park maintenance workers, which
17 would lead to a loss of 50 gardeners and 100 CPWs who
18 would be laid off as of June 30th depriving our parks
19 or sorely needed staffing and depriving 150
20 hardworking New Yorkers of their livelihood. This
21 situation is made all the more dire by the threat of
22 the Trump Administration to totally eliminate
23 Community Developments Block Grants known as CDBGs,
24 the federal—from the federal budget, a move
25 translation to the loss of \$4.5 million in funding

2 for the Parks Department, which would deal a mere
3 fatal blow for the Green Thumb Program, an
4 initiative, which relies heavily on CDBG funding for
5 its work to support the city's network of 600
6 wonderful community gardens. We simply cannot
7 tolerate a reduction in Parks resources at a time of
8 record levels of park usage and a growing city
9 population. Rather, we need to make targeted
10 investments to enhance key high impact initiatives
11 within the department. For starters, we need to
12 continue to grow the number of Parks Enforcement
13 Patrol or PEP Officers since today their ranks are
14 still so thin that most parks at most times have not
15 even a single officer on duty. We need to expand
16 funding for street tree pruning as rising costs have
17 pushed us back to an unacceptable ten-year cycle for
18 pruning. We need an additional \$2.7 million for this
19 important work in order to return to the seven-year
20 pruning cycle needed to keep trees healthy and
21 streets safe. We need \$3 million to increase our
22 Urban Park Rangers Program by adding 50 new positions
23 on top of the paltry 30 that are in place today.
24 This will not bring us anywhere near the historic
25 high of 200 rangers, but it will provide critical new

2 personnel to support environmental education, outdoor
3 recreation, wildlife management and active conserve-
4 conservation. We need \$1 million for ten more
5 outreach coordinators for Partnership for Parks.
6 These are critical on-the-ground staff who are
7 working to support Friends of groups around the city.
8 Currently, on ten outreach workers service the entire
9 park system giving each an impossibly large portfolio
10 of groups for them to care for, and we need \$1.7
11 million to permanently expand the city's beach and
12 pool season by a week beyond Labor Day. We also need
13 to baseline \$1 million for Fiscal Year 18 for stump
14 removal. This was money that was put in the budget
15 by the Mayor last year, but not baselined and, in
16 fact, we need to do much more than \$1 million to deal
17 with the unacceptable large backlog, which is into
18 the tens of thousands for stump removal.

19 Now, I would like to turn our attention
20 to the capital side of the budget. Under
21 Commissioner Silver, the department has launched
22 three vital new capital initiatives that have done
23 much to advance equity and access in our Parks
24 system. Sadly, none of these programs receive
25 additional rounds of funding in the Administration's

2 current Capital Budget proposal. First, is the
3 Community Parks Initiative, and we're calling for a
4 third round of investment in this program, which
5 helps revitalize small neglected parks in low and
6 moderate income neighborhoods. We're calling for an
7 additional \$150 million to support approximately 40
8 more CPI parks. Second, is the Anchor Parks
9 Initiative, which provides a major infusion of
10 capital to renovate heavily used midsize parks. We're
11 calling for an additional \$150 million to facilitate
12 the renovation of five more anchor parks. Third is
13 parks without borders, the brain child of
14 Commissioner Silver, an initiative, which makes parks
15 more open and welcoming by improving entrances and
16 park adjacent spaces. We're calling for another
17 round of investment of \$30 million in this successful
18 and popular program. At a time with the city's
19 population has now surpassed 8.5 million and appears
20 headed to a staggering nine million residents, we
21 also need to invest in the expansion of our Park
22 system. Fortunately, there are many inspirational
23 projects on the drawing board throughout the city
24 that would give us the additional green space that we
25 so desperately need in our growing city. Let's fill

2 the QueensWay a miles long linear park that would
3 make use of an abandoned rail line to connect many
4 unserved neighborhood in Central and Southeast
5 Queens. Let's also bring some environmental justices
6 to park starved Bushwick and deck over park of the
7 BQE to create a new green space called BQ Green.
8 Let's undo the damage done to nature in generations
9 past by daylighting Tibbetts Brook in the Northwest
10 Bronx, unearthing a long buried stream to realize
11 major environmental benefits and create new
12 recreational space. Let's build the world's first
13 underground park by turning an abandoned trolley
14 terminal into the low line on the rapidly developing
15 Lower East Side, and let's build on recent city and
16 state commitments to renovate the bath house at
17 Orchard Beach in the Bronx by investing in
18 desperately needed upgrades to the surrounding
19 grounds as well. Let's think big. Let's ensure that
20 every community in this city especially low and
21 moderate income neighborhoods has a thriving green
22 space. Let's bring spectacular new parks to life for
23 a growing and ever more active population. Let's
24 create a Parks budget worthy of this great city. I
25 now want to acknowledge we've been joined by stalwart

2 Parks Committee member from the Bronx Andy Cohen and
3 major advocate of Daylighting Tibbetts Brooks. I'm
4 sure we'll hear more about that, and I look forward
5 to hearing now from the Administration, and I'm gong
6 to ask our committee counsel Kris Sartori to please
7 administer the affirmation. Thank you.

8 LEGAL COUNSEL SARTORI: Do you affirm to
9 tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the
10 truth in your testimony before this committee today?

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I do. Well, good
12 morning Chair Levine and members of the Parks
13 Committee, and thank you for your strong support of
14 our parks, and also the other members of the City
15 Council who will be joining throughout this morning.
16 I'm Mitchell Silver, Commissioner of the New York
17 City Parks and Recreation, and I'm joined here today
18 a number of our senior staff including First Deputy
19 Commissioner Liam Kavanagh and Matt Drury our
20 Director of Government Relations. Thank you for
21 allowing me the opportunity to discuss the agency's
22 Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2018. Thanks to
23 the strong leadership of the Mayor de Blasio and a
24 strong partnership with the City Council, I'm pleased
25 to report on the progress we've made over the past

2 year. Our testimony will be supplemented by our
3 report for progress. I believe you all have a copy,
4 which was released this morning. This report
5 examines the status of strategic initiatives that
6 have guided our agency's efforts since the beginning
7 of this administration. As we gear up for the spring
8 and hopefully some warmer weather, we can look back
9 at 2016 as a particularly exciting year for NY Parks
10 our dedicated employees working closely alongside
11 elected officials and supported by thousands of
12 volunteer groups and other Park partners continue to
13 implement our vision creating and sustaining thriving
14 parks and public spaces for all New Yorkers. These
15 efforts reflect our agency's central mission: Caring
16 for our parks and public spaces, planning parks that
17 are resilient and sustainable and thoughtfully
18 building a park system for the present and future
19 generations to enjoy. As I think we can all agree,
20 an outstanding city requires outstanding parks and
21 public spaces, and I'm extraordinarily proud of the
22 job we've done to provide those spaces to residents
23 and visitors alike. Upon arriving to the agency
24 almost three years ago, it's become innately clear to
25 me that our employees were dedicated, creative and

2 hard working, but there were more opportunities to
3 make our process more transparent, carefully
4 coordinated and efficient. I made it my-my number
5 one priority to look closely at the agency's capital
6 process, and I'm extremely proud of our efforts to
7 bring transparency and accountability to a process
8 that many said was confusing and unwieldy. Today,
9 any New Yorker who is curious about any of our city
10 parks capital projects that is underway can get an
11 update about that project status within seconds of
12 using our Capital Projects Tracker, and the website
13 has seen close to 300,000 visits since its creation.
14 The average time to complete design on a capital
15 projects in Fiscal Year 2016 was 54 days shorter
16 compared to the Fiscal Year of 2016, nearly two
17 months. The average construction project in Fiscal
18 Year 2016 took 99 fewer days than in Fiscal Year
19 2015, and while I acknowledge that many of you faced
20 frustrating delays on projects you funded, and you
21 will inevitably be able to point to projects in your
22 district that have take far too long, I would ask
23 that you keep in mind that these process reforms will
24 take time to make themselves felt as recently funding
25 projects begin to benefit from a significantly

2 improved capital process. I have no doubt that you'll
3 come to agree that we've made important strides
4 towards delivering critical park improvements to your
5 constituents more quickly. On the operations front,
6 we pilot an exciting new model for trash management
7 in our large parks even as we continue to increase
8 the effectiveness and efficiency of our mobile
9 cleaning crew citywide. It seemed clear early in my
10 tenure that we're missing opportunities to directly
11 engage New Yorkers in helping plan for the future of
12 all of their parks. So we established new
13 opportunities to community engagement across the
14 board. With our design process communities now are
15 telling us first hand the features and amenities they
16 value most in their parks so our designs can better
17 reflect their needs and priorities. Our community
18 scoping sessions have included thousands of attendees
19 all of whom feel invested in the future of their
20 parks because they've help shape what those parks
21 will become. And for the first time in the city's
22 history, we have encouraged New Yorkers to directly
23 nominate the parks they thought would benefit from
24 our Parks Without Borders new design approach. We
25 received over 6,000 submissions from the public from

2 which we were able to select eight signature projects
3 to receive \$40 million in capital improvements. We
4 launched a citywide conversation about how we can
5 create a more seamless public ground with the Summit
6 in 2016. That brought together experts and thought
7 leaders, students and community activists to weigh in
8 on the future of the park system. We have now
9 enlisted over 2,200 New Yorkers in an effort to
10 catalog every street tree in New York City using
11 cutting-edge technology that now allows us to track
12 the caretaking efforts impacting each and every tree.
13 We recognize there's always more work to be done, and
14 we continue to strive in every way to be responsible
15 stewards of public dollars while implementing our
16 innovative and inclusive approach to ensuring that
17 our parks serve all New Yorkers. Thanks to the
18 support of the Mayor and our partners at the City
19 Council we have deployed additional cleaning staff
20 during the times our parks are heavily used creating
21 what we call a step-up program to replace staff that
22 have been deployed to beaches and pools during the
23 summer season. We hired additional gardeners to
24 beautify parks through out Community Parks Initiative
25 Neighborhoods, and have significantly increased the

2 rank of our Parks Enforcement Patrol in all five
3 boroughs. At the same time, we're investing \$150
4 million to transform anchor parks in each of the five
5 boroughs, and to date, the City Council—the City has
6 invested over \$318 million mayoral capital funds
7 through our Community Parks Initiative to re-envision
8 parks and playgrounds that hadn't seen investment in
9 decades. With an operating budget that has increased
10 by 18% since 2014 and a new record level \$4.5 billion
11 worth of investments in critical park infrastructure
12 in our Capital Plan. Mayor de Blasio continues to
13 demonstrate the city's commitment to building a more
14 equitable park system for all of New Yorkers. And
15 now, I'd like to introduce Matt Drury, our Director
16 of Government Relations to help provide more context
17 and detail about the agency's efforts as we head into
18 Fiscal Year 2018.

19 MATT DRURY: Thank you, Commissioner
20 Silver and thank you to the Council for the
21 opportunity to testify today. I'd like to begin by
22 outlining some key facts and figures that will help
23 illustrate the scale and diversity of what we at NY
24 Parks. We're the steward of over 29,000 acres, 14%
25 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 green streets. There are currently 515 active Capital contracts for parks improvement projects, 190 of which are in design, 148 are in procurement, 177 are in construction. The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2018 reflects the agency's ongoing priorities providing for operating expenses of \$487.5 million, a significant increase over the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2017. The Preliminary Ten-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 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 this budget there were several key additions to the Ten-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 wall, boilers and HVAC systems, playgrounds and comfort station repair, park bridges, investment in our agency vehicle fleet and

2 safety upgrades for our recreation and nature
3 centers. While these additions may not make
4 headlines, they are critically important to
5 sustaining our parks and recreational facilities into
6 the future. The Mayor's Budget allows us to continue
7 delivering on our Framework for an Equitable Future,
8 released in October 2014, which has served as our
9 guide in delivering meaningful improvements to our
10 parks and public spaces. In Fiscal Year 2018, we
11 will announce 11 new capital sites set to receive
12 park improvement through the Community Parks
13 Initiative, our agency's signature effort to
14 distribute city resources in a fair and focused
15 manner. Launched in 2014, the Community Parks
16 Initiative has invested \$318 million to date in
17 mayoral capital funding to strengthen parks and
18 public space in under-resourced and high poverty
19 neighborhoods transforming more than 67 sites
20 citywide. The positive impact of CPI is already
21 being felt in communities all over New York City.
22 Since the launch of CPI, over 2,100 community
23 representatives have participated in 45 design
24 meetings allowing park users, neighborhood leaders,
25 community board members, and elected officials to

2 provide input on the future design of their
3 neighborhood park. Neighborhoods across the city
4 have benefitted from immediate high impact
5 improvements completed by our in-house crews, and we
6 are pleased to report that we expect to cut the first
7 ribbon at some of our CPI sites this summer. In the
8 meantime, our Partnership for Parks outreach
9 coordinators have engaged with 50 park groups and
10 enlisted over 12,000 volunteers for park cleanup
11 projects in our CPI neighborhoods. Younger park
12 visitors have benefitted from new programming thanks
13 to the Playground Associates and Urban Park Rangers
14 we've deployed to these neighborhoods. Last year we
15 had over 500,000 visits to our programming sites.
16 Our parks are an essential part of our urban fabric
17 anchoring neighborhoods, enriching lives and
18 supporting communities. Our newest initiatives focus
19 on designing and building our parks with the entire
20 public realm in mind. To that end, in 2016 we
21 launched Parks Without Borders, a new approach to
22 park design. It focuses on the accessibility and
23 connectivity of three main areas within our parks:
24 the entrances, edges and adjacent park spaces, which
25 are the places where parks and the surrounding

2 neighborhoods interact most directly. We have
3 applied this design approach in a few ways. We've
4 allocated \$40 million of mayoral funding to construct
5 a set of eight showcase projects receiving large
6 scale capital redesigns. We dedicated an additional
7 \$10 million to help the span the scope of existing
8 capital projects already in process, and when and
9 where appropriate, we're seeking to incorporate
10 design philosophy into new everyday capital projects.
11 Design on Me showcase projects should conclude by the
12 end of this calendar year, and we look forward to
13 introducing these re-imagined spaces to the public by
14 early 2020. Given the needs of a fast growing city,
15 the commitment to equity also means we need to
16 continue improving our parks and playgrounds in all
17 neighborhood by updating aging infrastructure and
18 adding green space to areas most in need. [coughing]
19 [siren]In August 2016, Mayor Bill de Blasio and
20 members of the Council joined us in announcing the
21 investment of \$150 million for major improvements at
22 five large parks, one in each borough know as the new
23 Anchor Parks Initiative. These parks act as anchors
24 to their surrounding communities by providing large,
25 diverse recreational resources. Through Anchor Parks

2 we will invest in new resources like soccer fields,
3 comfort stations, running tracks and walking paths,
4 transforming these parks for the 750,000 New Yorkers
5 who live in the neighborhoods that surround them, and
6 make these older parks feel new again. Each of the
7 anchor parks is a key community asset and the \$30
8 million in mayoral funding for each site will make a
9 major impact. We're happy to share with you today
10 that all five of our anchor park projects are well
11 into design for their initial phases, and have
12 benefitted from well attended public input meetings
13 so that the priority improvement of each park can be
14 shaped by the local residents that know these parks
15 best. We anticipate completing design by the end of
16 2017, and getting construction underway by later next
17 year, but beyond making significant capital
18 improvements to our parks and facilities, we're
19 working to improve our management practices to ensure
20 cleaner, safer and more enjoyable park experiences
21 for all New Yorkers. Our dedicated maintenance and
22 operation staff do their best to keep our parks in
23 the best condition possible, and new programs are
24 making their work more efficient everyday. You may
25 recall that in recent years we expanded our

2 operations for the 21st Century pilot a/k/a Ops 21 to
3 increase the effectiveness and efficiency of our
4 mobile cleaning crews citywide. With new performance
5 guidelines the pilot yielded 500 extra hours of
6 cleaning time each day, the equivalent of an
7 additional 63 full-time staff. Complementing these
8 performance guidelines we launched a new playground
9 repair and inspection program, deployed additional
10 cleaning and horticulture staff at peak weekend times
11 and recruited new seasonal step-in staff to make sure
12 our parks and playgrounds stay clean while
13 simultaneous—while we simultaneously expand our focus
14 to our beaches and pool, but we continue to seek to
15 innovate, and this past year through our successful
16 partnership with the Central Park Conservancy Cratona
17 Park in the Bronx was a site for a trash manage pilot
18 program overseen by our Innovation and Performance
19 Management team, which produced impressive results.
20 We're also pleased to announce the creation of the
21 new senior management position, the Deputy
22 Commissioner serving as Chief Operating Officer to
23 oversee our borough and citywide maintenance and
24 operations teams, and to help us continue finding
25 smarter ways to marshal our resources. Lastly, as

2 more and more people rely on Smart Phones to access
3 information, we're working on the Mobile Optimization
4 of our agency website to make sure that New Yorkers
5 and visitors can have up-to-date information about
6 parks and programs at their fingertips. At the same
7 time, we use the technology to collect previously
8 unavailable information that can help us make better
9 decisions about our resources. In one pilot program,
10 placed soofa benches, solar-powered smart benches
11 throughout High Bridge Park in Manhattan and the
12 Bronx to gather visitation data to better create
13 maintenance schedules, programming opportunities and
14 park designs. The use of technology and the exciting
15 initiatives that support it can greatly improve our
16 ability to care for our parks. With this data in
17 hand, NYC Parks will be even stronger stewards of our
18 thriving urban forest and natural areas. Our street
19 trees create a tree canopy that reduces both air
20 pollution and the heat island effect. Over 10,000
21 acres of natural areas throughout the city including
22 forests, wetlands and dunes provide both protection
23 from the elements and the unique opportunity for New
24 Yorkers to connect to our natural environment, which
25 also includes abundant wildlife over 600 species to

2 be exact. This past year NYC Parks helped launch
3 Wildlife NYC, a campaign to increase public awareness
4 about urban wildlife in the city from soaring hawks
5 to curious coyotes, to help New Yorkers live safely
6 and harmoniously with the wildlife that call New York
7 City home.

8 In 2016, NYC Parks also completed our
9 ambitious Trees Count program, which surveyed and
10 catalogued street trees in all five boroughs. Over
11 2,000 trained volunteers participated in the survey
12 using mobile devices to map 130,000 city blocks
13 containing 666,134 street trees of 132 different
14 species. Utilizing this data we launched an online
15 Street Tree Map, which brings New York City's urban
16 forest to your fingertips. The map allows every New
17 Yorker to access information about every street tree
18 in New York City and allows users to mark trees as
19 favorites, share them with friends and record their
20 caretaking and stewardship activities. The Street
21 Tree Map tells a story behind every street tree in
22 New York City encouraging more educational and
23 stewardship opportunities. Furthermore, through a
24 partnership with the City Council, we are exploring
25 how to post more information about our street tree

2 maintenance efforts online, information such as tree
3 pruning and tree planting schedules will help give
4 New Yorkers greater transparency into our forestry
5 operations, and will connect to our urban forests
6 like never before. But a healthy tree canopy is a
7 just one element of creating a strong and resilient
8 New York City. The devastating impact of Hurricane
9 Sandy illustrated the importance of our city's
10 coastline including the 156 miles managed by NYC
11 Parks, which accounts for 25% of the city's
12 coastlines. Parks and green space absorb storm
13 water. Dunes and wetlands protect our coastlines.
14 Together, they create the critical infrastructure
15 needed to keep our neighborhoods strong and
16 resilient.

17 Since 2012, we've established new coastal
18 dunes, rebuilt the Rockaway Boardwalk and continued
19 to restore our wetlands, all of which helped to
20 protect our communities. In collaboration with city,
21 state and federal partners we replenish beaches, and
22 are renovating facilities to better withstand the
23 flood hazards. We're also collaborating on the
24 design and implementation of integrated flood
25 protection systems along the coast of Staten Island

2 as well as the 2.4 mile stretch of Manhattan's East
3 River waterfront. NYC Parks is protecting inland
4 communities with new green infrastructure, natural
5 elements of engineered systems that manage storm
6 water. Through a network of forests, wetlands,
7 street trees, and green streets, we're encouraging
8 storm water management that relies on plants and
9 trees rather than sewers and rivers. In partnership
10 with the Department of Environmental Protection and
11 the Department of Transportation, NYC Parks is
12 expanding bioswales and permeable paving in
13 neighborhoods that experience flooding during rain
14 storms.

15 As the Commissioner noted earlier, we
16 remain laser focused on improving the efficiency of
17 our capital process, and we saw tangible results in
18 2016. Comparing projects that completed designs—
19 whoops. I'm sorry. In Fiscal Year 2015 to Fiscal
20 Year 2016, we were able to reduce the average time
21 period designed by 54 days, nearly two whole months.
22 In past years, only 20% of our project designs were
23 being approved by the Public Design Commission on
24 their first submission, but that approval rate is now
25 83%. We automated and standardized the process to

2 compile our contract books. It used to take two weeks
3 and now can be done in only two hours. In Fiscal
4 Year 2015, the agency processed 407 change orders,
5 which can delay construction considerably. After a
6 dedicated effort, in Fiscal Year 2016, we reduced the
7 number change orders by 78% from 407 down to 90, and
8 nearly a quarter of our Fiscal Year 2016 construction
9 projects were completed over 30 days earlier than
10 their scheduled construction completion date. The
11 average construction project in Fiscal Year 2016 took
12 99 days fewer than in Fiscal Year 2015. Keep in mind
13 these improvements are all being made in the context
14 of the highest volume of individual projects ever
15 seen by the agency. As we mentioned earlier, over
16 500 separate capital projects currently underway.

17 As our agency wide efforts and
18 initiatives to support sustainable and equitable park
19 development on a day-to-day basis we rely on our
20 expert staff and our partners to invigorate our parks
21 and public spaces through our place making efforts,
22 and creative programming thanks in large part to
23 support from Council Members. Throughout 2016, our
24 Shape Up NYC classes turned parks in all five
25 boroughs into fitness studios. Park events like

2 Winter Jam, Fall Field Day and Street Games
3 transformed our parks into winter wonderlands and
4 playful destinations. In our playgrounds more
5 660,000 kids participated in our Kids in Motion
6 program, and in our outdoor theaters, we screened
7 almost 500,000 for thousands of New Yorkers.

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: 500.

9 MATT DRURY: Five—sorry. We screened
10 almost 500 movies for thousands of New Yorkers.
11 Sorry. Our Urban Park Rangers led hiking, commuting
12 and birding outings given nearly 45,000 New Yorkers
13 the opportunity to explore the natural beauty of our
14 city. Through our Public Park Program, 81 temporary
15 installations were on view in our parks, and in
16 partnership in Uniglo, \$200,000 in grants will allow
17 local artists to showcase their work in park spaces
18 that have been historically underserved by cultural
19 programming. In addition, maintenance was performed
20 at more than 500 park monument sites throughout the
21 city, helping keep this historic and important assets
22 in top form. In our pools almost 32,000 children and
23 adults participated in learn to swim programs and at
24 our public beaches. Our committed lifeguards help to
25 protect New Yorkers as we again prevent any drowning

2 fatalities during our beach season. At our
3 recreation centers veterans and people with
4 disabilities can now purchase an annual membership
5 for \$25 a year the same young adults and seniors.
6 While we reduced the fees for tenant's permits in
7 half. All of these efforts are driven by our
8 commitment to robust community engagement, and we're
9 grateful for the thousands of volunteers and dozens
10 of non-profit partners who work side-by-side with our
11 staff to care for our parks. We recognize thriving
12 parks and open spaces require not only dedicated
13 staff, but strong non-profit partners and
14 enthusiastic volunteers to make our parks beautiful
15 and active centers of community life. Partnership
16 for Parks, a public-private program managed jointly
17 with the City Parks Foundations supports a growing
18 network of individual advocates and organizations
19 dedicated to their local neighborhood parks and green
20 spaces. Partnership for Parks equips local leaders
21 with the skills and tools needed to transform
22 neighborhood parks and green spaces into dynamic
23 community assets. In 2016 alone Partnership for
24 Parks supported over 700 community groups, encouraged

2 close to 25,000 volunteers to participate in
3 stewardship projects in hundreds of parks.

4 Green Thumb, our community garden
5 program, is the nation's largest urban gardening
6 program assisting over 600 community gardens
7 including 41 new community gardens in 2016. This
8 expansion is thanked in large part to the permanent
9 transfer of 34 previously temporary community
10 gardens. It's the—it's going to be the largest
11 single addition of permanent community garden space
12 in more than a decade. Green Thumb works with nearly
13 20,000 garden members across New York City through
14 education workshops and events. Thousands of member
15 and volunteers and donate nearly one million hours
16 every year to community gardens that provide New
17 Yorkers with access to safe, open spaces and fresh
18 healthy food. In fact, this Saturday, March 25th,
19 Green Thumb will be holding its annual Grow Together
20 Conference focusing on how to sustain our community
21 gardens. We hope you're able to join us for what
22 should be a wonderful day.

23 Our non-profit partners such as
24 conservancies, cultural organizations, zoos,
25 environmental centers, historic houses and community

2 based organizations help provide a diversity of
3 activity and support for our parks. In 2016, several
4 of these partners continued their efforts to enhance
5 the Community Parks Initiative, and as of this date
6 are on track to meet or exceed their initial
7 commitments. A few examples: Prospect Park Alliance
8 has led design and public engagement efforts on two
9 CPI parks. The Randall's Island Park Alliance has
10 helped improve and program Thomas Jefferson Park, and
11 is now working to organize community stakeholders
12 along the East River Esplanade, and the Central Park
13 Conservancy has undertaken 25 renovations at 15
14 different parks, helped train 68 CPI gardeners, and
15 provided expertise towards our new Waste Management
16 Pilot for Crotona Park in the Bronx.

17 The progress we've made in recent years
18 is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our
19 parks employees and thousands of volunteers, partners
20 and park users. In accordance with Mayor de Blasio's
21 vision for parks equity, they've all played vital
22 roles in making our parks and by extension our city
23 greener, healthier and more beautiful. Now, I'll ask
24 Commissioner Silver to offer some closing thoughts.

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you and we
3 understand that our parks are an essential part of
4 our urban fabric anchoring neighborhoods, enriching
5 lives and supporting communities. In nearly every
6 measureable way, New York City Parks has thrived in
7 these past three years. The parks are a Board's
8 (sic) Initiative and the Summit set forth a new
9 vision for Parks across our city and around the
10 world. The community parks and Anchor Parks
11 Initiatives are bringing hundreds of millions of
12 dollars in capital investment to renew precious
13 neighborhood assets. Our cultural resiliency work
14 has brought beach goers back to our beaches in
15 droves, the scores of target initiatives and
16 improvement across our system brought a needed impact
17 to everyday park users. These actions provide a deep
18 and solid foundation upon which to grow. We are now
19 able to bring greater equity and innovation to
20 advance planning and place making, and a higher
21 standard of care to every single one of our sites.
22 Our park system is strong and growing stronger.
23 Thank you for allowing us to testify before you today
24 and for your dedication to providing great parks and
25 open spaces to all New Yorkers. We look forward to

2 continuing work with the Mayor and the City and to
3 create a bright green future with a more equitable
4 and innovative park system. We value your
5 participation, and thank you for support of our
6 agency, and now we will be happy to answer any
7 questions that you may have.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you,
9 Commissioner Silver. Thank you Matt. I want to
10 acknowledge we've been joined by a much beloved Parks
11 Committee member Council Member Alan Maisel from
12 Brooklyn. Commissioner, am I right that park use is
13 surging in New York City, and if so, do you have
14 numbers for total park usage relative to historical
15 figures?

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We do know that
17 Parks spaces are increasing. There are several parks
18 that actually document the numbers. You've mentioned
19 Central Park, 42 million. High Line actually is at 8
20 million; Prospect Park, 10 million; Flushing Meadows
21 Corona Park, 10 million. We estimate that in terms
22 of visits, not visitors, that now we're getting 130
23 millions to our—all of our parks each year. That
24 includes beaches and pools. So, we have not compared
25 it in past years, but based on what's happening in

2 the parks that do track numbers, we are seeing an
3 increase in park usage in our city.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Those big numbers
5 and I that's impressive, and it bodes well for the
6 future of our city I think. So in that context, how
7 do you justify cutting 170 staff for the--do I have
8 that number right?

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: No, we actually
10 have an increase of 55 staff from fiscal--from last
11 year. We--our full headcount was at 4,188 and right
12 now the Preliminary Budget has it 4,243.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, the--the 150
14 gardeners and maintenance workers worker, which are
15 scheduled to be cut, correct?

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right now just--

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] But
18 what is--what's the logic there?

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: As you know, we're
20 still in the budget process. This is a conversation
21 we have every year, and so we're very eager to
22 continue a conversation between the Mayor's Office
23 and City Council about those 150 positions.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You know, the--the
25 public doesn't always appreciate just how much work

2 it takes to maintain a heavily used urban park, but
3 with 130 million people visiting our system, there is
4 an—an incredible amount of work we have to do in
5 maintaining these spaces, and even in this
6 technology—this—this technological age, that requires
7 men and women on the ground and gardeners and
8 maintenance workers are critical components of our
9 park system. It's tough work in hot weather and cold
10 weather, but it—it must be done. What impact do you
11 project the cut of 150 of these positions will have
12 on the Park system?

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: In all cases, we
14 always sit down and figure out how to be as efficient
15 as possible with the staff that we have. As was
16 stated, we now brought on a new Deputy Commissioner
17 for Operations. As you heard also by being a lot
18 more efficient through our optimization of our mobile
19 crews, we were able to save 500 hours, which the—the
20 addition of 63 full-time employees. We also shifted
21 toward placing our staff at high destination parks
22 over the summer to make sure they're clean on the
23 weekends. We hadn't done that before. So we're
24 getting smarter about how to use our park resources
25 and so if, in fact, the 150 is not continued, we're

2 always prepared to sit down and figure out how we
3 could be more efficient and to use the existing staff
4 that we have. But again, we know this is still an
5 ongoing conversation. We're early in the budget
6 process, and so we're eager through the Mayor's
7 office to continue to engage the City Council on
8 these 150 positions.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, with the story
10 of the Parks Department in recent years is that—that
11 you've been ever more creative in how to stretch a
12 dollar, but at a certain point you can't do more with
13 less. You're going to do less with less. And in the
14 case of these 150 workers, aren't they allocated to
15 CPI parks? And you're saying that in their absence
16 you'll find cuts elsewhere to maintain level in the
17 CPI park—

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well—

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --or efficiencies
20 elsewhere, as you might put it?

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We continue to look
22 how we optimize our mobile crews, and you had
23 mentioned Partnership for Parks. In terms of the
24 number of volunteers that are coming out now, those
25 are one-shot events that happen throughout the year,

2 but we're seeing a lot more people coming out in the
3 neighborhood to support their parks. We're seeing
4 people obeying park rules, and just enjoying their
5 parks a lot better as they recognize these open
6 spaces are vital to living here in New York. But we
7 continue to look at ways of being more efficient with
8 the resources that we have, and again, we'll continue
9 the ongoing conversation of what we can do with the
10 se 150 employees, CPWs and gardeners.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, understood.
12 You know, the--the Mayor has--has prided himself on
13 moving beyond the era of the Budget Dance and we
14 applaud him for that, but this would be the third
15 year in a row where the Council has had to put money
16 in for these workers, and in cases where it's of
17 exclusive interest to the Council and the Mayor
18 doesn't want to fund it, and there's some
19 justification here, but these are workers which have
20 become integral into one of your signature programs,
21 which is CPI. So the fact that Mayor is not
22 baselining it, and the we are left with a very heavy
23 list of--of I think it's \$11 million or \$12 million
24 roughly to-- \$8 million. Forgive me. It's still
25 quite substantial. To me it's--it's--it's--it sure

2 feels a lot like a dance, and—and one that I—I regret
3 we're—we're finding ourselves in again. You did
4 mention that the people are obeying park rules more.
5 I don't know if that's actually data on that. It's
6 great to hear, but the data that we do have coming
7 out of reports on crime in parks I believe shows that
8 we are up this year relative to last year. Is that
9 correct?

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: That is correct.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And—and what—what is
12 the percentage increase?

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I believe it's
14 about [background comments] I think it's 6%, 5%.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So—so maybe my data
16 is wrong or I have— I guess I'm looking at FY16
17 versus FY15 the number of felony crimes against
18 persons in city parks rose from 488 to 612, which is
19 a 28% increase, and I'm actually not seeing numbers
20 for the first two months of this year, but I believe
21 the trend has continued in my-- [background
22 comments]

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So, the numbers I
24 have that I'm reporting is that for the fourth

2 quarter of 2015 it was 230 and then from the fourth
3 quarter of 2016 it went up to 243.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, ,you're—you're
5 comparing quarter by quarter so maybe that's the
6 issue, but again I have FY15 there 488 crimes against
7 persons, felony crimes against persons. In FY16
8 there were 612 felony crimes against persons. So far
9 the first four years (sic) of FY17 we're showing 219—
10 245 felony crimes against persons versus 219. So,
11 we're not counting Central Park in those stats. So
12 that's a 28% increase last year, and working a 11.8%
13 increase this year. Am I mistaken in those overall
14 numbers?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We—we can agree we
16 have seen an increase in parks. We are sitting down
17 on a regular basis with NYPD, and we are noticing
18 we're getting more people in the parks. The weather
19 is warmer, but we're just now sitting down to
20 actually target those 12% of parks where crime does
21 occur to figure out how we can work with NYPD to do—
22 because again our park security is focused on park
23 rules. NYPD is our partner in dealing with—with
24 crime in our parks, and we're also looking at what
25 they call set to that principle .(sic) It's

2 community—it's crime prevention through community
3 design. Parks and our borders is one example. So
4 for those parks that we are seeing higher levels that
5 we now want to sit down with the commanding officers
6 and determine where it's taking place in the park so
7 (1) they can work on increasing their patrols, but we
8 could also work on through planning purposes is it
9 lighting? Is it shrubs? What is it about that place
10 that is creating some of the crime? So we can use
11 other strategies to determine how we can start with
12 NYPD to address or make our parks safer.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, the—the—the
14 striking context here is that crime in New York city
15 is down, and that's a huge achievement for the city,
16 for NYPD. Something the Mayor is very proud of.
17 It's been down to record lows. So in that context
18 the increase in parks crime raises red flags for me,
19 and it's not only property crime. I didn't focus on
20 that. One could understand that when you have more
21 people coming into parks there might be more iPads
22 that go missing, but we are talking about crimes
23 against person, which seems hard to explain away
24 merely by the increase in park usership. It—it is—

2 it—do you have any other theories for the cause of
3 this increase?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Again, we're
5 working NYPD. We—certainly they take the lead on
6 crime related matters. Clearly our PEP work with
7 them very closely to determine how we jointly can
8 address this issue as well as our borough
9 commissioners. It something we take very seriously.
10 What I was going to share with you was that we are
11 seeing more people using our parks. The city is
12 growing. While we recognize that there's a
13 difference to the overall crime rate, it's still
14 about one percent of all crimes within the city occur
15 in parks, and it's cover 14% of the footprint. But
16 we are looking at other strategies. Those parks,
17 those 12% again, we have about—date on about 1,100
18 parks. We are beginning to focus on where they're
19 occurring within the park and then if there's a
20 specific location we want to see if there's another
21 intervention through planning purposes, through what
22 we call CPTED principle. (sic)

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You—you refer to
24 [pause] Pep Officers as primarily focused on park
25 rules, and—and that is the case. Obviously in part

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: And another 31 of
3 the Urban Park Rangers, which includes--

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Right.

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --the same program.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right. So how many
7 PEP officers are currently on board?

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: About 255.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: There are 255. So
10 this is a city of 1,9500 parks, 30,000 are acres and--
11 --and you don't need a degree in mathematics to
12 realize for most parks, most of the time on most days
13 throughout most of the year, there's not going to be
14 a PEP officer on patrol. That's the experience of
15 park users, one that--that I hear about in every
16 borough of the city as I--as I travel the parks. This
17 is a concern for people not only because they don't
18 want illegal barbecuing but also because of broader
19 concerns about safety, right? So--so, how do you
20 envision such a tiny force patrolling such a
21 sprawling park system?

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, first let me
23 just say that our Parks Enforcement Patrol are unsung
24 heroes. I agree with everything that you've said.
25 They save lives. They are providing education.

2 They're also enforcing park rules. So I agree
3 they're a very critical asset to keeping our parks
4 enjoyable and safe. As I stated before, we continue
5 to with NYPD. They're our partners on addressing
6 crime. We have deployed both taskforce and—and
7 mobile patrols that can get to more parks, but we can
8 continue to have the conversation, you know, in this
9 budget process, but as you stated, we baselined an
10 additional 67 PEP officers last year, and that was
11 the Mayor's commitment to move forward to make sure
12 we even have more of our Parks Enforcement Patrol out
13 there in our parks.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Understood. So I
15 referenced fear of cuts by the Trump Administration
16 in my opening remarks. There's been a lot written
17 about this, and the—the two weeks since the Trump
18 Administration offered a budget blueprint, and great
19 alarms have raised and it's justifiable about the
20 impact on public housing, on our Police Department,
21 on our schools. But the public needs to understand
22 that there is essentially no arm of New York City
23 government is not vulnerable in an era of several
24 federal budget cuts even the park system, and which
25 you are well aware of, and that is in part because we

2 get Community—you know, the block grant money, which
3 I believe, if I have the numbers correct is—it's 5.--
4 \$4.5 million a year for the Park system, and I think
5 the single largest chunk of that, a million or more
6 goes the Green Thumb. Could you confirm whether--
7 could you confirm what the total amount of federal
8 funding at the Parks Department receives a year is,
9 and where that money goes and what kind of
10 contingency plans you have in the face of such cuts?

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I know you
12 mentioned the \$4.5 is the correct number, but right
13 now, we believe it's still premature. The Mayor put
14 out a proposed budget. We understand Congress is the
15 one that will adopt that budget. We're in con-
16 constant contact with both the Mayor's Office and
17 OMB, but as we see this budget process move forward,
18 we'll make some determinations at that time, but it
19 is \$4.5 of our budget of close to half a billion
20 dollars.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So what--what happens
22 to Green Thumb if they lose a million dollars?

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We'll have that
24 conversation as the federal budget becomes a reality,
25 and we'll be looking at what options that we can do,

2 but as you know, the--the Green Thumb Program is a
3 very important program for the city, and those
4 gardeners that--that use it as well as everyday New
5 Yorkers that benefit from these treasured green
6 spaces.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: There is probably
8 not--there's probably not a dollar that we spend in
9 city government that gets more mileage than the
10 dollars we spend on Green Thumb just by the sheer
11 number of parks properties they touch, and by the
12 multiple air effect that it achieves because of the
13 volunteer efforts that so many New Yorkers are
14 placing in those parks. So while a million dollars
15 in Green Thumb in the context of--of some of the
16 billion dollar sums we're fighting over in the budget
17 might not sound like a lot. It would really be felt
18 in this city, and be felt in these--these really
19 important parks properties. I know you value
20 community gardens. I know you value Green Thumb and
21 I--I would just urge the department to--to contemplate
22 ways we can shield this important program if, indeed,
23 we do face the kind of devastating cuts, which are
24 not being proposed by the Trump Administration to--to
25 my profound regret. I'll also mention, though it's

2 not officially your purview, there's been talk about
3 cuts to the national Park Service including comments
4 about privatizing the service. There's currently a
5 hiring freeze in the National Park Service, which is
6 really devastating when you have seasonal hires as
7 they do. It calls in the question how they're going
8 to hire up for the summer rush. People don't
9 understand that there are no fewer than ten national
10 park properties in the New York City including the
11 beloved, beloved sites like Grants' Tomb, like the
12 Hamilton Grange, like Castle Clinton and, of course,
13 the Statue of Liberty. So, you know, in this context
14 of budget cuts to the National Park Service for
15 properties in the five boroughs, the potential for
16 cuts to funding that is directly being deployed by
17 your department to parks throughout the city, I want
18 to make sure that we do not inflict any wounds on
19 ourselves by cuts like the 150 parks and gardeners
20 and maintenance workers, which are currently on the
21 chopping block. So, I'm going to pause right now to
22 see if my—I think my colleague Council Member Cohen
23 has a question and then Council Member Maisel, do you
24 have a question as well? Alright, wonderful.
25 Council Member Cohen.

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

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'm fine thank you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Excellent. One of
6 the topics crimes in parks. I'm very concerned about
7 the Williams Bridge, although we've had kind of
8 persistent low-level crimes, and I think we had a
9 shooting there recently. I am concerned about what
10 we could do to try to make that park, which—although
11 it's not my biggest park, I think it is, you know,
12 it's heavily used per square foot as any park in the
13 city. So I don't know if you have thoughts on what
14 we could do generally in terms of, you know, shortage
15 of PEP and trying to make that park in particular a
16 little safer.

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So, Council Member
18 what I've mentioned earlier is that I've instructed
19 both our Assistant Commissioner over our Urban Park
20 Service Program as well as the Borough Commissioners
21 to start working with NYPD and looking specifically
22 at some of the places because NYPD is our partners in
23 dealing with crime, to see if there is another
24 approach through what we call CPTED Crime Prevention
25 Through Environmental Design to see as we work with

2 NYPD to address some of those hot spots are there
3 other approaches we can take to address some of the
4 specific issues. That is the approach that we're
5 going to take. Because we have our patrols that
6 could—are very mobile in terms of our PEP, we're
7 trying to see exactly how we can focus on some of
8 these hot spots throughout the city. We get crime
9 data, but we don't get specifically where it's
10 occurring. So we want to meet with the commanding
11 officer and NYPD to see whether we can try some new
12 approaches to address what we see as a—a slight
13 increase in crime in our parks.

14 MATT DRURY: If I can just add, specific
15 to the overall, we obvious—it's a unique nature
16 because a lot of it is after school and we're aware.
17 We're actually working closely. Our borough
18 commissioner is working with our Public Programs
19 Division trying to think of some creative ways to
20 with recreational opportunities because I think to
21 some degree there is sort of a youth engagement
22 strategy that's also going to accompany the efforts
23 that the Commissioner took and spoke of as well.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I'd really
25 appreciate being kept in the loop on that because it—

2 it has been a concern and—and it's a growing concern.
3 My Chair who has been also a—a Democratic partner on
4 the—on the Daylighting at Tibbets Brook. I don't
5 sit on the Environment and Sanitation so I can't
6 complain about DEP's lack of involvement, but can you
7 just a little bit about sort of the—the—the role
8 ultimately, you know, how the two agencies are
9 working together on—on this project because I do
10 really think that DEP should be, you know, more of a
11 partner. I know Parks advocates want to get the job
12 done, but I do think that that it would be helpful
13 and important if DEP stood up as—as partners.

14 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, we're
15 engaging a consultant. We're actually working with
16 DEP on the first phase of the Daylighting for
17 Tibbetts Brook. Also, DEP is involved. Whether we
18 want to sit down and have a meeting to talk more with
19 both agencies, but it's something that we would not
20 move forward with this project without DEP. There is
21 a design projects. There's—there's no funding to
22 actually do any capital work, but at least we're
23 going through the design process to see how can
24 daylight that first phase of Tibbetts Brook, but DEP

2 is actually involved. We are taking a lead with the
3 consultant, but DEP is also involved.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I know there's a
5 lot of multiple moving parts in order to get that
6 project really to be meaningful in terms of water
7 expansion. I'm sure my excellent Borough
8 Commissioner reported on our meeting with our U.S.
9 Senator's offices in trying to get some progress on
10 the--the department trail, but it's sort of amended at
11 the CSX property. (sic) I just--you know, I had a
12 question about your testimony. When--when you
13 mentioned that capital projects were 99 days ahead of
14 schedule like in FY17, how--how do we--what does that
15 represent? I mean if a project was started three
16 years ago, is it 99 years or 99. [laughs] We have
17 the back lights out. It's been 99 days ahead of
18 schedule over the course of the three years. What--

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] Well,
20 the 99 days was what we were able to compare from
21 2015 to 2016 for the construction phase. There are
22 three phases of a capital project: Design,
23 procurement, construction. So we're able to measure
24 the period of time for the construction phase from

2 FY15 to 16, and that's where we saw an increase in
3 the 99 days. There was another number--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: [interposing] A
5 decrease—a decrease in 99 days.

6 COMMISSIONER SILVER: A decrease,
7 correct. There's a decrease of 99 days. The 30 days
8 were the number of projects that actually were
9 completed ahead of time, but the—that was an
10 important measure that three months. We worked very
11 closely with engineers. We do pre-site
12 investigation, and so there have been some benefits
13 of some of the things we've put in place to bring
14 that construction phase down. So that's just the
15 construction phase of the project.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I don't---I-I
17 don't want to give you a hard time, but I'm just
18 curious. Is it app—is it a true apples to apples
19 comparison? I mean if you had a—a very substantial
20 project in—in FY--?

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, it is.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Okay.

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It's an apple to
24 apples comparison.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Alright. I'm just
3 going to keep bouncing around a little bit if you
4 don't mind. [laughs] It's not my district but I-I
5 have a deep interest in-in the Rockaways, and I was
6 just curious. I see that-the Boardwalk is not
7 currently completed. It was my impression that it
8 was.

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It-it will be fully
10 opened. There's a partial.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: [interposing] Oh,
12 I didn't see the partial.

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I-I will-you know,
15 what, you know what, I care deeply, but I will
16 definitely-I didn't see you there. I'm going to move
17 on then.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: How about Orchard
20 Beach?

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: In terms of Orchard
22 Beach, as you know there was-there are-it's about a
23 \$50 million project. There was some money both from
24 the city and we expect from the state, but to do that
25 project and move forward we need approximately \$50

2 million. So it's something we'd like to move
3 forward. We'd like to make sure that Governor's
4 commitment \$10 million--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: [interposing]
6 Sorry, not to jump in. So you have \$50 million?

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: No, no, no. The
8 budget to do the project would be \$50 million.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: [off mic] And how
10 much is in place now?

11 MATT DRURY: [off mic] Thirty in the
12 State funds--

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I think we have--

14 MATT DRURY: [off mic] Thirty in the city
15 funds.

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --we have 30 in the
17 city funds--

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] But
19 there's also state funds, too.

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

21 MATT DRURY: [off mic] There's a \$10
22 million commitment--

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [off mic] There's
24 \$10 million from the Governor. [background comments]

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So even to do that
3 bath house we're not fully funded?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: That's correct.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So to renovate the
6 bath house is how much?

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Our--our budget--

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Sorry, sorry Council
9 Member.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Oh, no, please.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We have to clarify
12 this.

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So right now, the
14 project cost is \$50 million [background comments] and
15 there is \$30 million in city funding that's in place.
16 I'm sorry, \$20 million is from the mayoral funds, \$10
17 million from the borough president, and we hear
18 there's about another \$10 million coming from the
19 Governor's Office That puts us at \$40 million.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, well, well,
21 I'm first trying to get over the fact that it takes
22 \$50 million to renovate a bath house, which is--which
23 is an extraordinary, extraordinary high number, but I
24 was under the under--I was under--I understood that we
25 were at full funding for the bath house, but you're

2 telling me that we're still \$10 million short on
3 that?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It is. The bath
5 house and the plaza. The building has to be
6 stabilized and restored, and then I believe there's
7 going to be some access at the lower level where they
8 use, primer use would be a concession, but also the
9 plaza area.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Got it. So you're
11 not proceeding on this project because you're still
12 \$10 million short or you can--?

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We're looking to
14 see what we can pursue. We also have to make sure
15 it's ADA compliant. So we're going to see what we
16 can do with the \$40 million or if we have to wait
17 before it's fully funded, but it's a project we're
18 committed to going forward by virtue of the Mayor
19 giving this capital project \$20 million.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, we—we have a
21 disconnect between what I'm hearing from some of the
22 leadership in the Bronx, which you told me we had the
23 \$50 million. We'll—we'll—we'll square that, but
24 when—when, assuming that it is only 40 which would be
25

2 unfortunate, when do you hope to clarify whether you
3 can proceed on that basis?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, we'll have to
5 meet with staff because we can't proceed with a
6 project unless it's fully funded. So either we have
7 to change the scope, but it's something that we can
8 certainly meet and get back to--to get back to you on
9 exactly a better estimate of how we believe we can--

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] And
11 the--the--the broader grounds, this is a large--a large
12 park, it's a large property. None of that would be
13 touched even if you had \$50 million, right, except
14 for the plaza right in front, but is there a price
15 tag for a broader scope that would include the
16 grounds and the pass an access way--

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] I
18 believe there was a study. I'd have to get back to
19 you on what the larger budget would be. I'm just
20 right now focused on the bath house in the immediate
21 area, but we could certainly get you that number.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, I'm going
23 to pass it back to our colleague from the Bronx.
24 I'll just make the point that this an unbelievably
25 heavily used beach. It is the only beach for a huge

2 part of the city, and -and communities that are not
3 going to the Hamptons on the weekend. They are—they
4 don't have that access. They don't have the economic
5 ability to do that. So Orchard Beach is just hugely
6 important, hugely used and vital to millions of
7 people, and so while the price tag is considerable,
8 if you look at the impact, it's actually a fairly
9 modest amount per user, and—and one that I would
10 certainly support. So I'm going to pass it now back
11 to Council Member Cohen.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Alright, thank
13 you, Chair. I really do appreciate your advocacy on
14 this issue and—and the \$50 million just to be clear,
15 you know, calling it a bath house, but it involves
16 the whole colonnade and it is, and unfortunately
17 we've—we've not been as good a stewards of that
18 facility as we should have been because it is in—in
19 very, very deteriorated condition. So although that
20 does like a staggering amount of money, I'm—I'm sure
21 it's—it will, you know, all be used. So I do
22 appreciate, and I—and I also do believe that as a
23 delegation at one point we did a briefing, a budget
24 presentation of the whole—of the whole multi-multi-
25 phase project and it might have been—it was well over

2 \$100 million I believe, but I think I've covered all
3 my territory. So thank you, Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council
5 Member Cohen. Council Member Maisel.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Good morning,
7 Commissioner. As you may know, I represent Marine
8 Park both the community and the park, and my-my
9 predecessor and myself have put a lot of money into
10 Marine Park I think up to maybe \$12 million plus.
11 Last year I asked that the oval in the Marine Park be
12 repaved and the kiddie park, which is adjacent to the
13 Carmine Carol House because be rehabilitated. It
14 didn't happen last year. I-I'm not sure if my letter
15 for this year was sent out yet, but we're seeking
16 again to renovate the oval. It's a huge amount of
17 money, \$8 million for the bicycle path and the Oval
18 plus a couple million dollars for the kiddie park,
19 and because Marine Park is a regional park, thousands
20 of people use Marine Park during the summer every
21 week. I'm happy to put a lot of my capital money
22 into parks. Maybe two-thirds of my capital money
23 goes into parks, but I don't have the kind of
24 resources to-to keep up with the demands, and the
25 wear and tear in Marine Park that we have every year.

2 So I urge you to take a look at those--those projects
3 and I'm willing to settle for one of them.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So I'm sure you
5 could certainly follow up with our newest Borough
6 Commissioner Maher and I'm pretty sure he's up to
7 date on your request. If not, he should schedule a
8 meeting very soon. So we get the full breadth of--of
9 some the projects.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Well, I'm going
11 to actually meeting with Commissioner Maher very,
12 very soon like tomorrow. [laughter] But I want to
13 just make sure that you know my feelings about how
14 important Marine Park is to the entire borough. The
15 largest park in--in Brooklyn--

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] It is
17 the largest park in Brooklyn.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: --as--as--as you
19 know.

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MAISEL: Thank you very
22 much Commissioner.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much
24 Council Member Maisel, and we're going to pass it off
25

2 to our colleague here in Manhattan, Council Member
3 Kallos.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Thank you, Chair
5 Levine for your leadership and thank you, Parks
6 Commissioner Silver. In 2014, I came to this budget
7 hearing and noted that these East River Esplanade was
8 literally falling into the river, and that if we let
9 it fall into river, it would be \$430 million to
10 rebuild it, or it would cost us \$115 million to not
11 make it as great as the West Side, and I do demand
12 that we make the East River Esplanade better than the
13 West Side, but just that it would take \$115 million
14 to shore it up. In that year, we were able to secure
15 \$35 million. We have finished phase 1 and 2 of the
16 at \$35 million, and we now instead of \$115 million,
17 which I asked for previously, we are now requesting
18 \$169 million to keep that work on track. And so,
19 Commissioner Silver, I want to thank your team for
20 their great work, and ask if you will continue to
21 fund the shoring up of the East River Esplanade so
22 that it does not fall into the river.

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, all I can say
24 is that we do agree with you that we're very pleased.
25 We actually have \$42 million from phase 1 and 2 that

2 went into stabilizing the Esplanade, and we recognize
3 that more work—work needs to be done. We will
4 continue to have conversations with the
5 administration about getting additional capital
6 dollars to improve the Esplanade.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: And—and thank you
8 and this is an issue of importance to Council
9 District 5 as well as my—my neighbor to the north.
10 We actually split the Esplanade, which runs from 60th
11 to 125th Street, and a lot of the work that we've
12 already secured has been benefitting both the Upper
13 East Side and East Harlem. So, again, thank you for
14 the work. On a separate note, the East Side, my
15 Council District, District 5 actually ranks fourth
16 from the last for open space, and so we're looking
17 for it anywhere we can. I want to thank you for
18 opening 2,000 square feet and doing a ribbon cutting
19 and the community is still excited about it because
20 we now have pier space that can be used as park
21 space. However, we have about 50,000 square feet, an
22 acre and a quarter that's under the Queens Borough
23 Bridge. It's called Queens Borough Oval, and in my
24 lifetime I—I've never actually been able to be there
25 because there has been a private lease for the entire

2 park for the better part of 40 years and I—Even on a
3 City Council Member's salary, I can't afford the \$180
4 to \$225 an hour to play tennis there. I've asked
5 other folks from the Parks Department if they would
6 play tennis with there, but none of us seem be able
7 to—to—to part with that \$180 to play. And so I
8 understand that certain members of the public may
9 have \$180 to play tennis there, but they certainly
10 don't live in my district, and they don't live in the
11 surrounding area because I haven't actually heard
12 from anyone in my community other than asking to
13 return the space. And so we've worked with Community
14 Board 8 for the better part of my entire first term.
15 We passed—we've had 14 meetings. We've passed four
16 resolutions. The Borough President, our Congress
17 Member, our State Senator, and—and I—and our Assembly
18 Member have all asked to please not renew the lease,
19 and to open it back to the public. I for one am
20 willing to put capital fund, but can we please de-
21 privatize a park in the city, and add public space
22 and a brand new public park.

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: For clarification
24 purposes, the space underneath the Queens Borough
25 Bridge is a Department of Transportation property. A

2 lot of people affectionately call it a park, but
3 actually it is a Department of Transportation
4 property, which is being used as a concession. We
5 know that about--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [interposing] But
7 before that, it was—it was a park before it was a
8 concession because we've had people at Community
9 Board meetings testify that they played softball
10 there that they ran on track there. So it has
11 historically been used for parks purposes and even
12 now is being licensed through Parks.

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It's being licensed
14 through Parks, but it is a property—it's a city-owned
15 property that is now under the jurisdiction of
16 Department of Transportation. I can't answer what
17 happened prior to the concession. It's been I'm told
18 some 30, 40 years. But as you know, going forward,
19 we have met with many stakeholders including our
20 elected officials. We have both a short-term and a
21 long-term plan. The short-term is to continue—to
22 make a recommendation to continue the lease, and on a
23 year-to-year basis while we explore several long-term
24 options. We have not come up with a determination
25 yet of what that long-term—long-term option is, but

2 we'll continue those conversations with both you,
3 your colleagues, elected officials as well as other
4 stakeholders until we can come up with a resolution.
5 But for the time being we are recommending, which we
6 did share with the committee when we met with them,
7 depending on how long the conversation would occur
8 that we would have to extend that license agreement
9 until we come to a long-term solution.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I think there's
11 an overwhelming concern at least by me as Chair of
12 Governmental Operations having overseen Rivington and
13 now Waters Edge and others. Any time we see a
14 private vendor who's paying I believe just over \$2
15 million for an acre and a half—and a quarter of city
16 space, which is far below market, and making several
17 million dollars a year, and not having to compete
18 against a free market or compete against other
19 providers. We—we have similar arrangements not quite
20 with groups like Asphalt Green where over 40,000
21 children play, but we're not seeing anywhere near the
22 number of people there, and we're not seeing access
23 to this space for low-income families and the
24 community as a whole. So I guess the concern for
25 myself all the elected officials and the Community

2 Board is just that allowing it to lapse into yearly
3 renewals is not responding to the community, and—and
4 I believe that I work for the voters, and Parks
5 should also be working for the residents of the
6 community.

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We continue to
8 listen to stakeholders on both sides of the issues,
9 or those that would like it to continue and those
10 that would like it to somehow become a—an open space.
11 As I stated we have both a short-term recommendation
12 as we explore some of the long-term options and that
13 is the process that we're continuing. But we're
14 always willing to sit down to talk to anyone that
15 wants to talk about this further, but that is what
16 we've shared with the community, with the elected
17 officials, but we don't have a final recommendation
18 of what the long-term use should be.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I—I guess the—the
20 last piece, and I believe the Riverside Park Tennis
21 Association is in Council Member Levine's district,
22 but that's a tremendous model where Parks property
23 with clay courts on it, is maintained by the
24 Riverside Park Conservancy and this sub-entity, and
25 we've got these great clay parks, and if we could

2 replicate that model and have—work with them to be
3 custodians of this, we could tomorrow cancel the
4 license and still have a tennis use there. But we
5 could replicate the success that you've had on
6 Riverside. So, once again, we're slightly envious of
7 the West Side on the East Side, and hope for similar
8 services.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, you don't have
10 to be envious of me on that one because those are in
11 Council Member Rosenthal's district, but the—the
12 truth is that we do have a model for a public run
13 tennis court, and—and I don't thin that Council
14 Member Kallos is against tennis. I gather he has a
15 pretty good game, but that under the public managed
16 model it's—it's a \$100 annual fee, and thank you for
17 reducing that. That's certainly increased usage.
18 There is clearly budgetary impact if it's going to be
19 a publicly run entity with the lower fees, but I
20 think what you heard Council Member Kallos say, and
21 I would echo is that let's have the conversation
22 about what the budget would need to be. On the
23 capital side probably there is millions of dollars of
24 backlogged needs there, and on the operating side,
25 and ultimately I would that it's—there's a public

2 benefit served by that investment, and I would—I
3 would add my voice to—the Council Members in—in—in
4 pushing for those kind of creative solutions for
5 public access in this public space no matter what
6 agency has jurisdiction. I want to acknowledge we've
7 been joined by many of our wonderful colleagues
8 including Council Member Ulrich, our Majority Leader
9 Jimmy Van Bramer, Parks Committee members from
10 Brooklyn Council Member Mark Treyger and Darlene
11 Mealy, and I believe that Councilman Treyger you have
12 a question, is that right, sir? Okay, we'll—we'll do
13 you next and then we'll have Council Member Ulrich,
14 and—and the others as well—

15 MALE SPEAKER: [off mic] Van Bramer.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --and Van Bramer and
17 then Mealy. Okay, take it away Council Member
18 Treyger.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you, Chair
20 Levine and welcome Commissioner. I just want to
21 begin by again just saying that it was definitely
22 tough to fill the shoes of Brooklyn Commissioner—
23 former Commissioner Jeffries, but we—we are thrilled,
24 and we applaud you on the appointments of
25 Commissioner Marty Maher. It's good to call you

2 commissioner now, Marty. [coughing] I-I just want
3 to begin by reading through your comments the issue
4 of the investments in anchor parks throughout the
5 boroughs and-and the Community Park Initiative, which
6 I do appreciate and I mentioned this at a-a previous
7 parks hearing, but I believe it's important for the
8 Commissioner to-to also I think hear this is that
9 we're still concerns about the issue of not just
10 recovery, but resiliency neighborhoods that I
11 represent, and there are certain-there are certain
12 parks that have not gotten the love and the
13 attention, which they needed for quite time
14 particularly in areas that are prone to flooding and
15 emergencies. There are still parks, for example, in
16 Coney Island that are called parks, but are
17 completely concrete, and we've heard, you know, DEP
18 and other sister agencies the importance of trying to
19 green up these parks. And so forgive me if this was
20 asked before. I was in the Education Committee
21 hearing, but is there a plan to continue the
22 Community Parks Initiative this year, and is there a
23 way to loop in resiliency initiatives and goals. For
24 example, there's a park in Coney Island called Surf-
25 Surf Playground that is not-is near a school and just

2 predominantly, you know, concrete and that's
3 something that that should be an example of a park
4 that's being converted to green space for—for more
5 than one reason. So I just want to hear your
6 thoughts first on that.

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay, in terms of
8 the Community Parks Initiative our focus for this
9 budget and the Capital Budget is really state of good
10 repair, and -and making sure we're holding the assets
11 that we have, and if we look at all the major capital
12 items, it's really state of good repair. Having said
13 that, for all or Community Parks Initiative projects
14 DEP is heavily involved in resiliency as part of each
15 project. I believe a majority of the Community Parks
16 Initiative has some element of sustainability working
17 with DEP where there's storm water retention on site.
18 So the answer is yes. In addition to that we always
19 look very carefully on how we plan and build all of
20 our parks within flood plains. It's something that
21 is the first step we take when we're designing a
22 park. So to answer your question on the Community
23 Parks Initiative yes, and parks in general yes, but
24 in terms of the CPI for this budget, right now we're

2 now seeing another round this fall, but this budget
3 is now focused on state of good repair.

4

5 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: But so there
6 will be an announcement of more parks as part of this
7 initiative is that correct?

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: These are eleven
9 sites this fall.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: And have you
11 picked those sites already or are they--?

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right now we have a
13 general list when we did our analysis a few years
14 ago, so we'll be looking at that list to make the
15 determination. So right now it's still a
16 conversation and analysis.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: [interposing]
18 And I'm not just advocating just for my district. I--
19 I think that all of the communities that are
20 vulnerable and--and prone to flooding, and also that
21 have not been--they have been really neglected for
22 quite some time. One thing about Sandy, it hit areas
23 that were historically neglected period. Coney
24 Island, Red Hook, Canarsie, you name it. These are
25 the areas that needed some help for quite some time.

2 So I would really like to work with your—with your
3 departments on making sure that we loop in these
4 resiliency goals as well. I also saw that the—the
5 allocation of that. One thing about Sandy, it hit
6 areas that were historically neglected period. Coney
7 Island, Red Hook, Canarsie, you name it. These are
8 the areas that needed some help for quite some time.
9 So I would really like to work with your—with your
10 departments on making sure that we loop in these
11 resiliency goals as well. I also saw that the—the
12 allocation of that \$150 million to transform anchor
13 parks in each of the five boroughs, and I remember—I
14 remember reading there was recently an announcement
15 that the Mayor I think—I believe with your agency
16 and—and with Deputy Mayor Shagin (sic) a big
17 investment in Bushwick Inlet Park to keep a promise
18 that was made by the previous administration to
19 purchase land to convert it into a future park. And
20 I—I'm all for increasing green space, but I just want
21 to again remind the Parks Department that there was a
22 promise made by the last administration to a really
23 big space in Southern Brooklyn, and Commissioner Mark
24 gave me the right pronunciation Calvert Vaux Park.
25 Is that correct, Commissioner?

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: That's correct.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Alright. Thank
4 you. Where they had promised I think over \$70
5 million or somewhere around that figure of \$40--\$70
6 million, a huge investment that was made to transform
7 it into regional park. All that was really done was
8 a--a parking lot and a few soccer fields. I don't
9 know the last time you've been to--to this physical
10 space, but it has such enormous potential. It's also
11 tied into EDC's study for resiliency in that region.
12 My full EDC point blank (sic) that in addition to the
13 protection of life and property and--and resiliency,
14 we need to enhance our public asset, which is Calvert
15 Vaux. It--it is just crying and dying for investments
16 and resources, and I'm going to demand Brooklyn--
17 Southern Brooklyn's fair share. It's not physically
18 in my district but it serves the entire Southern
19 Brooklyn region. So I just want to hear thoughts on
20 Calver Vaux.

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, Council
22 Member I listed to you because you mentioned
23 Bensonhurst Park and I went out there for a visit--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: [interposing]
25 Yes you did.

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --and documented it
3 and so you do know there is some intervention there,
4 and I also went out to Calvert Vaux as well. There
5 is a comfort station that's on its way in addition to
6 the ball fields or soccer fields, which are actually
7 some of the best that I've seen. And I also took a
8 walk through the other area of the area until I got
9 to the waterfront, and I do agree it is a park that
10 needs investment. So it's one that I'll continue
11 conversations with the administration, but I have
12 heard before—I did not know the number was \$70
13 million. I thought the number was lot smaller, but
14 it's certainly something we'll take into
15 consideration as we continue our conversations.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Well, I—I
17 appreciate that. I believe it was originally
18 somewhere in the—in the 40 to 50 range. Then they—
19 the estimates increased, but it's going to take about
20 at least \$70 to \$80 million I think, somewhere in
21 that region to—to actualize that vision of a great
22 lawn—and really things that the community does truly
23 deserve. So I—I would really just like to work with
24 you, and the last point I'll make because I want to
25 be mindful of my colleagues' time. The Chair and I

2 are proud to work together on the Parks Equity
3 Initiative in-in the City Council, and this was about
4 making sure that we are, you know, activating spaces
5 that historically have not been activated throughout
6 the entire year, and building up capacity in
7 neighborhoods. I just wanted to hear your thoughts
8 on-on-on how that program is going from your end
9 whether there are additional needs. We need-we need
10 funding to-to kind of-I-we really want to make this
11 not just a part of a budget dance, but a part of the
12 norm here in the City of New York that we are
13 creating fair equitable opportunities across all
14 regions of the city. I just want to hear your
15 thoughts on that.

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, I think you
17 and the Council for that funding. Let me just share
18 with you from the City Parks Founding that where the
19 money went it was able to either partially or fully
20 fund eight staff members that Partnership for Parks
21 who really worked to provide technical assistance to
22 communities. So all those communities have
23 benefitted from those funds. In addition, there was
24 about another \$667,000 that went direction to parks.
25 We've used that to activate a lot of our parks. That

2 included community events, movie nights. As we
3 stated, we had over 500 this year additional program
4 associates and improvements to a number of community
5 gardens. So all of the—the funds that the Council
6 provided actually did go to work, and there was
7 another \$775 million that was also given out to
8 various groups to put their own projects in. So the
9 initiative itself was highly effective and—and we
10 thank you for it, and again I heard your concern
11 about how we can continue this going forward. We'll
12 certainly make a note of that as we continue our
13 conversations with the Mayor's Office as the process
14 continues.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: And please let
16 us know if there are capacity issues. Let us know now
17 so we keep this program afloat and strong and make it
18 a part of the normal in—in our city, and just the
19 last point. I know that we're not in beach season,
20 but always keeping our eye on—on staffing levels and—
21 and staffing outreach. Are there any concerns or
22 any thoughts of where we're at? I'm not sure if this
23 question was asked about—has staffing recruitment
24 begun for—for the seasons ahead or anything?

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I think the regular
3 staffing this--believe it or not during the snow storm
4 last week we already started working on the staffing
5 plans--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: [interposing]
7 Okay.

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --of the beaches.
9 So we start early. It was nice. As we're talking
10 about beaches the snow was falling but it is what it
11 is. It is spring officially. I don't know if
12 Commissioner Kavanagh if you want to want to add
13 anything else.

14 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: As-as
15 Commissioner Silver mentioned, we began our formal
16 beach preparation process last week. All things are
17 in place or working towards being in place for
18 Memorial Day Weekend especially with lifeguards. We
19 have a-a really strong class in training right now
20 over 300 applicants. We think we're going to match
21 last year's numbers of almost 1,500 lifeguards
22 working in New York City beaches and pools next
23 summer.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: So no concerns
25 at this point?

2 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: No.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Very good.

4 Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much,
6 Council Member Treyger. Next up we have Council
7 Member Ulrich.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Thank you, Mr.
9 Chairman and I realize I'm a guest of this committee.
10 I'm not a member. So I'll be prudent with my time
11 and Commissioner, I want to apologize for being late
12 today, but I did get a chance to review your
13 testimony, and I just want to let you know how
14 pleased I am to work with Commissioner Lewandowski in
15 Queens, and her fine staff at the Queens Office.
16 [sirens] They do a phenomenal job helping my
17 district, and before and after Hurricane Sandy and I
18 know that you know that already, but some of those
19 events and things that they were able to help us
20 accomplish before you taking over the department. And
21 it's always good to see Commission Kavanagh. He was
22 a big presence in the Rockaways last year. So I have
23 a few questions about the Rockaways in particular and
24 I know that my summer constituent here with me.
25 [laughter] I won't—I won't tell the people in his

2 district that in the summertime Council Member Cohen
3 spends an awful lot of time in the La Ponza, but
4 anyway. So, a few questions. First about capital
5 projects. So we—we've seen and we are very grateful
6 for the extraordinary investment that Parks has made,
7 and with respect to capital projects on the Peninsula
8 both in my district and I know Council Member
9 Richards. I don't think he's here with us, but I
10 know he certainly appreciates all the capital money
11 that the city was able to put forward while we waited
12 for FEMA to give us our allotment, if you will. The
13 Boardwalk is 99% done I think we'd say. I mean it's
14 almost there. I mean we're very--

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] By
16 Memorial Day it will be there.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: We are vey pleased
18 by that. We were very pleased that our federal
19 partners were able to secure more money than I think
20 the city even anticipated to be quite honest, and
21 we're very grateful that the administration has
22 agreed to reinvest a lot of the money in the
23 community. But one of the concerns that I hear from
24 folks on the community board and in the community is
25 that they are concerned that Parks might be using

2 some of the FEMA allotment that we're receiving, or
3 reimbursement money that we're receiving for other
4 Parks projects that are sort of related to resiliency
5 but not quite rebuilding parks and doing things. For
6 instance, this Parks facility is a \$39 garage.
7 That's what it's being coined and referred locally.
8 But people in the community are saying hey,
9 Shorefront Parkway is not fully rebuilt yet. We don't
10 have all of our park space up and running and you
11 know, Parks Department gets more money than we've
12 even asked for, and they want to take \$30 million of
13 that money and build a garage. So maybe you want to
14 address some of those points.

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: First, in terms of
16 total costs, when the recommendation was submitted to
17 FEMA, we split the cost. So the full \$30 million was
18 not submitted. It was about half of that amount with
19 the other half would be coming from the city. So
20 that was the first item. Secondly, we communicated
21 and Commissioner and Lewdice-Lewandowski was very
22 clear that this is a hub. This is the first line of
23 defense. When a storm is coming both to prep for it.
24 That is not elevated. It was damaged during Sandy.
25 So it is eligible. Right now, they're operating out

2 of temporary trailers, and if a storm is coming they
3 have to move all their vehicles further away which
4 reduces their ability to do storm prep. So this hub,
5 transit—this hub would take care of not only the
6 Rockaway but 130 other sites in a peninsula. It is
7 vital to the operations. The boots on the ground.
8 The same as having a precinct in the neighborhood.
9 It's the same as having this. You don't want to just
10 have police deployed in other areas. You need that
11 location on site. So we see this vitally important
12 to resiliency with boots on the ground, where they
13 would have their operations in an elevated structure
14 that would not get flooded. The last time it was
15 flooded and hurt the ability for a storm recovery.
16 So we agreed not to put the full amount forward.
17 It's only partial funding, and so—and we also
18 included seven items in total. We heard the
19 community and so we made sure that it was evenly
20 distributed throughout the peninsula.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: That's great.
22 With respect to the Capital Budget process, you know,
23 one of the frustrating things for us to deal with as
24 elected officials is that we have a limited amount of
25 discretionary money. You have scarce resources of

2 your own that you have to distribute throughout the
3 city. One of the concerns is the cost of these
4 capital projects that, you know, we ask Parks
5 Department, hey how much would it cost to fix this
6 ball field or this playground or his, you know,
7 tennis court or whatever the project happens to be
8 and not only in Rockaway. You know so many of my
9 constituents who's Forest Park and—and so many
10 playgrounds and park spaces between, and the costs
11 are just so high, and then we hear—and I don't know
12 if this is actually true because I'm not a member of
13 the committee, but that a third of that cost actually
14 goes to the—architectural, internal costs of the
15 Parks Department, the fixed costs. Is that—so if the
16 project is \$1-1/2 million, does the actual
17 construction only cost a million dollars, and 500,000
18 is going to Parks? Can you clarify that for me?

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Let me clarify.
20 There are two separate questions. So let me first go
21 on the costs, and second we'll go on our projects
22 either on in-house or with consultants, which is what
23 you're referring to. In terms of the cost we share
24 your concern. We put out competitive bid and this
25 what the market is telling us it would cost, and

2 we're doing everything we can by standardizing our
3 designs to help bring costs down, but even the New
4 York Building Congress stated in their Annual
5 analysis they're seeing prices going up 4% in 2016
6 and they expect it to be the same again. And to
7 quote them they said that this means a stretched
8 labor force, increased use of overtime and an ability
9 for contractors to pick and choose which projects
10 they pursue is causing an increase. This is
11 something we do not control. We're doing our best
12 with estimating software with doing custom-non-
13 customized design and having more templates to help
14 bring the cost down. We're still getting the higher
15 bids. So it's something that we're hear to any
16 ideas, but it's the nature of where we are in the
17 market. In terms of what you were mentioning about
18 the cost, what happens when we recommend consultants
19 to do design on some of our projects these the
20 10/10/10, as you mentioned. Ten percent of the
21 project cost is charged for design. Ten percent of
22 the project is charged for construction supervision,
23 and the ten percent is contingency. So it's not 30%.
24 When we use consultants it's that 10% I mentioned,
25 that we pay them for design and another ten percent

2 for construction supervision. So that is—is not a
3 third of the budget? That—that part is not correct.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: You know, so many
5 Council Members now participate in or use
6 participatory budgeting in their district to engage
7 their constituents to get ideas about what they'd
8 like to see with respect to parks and libraries and
9 DOT, and I think that some of the feedback I've heard
10 from many of my colleagues is that Parks has been
11 less than flexible with respect to the type of
12 projects that you would allow in the participatory
13 budget process. My office for instance Robbie who
14 works for me submitted 14 projects, ideas that we got
15 from people who serve on the community board and on
16 the steering committee, and 13 out of the 14 were
17 rejected by Parks. I mean clearly 14 is more than
18 just a handful and 13 out 14 were just flat out
19 rejected by the capital folks at the Parks Department
20 and I would ask that maybe you take a look at
21 internally their approval process or their
22 willingness to accept certain capital projects that
23 might be included in the PB process.

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, we'll
25 certainly take a look at it. I know that when we knew

2 the process was starting, we wanted to make sure that
3 what was capitally eligible and in projects that fit
4 within with the park was discussed up front, so we'll
5 certainly circle back and have a conversation with
6 staff about that.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Several years ago
8 we funded and—and approved and allowed a handful of
9 projects in Broad Channel and in Rockaway, and then
10 we found out that that was not that the actual cost
11 of those projects, and I'm—I'm now in the third year
12 and I'm going to be funding some of those projects.
13 So, I—I would—I would—I would almost appreciate it
14 more if Parks said no it's going to cost a million
15 and a half instead of \$500,000 or \$800,000 because
16 then the—the community says well, we voted on this
17 three years. How come we haven't seen a shove in the
18 ground yet? When is it going to start? How come it
19 costs all this money? Nobody told us this. So it's
20 not that I was being duplicitous or that you were
21 even being duplicitous. I just think that we have to
22 put a lot more thought and—and consideration into how
23 some of these projects are planned, designed, funded.
24 Are they going out to an outside consultant? Are
25 they going to be done in house? I don't know, but

2 that's something that I think we need to work on.
3 Lastly, Chair, Rockaway is undergoing a tremendous
4 renaissance. You've been out there many, many times.
5 I've seen you personally even on days when there's,
6 you know, no events. You just pop in and we
7 appreciate that, and we have a—a very dynamic Parks
8 Administrator in Portia Dam for what—she's doing a
9 phenomenal job out there. You should know that, but
10 we have tens and tens of thousands of additional
11 people coming to our beaches, and we're grateful for
12 that, but we need more staffing especially on the
13 weekends. When the hipsters invade, they come in
14 from Brooklyn and they come into my district [cheers]
15 or from—

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Hey,
17 hey, hey, hey.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: --or from the
19 Bronx. [background comments] When the Hipster comes
20 from the Bronx—Oh, he—he left. I guess he got him
21 back. Oh, there he is. He's over there, but when
22 they come from other boroughs, other parts of Queens
23 and they want to enjoy the beach, you know, the
24 garbage is piling up on the beach on certain days,
25 the—you know the—I think that the lifeguard hours

2 need to be looked at. This is a conversation that
3 Liam and I have had for a number of years. We need
4 more staffing. We need more staffing in the—in the
5 beach season in the Rockaways. That's my plea.

6 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, thank you for
7 calling me a Hipster because it's one of my favorite
8 [laughter] locations where I could run five miles
9 continuously and get a nice breeze. So you know, we
10 had a 500 peak season staff last year, and quite a
11 few went out to the Rockaway. I actually did a
12 detail of cleaning all the cans on hot August day.
13 So we'll certainly look into that, but we purposely
14 are deploying more weekend service particularly at
15 our beaches to make sure we keep up with the demand
16 of some of the trash that's collecting, but I'll
17 certainly check with staff, but I've been there a
18 number of times. I haven't seen that, but maybe it
19 was a day I was not there, but we value this
20 incredible asset, and you're right, it is a beautiful
21 place, and more and more people are coming.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ULRICH: Commissioner,
23 thank you. Chairman, thank you again.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Council
25 Member Ulrich. So for those Hipsters who are

2 planning their summer beach schedule, can you clarify
3 whether there's money in the budget for extension of
4 the Rockaway Bar-Rockaway Beach and other beaches and
5 pools beyond Labor Day by one week?

6 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It is not in this
7 budget, but I will defer to Commissioner Kavanagh
8 about some of the numbers that we experienced at the
9 tail end of the-the period of time where the beach
10 was extended, but there's currently not in this
11 budget.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, so you're-
13 you're going to tell us that it wasn't well used last
14 year, is that right?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: He's just going to
16 give you the numbers. [laughs]

17 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: In comparison to
18 2015, there was a marked in beach attendance in the
19 extended week 2016. It was approximately 263,000 in
20 2015 and over 400,000 in 2016. So there was an
21 increase there. For the first year we extended the-
22 the pool season. There were about 50,000 users in
23 the pools during the seven-day extension. We don't
24 have a basis for comparison in the prior year because
25 this is the first time the pools were extended, but

2 looking back to the prior week in 2016, the week
3 before Labor Day, we had about 90,000 attendees at
4 the pools during that week as opposed to 50,000 in
5 the extended week. So, it's—it's very much, you know,
6 weather dependent in 2015. As you may recall, you
7 know, we had cooler, rainier weather on the weekend
8 with that extension. This year we—we didn't have
9 such a drastic change in weather, and I'm sure that
10 helped to account for the increase that we saw year
11 over year at the beaches.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [off mic] It is [on
13 mic] dependent--it's weather dependent. It also
14 depends on when the school calendar falls. There can
15 be extra days after Labor Day that are—that are still
16 school holidays, but I—I would caution you—it seems
17 like where you might have been heading is to a
18 statement that use at the beaches just—justifies the
19 extension, but not use at the pools. Is that—is that
20 where you were heading?

21 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I didn't make
22 such a statement, but--

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, good.

24 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --I think the
25 jury is still out on that, but--

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, good.

3 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --I think the
4 jury is still out on that--

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Okay.

6 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --but the numbers
7 that we saw at the pools were--were certainly less
8 than at the end of August, which is traditionally a
9 slower time period, and I don't think we know enough
10 about whether or not it's going to grow in coming
11 years.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right.

13 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: And I--I just need
14 to say that, you know, we are always concerned about
15 having the--the appropriate number of lifeguards to
16 safely provide swimming especially at the beaches.
17 At the pools, we're able to, you know, cordon off
18 areas, and limit use. At the beaches it's much more
19 difficult and while our lifeguards have done a great
20 done during both extensions, many of them have
21 commitments outside of their--their work with us
22 during summer. So we're not--

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Right.

24

25

2 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --always able to
3 predict exactly how many staff we're going to have to
4 supervise this.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, look, there's
6 a equity issue that we've spoken about in the past
7 between pool use and beach use and the reason why we
8 want the season extended for both is it's a question
9 of fairness, and while the Hipsters flock to the
10 beaches in Rockaway and elsewhere, two-thirds of the
11 users in our city's pools are people of color and
12 generally from the surrounding neighborhoods and
13 they--they tend to be located in communities of color,
14 and there's a similar pattern in the lifeguard force
15 whereas the lifeguards and the pools are more likely
16 to be men and women of color and more likely to be
17 from the neighborhood, and it's really an inverse of
18 that at--at the beaches. So we've been advocates for
19 extension of both of these wonderful resources, and
20 we were grateful for the inclusion in the budget last
21 year for the extra week, and certainly disappointed
22 that it's not in this year' budget, and we'll be
23 pushing very, very hard for that in the negotiations
24 in the months ahead. I want to acknowledge we've
25 been joined by our colleague Council Member Johnson,

2 and I want to queue our Majority Leader Jimmy Van
3 Bramer for a question. He'll be followed by Council
4 Member Mealy and then Council Member Johnson.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank you
6 very much, Mr. Chair. Commissioner, I wanted to
7 follow up on a conversation with your Chief of Staff
8 yesterday just because I think it's important that
9 these things be on the record. In relation to
10 Queensbridge Park and the Park House project, which
11 is horrifically delayed, and which we're terribly
12 unhappy about. Now, I have great respect for your
13 Chief of Staff who we've done a great deal of work
14 with over the years and yourself, but I just wonder
15 if—if you can speak to where we're at now, when the
16 people of Queens Bridge can expect that project to be
17 done. And—also more globally, there was a
18 discussion that what happened at Queensbridge Park
19 with this park house, you've now made changes to the
20 way you do these projects and so, therefore, we can
21 expect far fewer kinds of nightmare scenarios like
22 this going forward, and—and I would just like to hear
23 you speak to that because what—the—the time frame
24 that we now are looking as I understand it for
25 completion of Queensbridge is—is—is a great—great

2 distance from when we thought we were going to have
3 the Park House done and, you know, all jokes aside
4 about—about hipsters going onto the Rockaway, which
5 is great. There aren't any Hipsters going to
6 Queensbridge Park, but the people who do go the
7 Queensbridge Park are my constituents who live in the
8 Queensbridge Houses and the Ravenswood Houses, and
9 they deserve a—an first rate park. We've done some
10 great work there, as you and I both know, but—but
11 this one is—is not a success story. So maybe you can
12 talk a little bit about where is that now, and when
13 the Parks Department believes it will deliver the
14 Queensbridge Park Park House and then more globally
15 the changes that have been made that we—your staff
16 and I assume your self, of course, to have more
17 confidence going forward that what happened there
18 won't be happening any more.

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, to understand
20 specifically, I understand you met with at least the
21 staff that updated you, my Chief of Staff, and I
22 believe it's close to going into procurement.
23 Procurement has a sliding scale 7 to 12 months. Of
24 course, we try to push it to be at the shorter end,
25 and the construction is anywhere between 12 to 18

2 months, but again, we've—I testified earlier that
3 we're now seeing huge savings at least about three
4 months on the construction side. So the news is not
5 good, but it could at least be a couple of years
6 before it's completed. I did call you after you
7 expressed your displeasure, and we did bring it up at
8 one of our critical meetings where we discussed
9 projects that are delayed, and that answers the
10 second part of your question. We now on a monthly
11 basis have a meeting where if projects are challenged
12 going forward, if there are issues I need to know
13 about, we discuss it right away before the delays
14 start to pile up. And I make sure that the council
15 member is notified, that we understand the nature of
16 the problem. If there are at any given time eight
17 reasons why a project is delayed, but I also
18 inherited a lot of projects that are were already in
19 the pipeline before I got here. This was one of
20 them, and many of them had experienced delays in the
21 past. So this meeting is important. So at any given
22 time we're going over five to seven projects, and I'm
23 trying to figure out how to make it move forward or
24 to deal with some of the issues that are out of our
25 control that we have to share with the—either the

2 borough president or the council member. So this is
3 a vital meeting. We call it red zone, and it's
4 something that we sit down and figure out what's
5 going wrong, and what can we do to make this project
6 move forward or deliver the not so pleasant news that
7 there's an issue that's just out of our control. The
8 contractor defaulted or an unsuccessful bid. There
9 could be a variety of reasons why a project gets
10 delay, but at least we're seeing that less and less
11 going forward.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So as soon as
13 I mentioned it to you at the last Parks Committee
14 meeting and it went into Red Zone I take it or it
15 was--

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] But
17 more for an update because you wanted me to get more
18 familiar with what was going on. So it was brought
19 there really to talk about what has transpired with
20 this particular project, and so that's where staff
21 was showing me exactly what had happened along the
22 way, and there was a series of unfortunate events
23 that caused it to be delayed. So at least I was more
24 knowledgeable about what had transpired. I think

2 this one dated back to 2013 I believe. Yeah, about
3 2013.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Right. So I—
5 I guess my question is the fact that it—it has now
6 come to your attention and—and is it—is it—has it
7 changed anything in terms of if it gets into the red
8 zone discussion or meeting then has—has that resulted
9 in the Queensbridge Park Park House project moving
10 any more quickly?

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right now with this
12 moving toward procurement that is the process I have
13 the least control over. I think the unfortunate
14 events that happened, happened prior to procurement.
15 You know, clearly we're trying to work through
16 procurement to have it on the seven-month side not
17 the twelve-month side, and that is something that
18 staff is going to push working with all the
19 irrelevant from law to MOCS to OMB to make sure it
20 moves through the process. We've been getting great
21 cooperation from all entities, and then for
22 construction we want to make sure that we have a
23 resident engineer, but make sure it's done safety,
24 but is done as quickly as possible.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So, it's-it's
3 March and we believe we're going into procurement,
4 and I was told that we can expect construction to
5 start in early 2018. Is that something you feel
6 comfortable with?

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: And that we
9 would have the Park House completed in-in-in 2019.

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: And-and it
12 maybe an 18-month period, right. So we could
13 conceivably have the Park House in the summer of
14 2019.

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: So I just
17 wanted to have that on the record. We're going to
18 hold you to it--

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I know you will.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: --and, you
21 know, I know you know how important this is, and-and
22 the good people of Queensbridge deserve nothing but
23 the very best, and that's why we have put so much
24 money into Queensbridge Park, and have-have really
25 helped transform that form. This is an important

2 piece of that. I think you know that, and the sooner
3 that an abandoned park house gets torn down and we
4 build a beautiful new state-of-the-art structure, is-
5 is for me a sign to the children of Queensbridge and-
6 and all of the people of Queensbridge that the city
7 understands and values that park because the children
8 shouldn't be playing baseball in the Summer Little
9 League that I sponsor in the shadow of an abandoned
10 park house. I don't like what that says to those
11 children. I know you don't like that either. So the
12 sooner we tear down that building and-and show the
13 images that I've seen of the amazing structure that's
14 going to go up in-in it's place, and I want to share
15 those images with the people of the district because
16 it's-it's maybe the nicest park house I've ever seen
17 you all-you all designed. We want that in
18 Queensbridge Park as soon as possible.

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Understood.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Mr.

22 Majority Leader and Council member Mealy.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [off mic] Hello,
24 Commissioner and your staff, and to our former
25 Jeffrey, then a new one Marty Maher. I want to say

2 thank you for all that you have done in Brooklyn and
3 especially I could say at least about 90% of all our
4 parks are done, but you were talking about the
5 competitive bid contracts those comfort stations.
6 Have you all tried any other contractor in regards to
7 these comfort stations? But I remember we just did
8 a—I could say about a \$10 million park, Imagination
9 Playground, the second in the world in Brownsville,
10 and here it is the architects—I know I asked for a
11 comfort station, but it's not there. And now we have
12 this state-of-the-art park, and now I have to put \$2
13 million in for just the comfort station. So I'm
14 saying how can we do a little better with these
15 comfort stations? That's a lot of the Capital Budget
16 that we could be putting into schools when—if we get
17 a competitive bid if they say a comfort station is
18 \$800,000 or \$1 million, that's a good, you know,
19 deduction from \$2 million. So have you all thought
20 about going to a different contractor? I know it's
21 an open bid, but maybe the—the same person is getting
22 the same bid, and you know Parks has a little issue
23 with the same people getting the same contracts.
24 Have you ever tried a new contractor some way or

2 another, or someone has to do a lower bid that this
3 one contractor.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We put it out and
5 we will accept the lowest responsible bidder. I
6 share your concern. When I got here it was under \$2
7 million. It is now approaching \$3 million, and--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing]
9 That's the problem.

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: And as I stated
11 earlier, we met with the--the industry. They
12 recognized prices are going up across the board here
13 in New York, and they expect it to continue. We are
14 experimenting with one comfort station--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing]
16 That's good.

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --in Staten Island
18 where we have in-house staff doing it, and it's not
19 building a new one, in-house renovation. We've even
20 gone to standardizing all of our comfort stations to
21 a template, and even with the template, we're
22 experiencing different prices in different locations.
23 So this is something that is out of our control. We
24 are open to any and all suggestions, but what we've
25 done is we've come with a standardized template. So

2 that wherever the comfort station goes we can compare
3 one project to the other, and we sit down with the
4 contractors, my staff, and sometimes evaluate what is
5 pushing these prices to go so high? So, essentially,
6 I can quote you what the Building Congress said, but
7 it's a product of a very tight market, a desire for
8 overtime. All these issues are pushing. It's really
9 not on the material side. That doesn't change that
10 much, but it's just in terms of just the demand for
11 contractors here in New York. So going out to others
12 we do that now. We put it out to bid, and we want
13 more to bid so we can get a very good price.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you. I
15 really thank you. At least we doing something
16 different. If you keep doing the same thing and
17 getting the same results, I thank you. At least a
18 template now that's a start. We're trying something
19 different. So I really appreciate that, Commissioner
20 and I was thinking that in regards to the OMB, OMB
21 the budget was announced last month. Has the
22 department made any additional budget requests from
23 the Office of Management and Budgment-Budget?

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] And
3 if you have--could you give me one of the requests
4 you put in?

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right. From the
6 time we submit there's all--always ongoing
7 conversations both about reductions as well as some
8 other new needs. Those conversations are ongoing,
9 and there's nothing I could really share at this time
10 because we're just beginning those conversations now.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Okay, that's good
12 to know, and have you ever [siren] asked for a line
13 item of playground associates? My colleague he just
14 asked that. He needs more staff in the parks.
15 Playground associates I put in out of my
16 discretionary funds--I put in just that my parks could
17 stay clean--

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]
19 Right.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: --every summer. I
21 do concerts out of my own pocket and bring it (sic)
22 every year. But in my discretion I still have to put
23 extra money in that we can have people to make sure
24 that our parks stay clean, and it's not a problem and

2 it's giving employment. So have you ever thought
3 about doing a--asking the city for a line item--

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]

5 Right.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: --a play
7 associate, a playground associate.

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] We--we
9 did last year. We got 500 of peak seasonal staff
10 that supplemented our parks in the past.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: How many hours do
12 they get?

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: The work a regular
14 work hour. It's a 35-hour week.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing]

16 Because I believe we've passed--

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: We passed it that
19 they stay a little longer than just the summer.

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Summer are they--are
21 they 40 hours a week? They're 40 hours.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing]

23 Forty hours.

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'm sorry.

25 Correct, they're 40 hours, and with that peak

2 seasonal we're able to keep some of our comfort
3 stations open longer. We also supplemented what we
4 call--what happens is that staff has stepped up to
5 pools and beaches, are--are supervisors and now we're
6 able to back--backfill so we kept an even level of
7 staffing in a lot of our parks. But also, most of
8 the smaller parks--I'm really referring to a larger
9 park or a smaller park. The smaller parks are really
10 cleaned by mobile crews. In terms of fixed posts
11 those are really for some of the larger parks. So
12 with that seasonal staffing, we're able to provide
13 500 and that was baselined. So they'll be coming in
14 again, and we're working out how they're going to be
15 deployed right now throughout our parks. So they--
16 they are playground associates specific to a park--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] Yes.

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --that is staying
19 there. That is something--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] That
21 you just did 500.

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Last year it was
23 baselined so it's every year.

24

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Baselined. Okay
3 that's good. Could you give me a breakdown of how
4 many you hire?

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We're in the
6 process of hiring now since they are peak seasonal.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing]
8 Could you--

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So we're in the
10 process of hiring--Commissioner Kavanagh could
11 probably tell you that.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: No, I'm talking
13 about and permanent staff because with the playground
14 associates this body had put in legislation that
15 instead of just like WEP workers having them just for
16 the summer, it should be a path to employment. So I
17 was just wondering--

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing]
19 Right.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: --have you all
21 practiced that as of yet?

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: In terms of the job
23 training participants, it is a path. They both have--

24 -

25

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] The
3 pathway to a job?

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --both private as
5 well as public and New York City Parks jobs. I
6 believe the number [background comments]

7 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I think we placed
8 about 700--

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] 700.

10 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --participants in
11 the job training program into jobs. More so of them
12 in the private sector, but 100--

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] The
14 private sector?

15 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: --but about 130 I
16 think were hired by the Parks Department directly to
17 fill vacancies within our ranks.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: That's good. So,
19 at a later date I would love to see the breakdown of
20 the WEP workers, how many have went to--

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right. We--we just
22 can--we don't do the WEP workers any more. Now it's
23 just the job training participants.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing]
25 Okay, for the jobs.

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So we phased out
3 the WEP. It's just right now the job training
4 participants are the public assistance recipients
5 that we work with.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I would love. I
8 have one more question. Since 2016, you did
9 summonses—summonses in the park. It's almost like
10 20,000. It went up.

11 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: What kind of
13 summonses are—summonses that you're giving people in
14 the park that it—it went up so high and since 2015 to
15 2016.

16 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I don't have the
17 actual breakdowns, but typically, we give summonses
18 for enforcing park rules. This is not related to
19 serious crimes per se, but we are on track to
20 probably do about the same this year, but these are
21 just for the quality of life offenses of that—
22 breaking the park rules. We first educate. Our first
23 goal of our Parks Enforcement Patrol is to educate
24 the public. If a rule is being broken, we request

2 compliance. If there's non-compliance, then a
3 summons is issued.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: See, and that's
5 where I'm—I can't understand a decrease of 36% when
6 compared to 10,380 summonses was issued during the
7 same period of Fiscal 2016. However, the DPR keeps
8 the current place. They might nearly—reach nearly
9 20,000 in 2016, 15 and 16. So I'm seeing respectfully
10 something has changed from 10,384 summonses to 20,000
11 summonses in the park.

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Some—is crime
14 going that bad in the parks?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It's not related to
16 NYPD.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I'm trying to see
18 if maybe it was contributed to now it's no smoking in
19 the park?

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Right.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Could you give me
22 something?

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, I think the—
24 yes, NYPD are the ones who--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] But
3 NYPD don't give the summonses. It's the Parks
4 Department.

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: No, you mentioned
6 crime. You said is crime going up? NYPD is the one
7 that handles crime. Our PEP officers are the ones
8 that enforce park rules. So we were baselined with
9 67 additional PEP officers, and so again our--

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: [interposing] Is
11 this the NYPD giving these summonses or the--?

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: No.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Well,
14 well let me--let me jump in. We--we're going to need
15 to move on unfortunately Council Member, but we--we
16 had spoke about this earlier and--but--but the fact is

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I'm sorry, but I
18 admit that I would love to know, which one?

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But the fact is that
20 Parks Enforcement Officer are law enforcement
21 personnel and they have arrest powers. They in many
22 cases respond to life and death emergencies. They
23 also enforce park rules. That's a big part of their
24 portfolio, and we did clarify earlier that it's not
25 just minor infractions that are of concern, but the

2 number of felony crimes against persons in the parks
3 are also up year on year. So we—we use that as a
4 context for advocating for an increase in the PEP
5 officers.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: The increased
7 summonses?

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Yes, but we—we do
9 need to move on only because the Commissioner has a
10 limited time, and we have other questions and I don't
11 want to lose him, but if you want to stick around for
12 a second round of questions, we'll be happy for that.
13 And I'm going to queue our colleague, Council Member
14 Johnson followed by Council Member Salamanca.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you,
16 Commissioner.

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Thank you.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Good to see you,
19 Commissioner.

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Good to see you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I always enjoy
22 working with you and your staff, especially your
23 Chief of Staff Margaret Nelson and the folks in the
24 Manhattan Borough Commissioner's Office that I get to
25 work with. With that being said, I have some tough

2 questions. I want to preface by being nice. I feel
3 like it's like Ground Hog Day. I'm like the guy that
4 steps in the puddle every morning over and over and
5 again when it comes to Parks capital. I feel so
6 frustrated, and I know, Commissioner that one thing
7 that you have taken very seriously over the last
8 three years, and I think you're very proud of, and I
9 give you credit for is the change in the Parks
10 capital process. I've heard you speak about that in
11 this hearing today, but I just want to give you a few
12 examples and we don't need to go through and talk
13 because it's—there are individual projects and each
14 project has a unique situation, but I just want to—I
15 feel like I have one day a year to vent about this.
16 So give me my two minutes to vent. Okay.

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: That's—that's what
18 I'm here for.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: So here we go—
20 here we go. So, I funded a fence for a garden almost
21 three years ago. It's like \$150,000, whatever the
22 number is. A year later I'm told the fence is
23 actually more expensive. It's about \$100,000 more
24 expensive, Jane Street Garden, and I said okay, I'll
25 put it in. The most expensive fence I've ever heard

2 of in my entire life. George V. the designer, I mean
3 he builds good fences. I put the extra money in.
4 Three years later still no fence. I understand
5 procurement, bid issues. Three years no—a tiny
6 garden. That to me says there's something broken,
7 that there's something majorly broken that after
8 three years a fence, you can't get a fence put in.
9 And so as part of the multi-site contract, I give
10 money towards Jackson Square Fountain repairs.
11 Basic—I mean nothing complicated here. The
12 Conservancy every six months coming to me when is the
13 fountain being upgraded When's the found? Three
14 years the found is not fixed. So I harass your staff
15 because my constituents harass me and saying you keep
16 telling us it's going to get done. It doesn't get
17 done. That's very—you know, I've talked to your
18 staff about it. We don't have to go into the
19 situation. It just speaks to me that there is
20 something broken if that's going on. There's really
21 no excuse for it. Okay, I put money into Downing
22 Street Playground. I put money into Father Fagan
23 Park. I put money into—I can name a bunch of parks,
24 and then I'm told by the Borough Commissioner's
25 office, "Sorry, Father Fagan is—needs more money and

2 Matthews Palmer needs more money. So we have to take
3 the hundreds of thousands of dollars you put into
4 Downing and we need to move it to two other parks to
5 cover the cost overruns that are associated. So
6 forget about all that time, money, touring effort you
7 put into Downing Street. Out the window because of
8 cost overruns. I'm not trying to beat up on you
9 because as you said, there are cost overruns, which
10 you don't have control over, and if bids don't come
11 in properly, you don't have control over that either.
12 But it's extraordinarily frustrating that you spent
13 time, energy, effort and this happens. So, I'm at
14 the point now where I say to myself I don't even want
15 to give want to give capital any more to Parks. I-I
16 just don't want to do it. It's not-it's not worth
17 the frustration on my part to give capital and then
18 have my constituents upset with me and for me to
19 bother your staff members. I feel bad bugging them
20 honestly. I feel calling them up and bugging them. I
21 don't enjoy it. I feel like I'm being a pest.
22 That's my rant on Parks capital, and I just-I know
23 you've spend an enormous of time and you're improved
24 it in many ways, but I just ask that it be improved
25 further. I don't know how that is. You're the

2 expert. I'm very frustrated. I'm grateful, but I'm
3 frustrated. So I had to say that.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I-I share your
5 frustration and the answer is yes. You know, we're
6 constantly looking at ways we could improve the
7 process, and when it--sometimes with procurement we
8 get surprises where we don't get a successful bid.
9 That could delay things up to six months, but you're
10 correct. We're working now with MOCS. They will be
11 releasing something called Passport, which will allow
12 the whole Vindex process to be online, and we're
13 working with the Administration to constantly see
14 other ways we can improve the process. Design, I'm
15 pleased to say we've now shaved two months off the
16 process on construction, three months off the
17 process, but procurement is one that we're working
18 out with MOCS to see how we can improve the process
19 to moves things forward. As Helen Rosenthal with
20 Council Member Cohen co-sponsored a bill to see if
21 they could also streamline the--the procurement
22 process, and so we continue to look at ways of doing
23 it because we all have good relationships with our
24 Council Members. This is one where I look in their
25 eyes, and I know they're disappointed because they're

2 constituents are sharing the same concern, and I want
3 those completed as quickly as possible as well.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you,
5 Commissioner.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So, so in-in a
7 hearing that we held on the capital process about a
8 month ago, we explored in depth this tension between
9 storage you're hearing from the front lines, from
10 Council Members about projects, which are taking
11 three, four, six more years, and-and the-the good
12 work that we know you're doing behind the scenes to
13 hammer out efficiencies, and one of the things that
14 emerged is that the main metric you're using to
15 measure your on-time success is only focused on the
16 construction stage. Now, from the perspective of our
17 constituents and, therefore, our own perspective,
18 it's very simple. The day the funding is announced
19 is when the clock start tipping in-ticking in the
20 public mind, and the day that the ribbon is cut is
21 when the clock stops ticking right. So if that's
22 seven years, and we extracted a little benefit in the
23 construction period of that while also having big
24 delays in procurement and design and even the period
25 of pre-procurement or pre-design then it's still a

2 loss for the community. So when you cited a 54-day
3 gain in the time table of capital projects, were you
4 referring to an overall gain in this process from
5 funding to completion or were you just looking again
6 at the construction stage.

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So, no, we're
8 looking at--there are three stages. The ones that we
9 can influence the most as Parks is design. Design
10 there was 54 or 55-day savings roughly two months
11 from design. Procurement we're working very hard,
12 but that's the one we control the least and
13 construction there's been on average a three-month
14 savings, 99 days. So it's the two months on design,
15 the three months on construction because I gave a
16 range of anywhere between four to six months, and
17 this we're able to shave some time off procurement.
18 So that is what now we're seeing from the time I came
19 on board tracking from 2014.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I want to drill down
21 on that more in a minute. I know Council Member
22 Johnson has a follow up and has to leave. I'll--I'll
23 just make the point that there are--there are--there
24 really are four phases because they're pre-designed--
25 designed procurement construction, and the public

2 doesn't care what agency has jurisdiction over any
3 phase, and we understand that some are out of your
4 control. And I know that pre-design has never been
5 part of your calculus, but that is—I think your goal
6 is for that to be a year only, which means in
7 practice it's often longer. So, it's—it's a trivial
8 addition to the total timeline.

9 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There isn't really
10 pre-design. When we hold a public meeting that is
11 when the process--

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] But
13 in—in the public's mind when Council Member Salamanca
14 or Johnson or Mealy or I secure funding for a park,
15 that's when it's in the press, right. That's when
16 the public becomes aware of it, and if it's 18 months
17 before the first design meeting, you know, that's
18 part of--

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yeah.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --that's part of
21 the—the delay that we're experiencing, right?

22 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, last year we
23 got 140 projects. All cannot start at the same time.
24 It's like 140 plans all coming at once.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Understood.

2 COMMISSIONER SILVER: What we do is we're
3 committed to have those projects within that fiscal
4 year assigned as staff become available. So you are
5 correct. There is some time for us to assign it to a
6 consultant and that could in some cases nine months
7 or up to a year.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, we'll follow
9 up on that in a second. Back to Council Member
10 Johnson.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Okay. [coughs]
12 Quickly, I-I put money in the budget to fill all the
13 tree pits in my district. I can't get a commitment
14 on when that's going to get done. I gave-I gave
15 enough money to fill every empty tree pit in my
16 district, and it would be helpful to understand when
17 the next planting season is so that I could have all
18 those tree pits filled. Who can make that commitment
19 to me of when that will happen?

20 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Council Member,
21 I-I-the tree planning season actually began just
22 recently. I can't guarantee you that we will
23 complete them all this spring, but I will guarantee
24 you that every viable tree pit in your district

2 that's funded for planting will be planted by the end
3 of this fall.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: By end of this
5 fall all of them?

6 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Manhattan Borough
8 office did you hear that when I call you and harass
9 you. By the end of this fall.

10 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Thank you.

11 [laughs]

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Commissioner
13 Kavanagh said so. Okay, lastly the High Line seven
14 million annual visitors, one of the biggest tourist
15 attractions in New York City now, almost a decade old
16 at this point. A huge success for the city of New
17 York. Chair Levine has been a huge supporter and
18 advocate for the park and I really appreciate his
19 support. The park is now having some capital issues.
20 You know, some of the stuff that was brand new back
21 when it opened now needs help. They, of course, have
22 raised a ton of money over the years for their own
23 capital expenses. They've worked with EDC on some
24 projects. You all have been generous in PEP Officers
25 and other ways supportive of them. I really

2 appreciate that, but their capital needs over the
3 next five years are significant. I am allocating
4 over \$600,000, which is a lot for me, in capital
5 money to help them with some very unsexy things, but
6 things that are critically important to the
7 maintenance of the park. Is the Parks Department
8 going to put money up and help the High Line because
9 of the significance of the park?

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, I'll first-I
11 serve on the--the board--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Yes.

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: --and I-I'm going
14 to have a conversation with both the board and both
15 the CEO, Robert Hannan. I'm not familiar about some
16 of the capital needs being asked for so I'll
17 certainly circle back, but there is some obligation
18 from the city. It is a New York City Park, but I
19 can't say exactly what our capital commitment would
20 be, but we do have responsibility since it's a city
21 park. But I serve on the Board and I know they are
22 looking at funding the last piece of the park, the
23 last strand or whatever they are referring to.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Section 3s.

2 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes, but beyond
3 that it has been brought to my attention about some
4 of the capital requests.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Great. I'd love
6 to chat with you about that and then lastly I want to
7 say your staff has done a phenomenal job on 20th
8 Street Park. You were there to cut the ribbon. The
9 design team has done a great job, the community
10 process, the charrette, the outreach. Everything has
11 been really, really, really well done. I am really
12 grateful because that has been a major for me as you
13 know, for the last three years, and—and—and I think
14 that that project if it gets done on time has really
15 spoken to I think the amazing work that the Parks
16 Department does in making neighborhoods in New York
17 City feel included in the process, clearly
18 communicating with folks about what's happening and
19 what's going to happen, and it's a process that's
20 made me feel really good about your agency and
21 department, and I want to thank you for that.

22 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: You're welcome.
23 I enjoyed every time I spent there. It's a very
24 enthusiastic community.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council
3 Member Johnson. You know the-the Bloomberg
4 Administration, which was really great on investment
5 of capital to create new parks including the High
6 Line, and much to its credit had a proposition that
7 they would invest in capital, but they would put not
8 a penny in for expenses, which is done in a number of
9 parks, the high line being one of them. Now they're
10 faced with an onslaught of seven million users a
11 year, and but that-that is a lot of trampling for a
12 park that's not getting virtually any public support
13 on the expense side except I guess for PEP officers.
14 So I would argue that it's time to open-open the
15 conversation of can we help them manage this-this
16 just astoundingly high rate of usage. Otherwise, the
17 park is really going to suffer and it's not good for
18 anybody. Alright, we're going to pass it off to my
19 colleague Council Member Salamanca from the Bronx.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Well, thank
21 you. [applause] Thank you, Mr. Chair.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You've got a one-
23 person fan club in the back there. [laughter]

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: [coughs] Thank
25 you all. Welcome--

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Was
3 that your wife, Council Member?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: No, no. Full
5 disclosure. My wife does love the parks but no, it's
6 not. Commissioner, welcome. I have a few questions.
7 I want to talk a little bit about Orchard Beach.
8 Orchard Beach has been ignored for years. You know,
9 it's the Bronx Street area (sic). This is where
10 families in my council district they cannot afford to
11 on vacation so they go to Orchard Beach. There was—
12 the Bronx Delegation put in a request that was the
13 number one request last year, and we go zero dollars.
14 I know that the Governor has made a commitment, and
15 the Mayor has made a commitment. I just want to talk
16 a little bit about what's happening, what's the
17 timeline? When will work begin in Orchard Beach?

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Well, right now, the
19 project is not fully funded. There is a commitment
20 right now of about \$40 million. The project can cost
21 \$45 to \$50 million. So I stated earlier that we're
22 going to sit down and take a look to see exactly what
23 work could be done for a lesser amount. We don't
24 want to start scaling back. There was a proposal
25 from a consultant about how much it would cost to

2 full restore it, but right now with the \$10 million
3 from the Borough President and the Delegation, \$20
4 million from the Mayor and then a commitment for \$10
5 million from the Governor gets us to \$40. There is
6 still shortfall.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] But
8 I'm sorry, sorry to interrupt, but--but Commissioner
9 was there not a \$10 million commitment from Assembly
10 Speaker Carl Heastie on top of what you cited that
11 would get us--

12 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There is, there is.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That doesn't get us
14 to \$50?

15 MATT DRURY: Yeah, just to clarify.
16 We're in conversations with the State and the
17 Assembly to kind of clarify the exact details there.
18 I mean I-I believe there is not as public a
19 commitment as the Governor made in terms of his \$10
20 million, but there are conversations happening about
21 an additional \$10 million, that I believe are coming
22 from the Assembly, but those details are still be
23 worked out.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, but if that--if
25 that \$10 million is there and--and I understand that

2 it is. I think the Council Member did as well. Does
3 that get us to at least the starting line on you are
4 able to start that? (sic)

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes, if it is fully
6 funded for what we anticipate then the answer is yes.
7 We just cannot start a project unless it is fully
8 funded.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Understood. Okay,
10 continue.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: And what's the
12 total cost of the project?

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: About \$50 million.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: \$50 million?

15 COMMISSIONER SILVER: 50, 5-0.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: For--for the bath
17 house--

18 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Okay.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --but the broader
20 grounds we're talking more over a \$100, correct?

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But you could start
23 the bath house if you had 50 in place.

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright, so
3 we're eager to get this started. I guess this is an
4 ongoing conversation that we'll have. Barretto Point
5 Park. When Sandy hit the pier, there was structure
6 damage done to the pier. Many years have gone by.
7 We're still waiting, you know, to open up the pier.
8 When will work begin? What's the status on this
9 pier?

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'll have to—I did
11 a site visit and I know that it is in very poor shape
12 with some of the piles. I'll have to get back to
13 you. I'm not sure of the status unless [background
14 comments] We'll get back to you on that one.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright, my-my
16 other question, you know, Commissioner I'm very happy
17 in my Council District in terms of the CPI. There
18 were five parks that were done, prior with Community
19 Board 2. When I became Council Member I had a bigger
20 district. Melrose we're opening up new parks that
21 are under construction. I'm really satisfied with
22 the work. I know work is being done, but I have
23 concerns about enforcement. You know, for years even
24 when I was District Manager I felt that the South
25 Bronx was not getting its fair share of PEP officers

2 actually patrolling or parks. Now, with some of these
3 parks under construction you're bringing new
4 amenities. That means that we're going to get bigger
5 crowds coming to the parks. There's going to be
6 comfort stations. How many PEP officers are assigned
7 to the Bronx in this Fiscal Year?

8 COMMISSIONER SILVER: It's—we're funding
9 for 54 but we have right 38.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: So, you're
11 funded for 54 and you have 38 at the moment. Now,
12 are you hiring new—you're hiring new PEP Officers.

13 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Hiring and putting—
14 always hiring putting them through Academy. The
15 answer is yes.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright and
17 out of the 38, how many are actually working because
18 I know that you have officers that are on leave, on
19 maternity leave.

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [background
21 comments] yes, we have in general of all the staff
22 seven on leave, but that's among all those that are—
23 that are active.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: And so the
25 summer is coming, and I know that we see less of a

2 presence of PEP Officers in our local parks because
3 they're patrolling the beaches. What--what remedy are
4 you going to so that we can see more of a presence
5 in--in the South Bronx.

6 COMMISSIONER SILVER: So to be clear, we
7 have the 38. We're also supplemented by 542 Park
8 Security Service. The majority of those you will see
9 deployed to pools and beaches. So it allows the PEP
10 officers to patrol the various parks in the city. So
11 we don't often talk about that. We have 292 when
12 fully staffed on the Parks Enforcement Patrol, but we
13 have 542. Now, they don't have the same powers as a
14 PEP Officer. They can't arrest, but still they do
15 provide a presence on the pools and beaches to remind
16 people to follow the park rules. So it doesn't really
17 affect that number because we deploy those to pools
18 and beaches.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Alright, you
20 know, Commissioner, you know, unfortunately in some
21 of my parks we have individuals who do not know how
22 to behave, you know, in parks. There's a lot of
23 illegal activities. They use the comfort stations
24 for drug use, alcohol use. Having more of a presence
25 means a lot to us especially when, you know, most of

2 our parks have baseball fields and children. You
3 know, we—we want them to—to enjoy their parks in a
4 safe—and have a safe environment and PEP Officers
5 bring that safe environment just—just to have them
6 there.

7 COMMISSIONER SILVER: And I had mentioned
8 earlier, but we work hand-in-hand with NYPD, and you
9 can imagine with a force of 255 we do our best to
10 educate the public and help enforce the park rules,
11 but in support of what we do, we work very closely
12 with NYPD to make sure that they patrol as well we
13 patrol our parks. And I do have an answer for you on
14 the Barretto Point Pier. It's at the Controller's
15 Office for registration. So that is a good sign,
16 which means that construction can start very soon.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: So once his
18 office signs off, how soon will construction begin?
19 Is there—

20 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yeah, about a
21 month.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: About a month?

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Yes.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: About a month
25 from now. Alright, and then just finally I just want

2 to give a big shout-out to my Bronx Commissioner Iris
3 Rodriguez. I think that's one of the best decisions
4 that you've made [applause] by putting Iris in the
5 Bronx ,and if Corey was here I would tell him, you
6 know, Corey she could resolve your issues over there
7 in Manhattan a well. Alright, well, thank you very
8 much.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Now, that's much
10 more than a one-person fan club. We are going to go a
11 second questions, which we have from Council Members
12 Mealy and Cohen. I'm going to ask the sergeants to
13 put us a three-minute clock for the second round
14 because we are running up against the deadline for
15 the Commissioner's time, and I want to make sure that
16 we do not lose him. So Commissioner, Council Member
17 Mealy. Not a commissioner yet. Maybe one day.
18 You're on, please.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I just want to
20 pass. I mean I will speak to them afterwards just to
21 get the numbers of the summonses. We have to see
22 where the up-increase of all these summonses are
23 coming. So I'll speak to you afterwards, and I think
24 you. I'm-I can say I've put all the shovels in the
25

2 ground, cut the ribbons in 90% of my district and I-I
3 say I have to save something for somebody else to do.

4 COMMISSIONER SILVER: And you have--you
5 had anchor park.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Betsy had an
7 anchor park, but my last statement, Betsy had an
8 anchor would be better as a dome. If we--that's the
9 highest density of public housing and I have asked
10 the Mayor previous three-I could say two mayor's now.
11 If we're really talking about saving lives if we put
12 a dome in there, we could get the next Olympics,
13 individuals right there from Brownsville. And I
14 have--we had started at one point. We had--I had put
15 up \$10 million and tried to get the Assembly, the
16 Senate and the State, but I feel if we could do it
17 and do at our Aviator in Brooklyn, we can do it right
18 there in Brownsville just as well at Betsy Head Park.
19 It's big enough that we could have--to save lives in a
20 dome right there at Betsy Head Park. So please
21 that's my vision. It's always been my vision. I
22 hope someone takes their fire torch and take it away,
23 but I feel we really need a dome not just a park
24 there and thank you, Chairman.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, thank you
3 Council Mealy and Council Member Cohen.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you very
5 much. I really just have one thing I just kind of
6 forgot. On-on CPI one of the things I guess I've
7 been a little concerned about is in the Eleventh
8 Council District-District there's been a tradition of
9 the Council Members funding capital projects in their
10 parks, and I just want you to keep in mind when
11 you're reviewing appropriate spending for CPI that
12 that should not be like, you know, our district
13 should not penalized. Community Board 8 and Community
14 Board 7 should not be penalized because Council
15 Members had had the ability to fund parks in their
16 district. So it's-it's a-it's a concern of mine
17 that-that there again that we're not missing out on--
18 Like I had a very good project that I recommended to
19 a playground to try to-for some help there, and I
20 would hope that that would again maybe it's not.

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: There are several
22 factors, but the main one is the-the 20 year lack of
23 investment. So each you have another set that's
24 rolling into that 20-year cycle. But that was the
25 main criteria. We wanted to focus on those parks and

2 again it turned out to be 134. That's seen a little
3 or no invest in 20 years. Very dense high poverty
4 levels and potential for growth. So we use that
5 criteria, but each year you have a certain list that
6 pops up. So I'm sure sooner or later parks in your
7 district may--may surface, but we want to be very fair
8 and use a data driven approach. I understand some
9 felt concern, but for 20 years not see investment for
10 us was a trigger that we had to do some intervention.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: You're the Chair.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Alright, we're
14 going to thank the commissioner. Commissioner, we're
15 to thank you for your testimony, and we're going to
16 call the next panel. Well, hold it. Hold. [pause]
17 Commissioner, can you hold just one second while we
18 start to figure out--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: We can ask some
20 question? No. [laughter] [pause] Commissioner,
21 would you mind being patient for just a minute or
22 two.

23 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I don't mind.

24

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you very
3 much. At least you've been quite patient already
4 this morning. [laughs.] [pause]

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: The sense we have
6 on here—[pause]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Council Member, do
8 you have a question? Okay. [background comments]

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I figured you would
10 be grilling him for a very long time. Thank you all
11 for waiting. Okay, Commissioner, I know that you're
12 on a tight schedule so I'll and get through some—some
13 additional questions in an expeditious fashion. The
14 QueensWay, a wonderful project that I cited in my
15 opening statement. What is the status as far as the
16 Parks Department is concerned?

17 COMMISSIONER SILVER: We are certainly
18 having conversations with the QueensWay, and I do
19 know that we signed off on a letter authorizing them
20 to do some early design work. We are focused because
21 we have such a large system of making our old parks
22 new again, and right now that tends to be our focus,
23 but in the meantime I'm meeting again with the
24 QueensWay team that has a new leader as far as the
25 Trust for Public Land, but in terms of our focus

2 right now, is to make sure like the Anchor Parks
3 Initiative we want to make those old parks new and
4 focus there, but we're certainly open to having a
5 conversation.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, I'm with you
7 on supporting our existing parks, but a project like
8 this it just doesn't come along more than one in a
9 generation because of the existence of the abandoned
10 rail line, and usually when we talk about creating
11 new parks, we stumble over the acquisition challenge,
12 and the cost of it as we experienced spectacularly
13 with Bushwick Inlet I'm very happy it was resolved,
14 but here we have a new park proposal where the
15 entire, every square of inch of it if I'm not
16 mistaken the acquisition problem is solved So
17 there's--there's--there's costs associated with the--the
18 renovation, but not--not the acquisition. So time is
19 not necessarily on our side because it currently is
20 an abandoned property now, which it's probably
21 unsafe. It's certainly unsightly. Are you--are you
22 concerned about the current state of that--that
23 property at the moment?

24 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I haven't had a
25 full view. I've seen it on paper. So I don't know

2 all—I know it traverse parks in other neighborhoods,
3 but as I stated that I'll be meeting with the
4 QueensWay team soon, and we did sign a letter that
5 authorized them to get a grant to start the early
6 phases. So I'm eager to see some of the work that
7 they're doing. I was just saying just for now we are
8 focusing on making some of those older parks new, but
9 I'm also open to see the QueensWay proposal and how
10 it evolved since I left met with them with maybe two
11 years ago.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, I'll look
13 forward to hearing your update after that meeting. I
14 know that the cost of tree pruning has risen quite
15 significantly, and the impact has meant that you can
16 get to each tree less off. What is the—the now
17 expected interval between tree prunings for street
18 trees.

19 COMMISSIONER SILVER: I'll ask
20 Commissioner Kavanagh to answer that question.

21 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Council Member,
22 we did see for the first time in many years a
23 significant increase in the cost per tree pruning,
24 and it did have a temporary impact on our ability to
25 prune trees Thankfully, the Mayor's Officer funded

2 that gap between what we part—we used to pay and what
3 we're paying now. So we're still on a seven-year
4 cycle, which is the—which is the good news.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I didn't appreciate
6 that and that is great indeed. Thank you. Alright,
7 street stump removal. This is a real challenge
8 particularly in the Outer Boroughs where the back log
9 is quite considerable. What is the current backlog
10 on tree stump removals?

11 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: The current
12 backlog is about 20,000 stumps.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Wow.

14 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It's down
15 significantly from what it was just a few years ago,
16 however, and we are—we are making progress.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And that is because
18 you—you were able to put in a million dollars for—in
19 last year's budget to reduce the backlog, right?

20 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: Yes, we had a
21 baseline of \$2 million in mayoral allocation to which
22 the Council added a million dollars, which we
23 appreciated greatly. However, there is, you know,
24 you know, a—a gap between the number of tree we
25 remove every year, the number of stumps we're able to

2 remove with those contract dollars, and the current
3 backlog. So while we have made significant progress,
4 we would need an additional investment in order to
5 eliminate the backlog and remain current with the
6 stumps that are generated by our tree removal
7 program.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, it's not the
9 case that there was a million that you put last year
10 on top of the baselined amount, which now would be
11 lost?

12 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: I'm sorry, yes,
13 the Council funding is not baselined in the upcoming
14 budget.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Understood. So if I
16 were to call today to inform you of a tree stump that
17 needed to be removed, what's the expected delay
18 before it's actually removed?

19 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It-it's difficult
20 to say because of a variety of factors. Number one
21 being--having a qualified contractor in place to
22 remove them. There was always some amount of time in
23 the--the bidding and procurement and--and--

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Could
3 you even estimate? Is it a year? Is it 18 months?
4 Is it more heaven forbid?

5 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: It would probably
6 be between a year and 18 months I would say would be
7 a—a good estimate for removing every—if we were fully
8 funded to removing every stump after a tree was
9 removed.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, well that's—
11 that's—that's far too long, and we will be pushing on
12 the budget negotiations to make sure that we can
13 reduce the backlog and—and therefore reduce the delay
14 for the benefit of our—our colleagues in the Outer
15 Boroughs and I gather in Brownsville this is perhaps
16 an issue as well. Am I correct that there are no—
17 there's no additional round of parks equity at the
18 Community Parks Initiative funding? Is that correct?
19 Have you run through allocating all the parks that
20 you can under the current funding?

21 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Under the current
22 one, the next round to be announced is 11 more sites.
23 Those will be announced this fall, and I believe that
24 will include the—the funds that we have allocated
25 from the initial \$318 million.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So at the point the
3 door is closed for--unless you get additional money
4 for adopting parks into the program.

5 COMMISSIONER SILVER: Correct, correct.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: When you designed it
7 originally you did an inventory, and I believe that
8 you identified 200 parks or more that--that qualified
9 based on lack of investment. They were--

10 COMMISSIONER SILVER: [interposing] There
11 were 215 parcels and when we did our analysis some of
12 these weren't--they were park assets, but what you
13 would call a playground per se, and that list went
14 down from 215 to 134. The 67 was part of that
15 initial and that's now what is--we're moving forward
16 with the 67.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, on just--I just
18 have one follow-up question from my staff the--the
19 stump removal, which is what would it cost to fully
20 fund that program? If--if resources were not the
21 constraints any more, are we talking \$2 million more,
22 \$3 million? What is the--what's the shortfall there?

23 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: There are two
24 components to it. To eliminate the backlog would
25 cost about \$7.5 million just for the line--

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Oh,
3 that's a one-shot deal, right.

4 COMMISSIONER KAVANAGH: One shot and then
5 it would it take approximately \$4.5 million in total
6 to keep current with the stumps that are generated
7 annually through our removal program.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. There are a
9 lot of people waiting to testify. So, we'll wrap it
10 up there, and I thank you very, very much for your
11 attention over the last 2-1/2 hours. Thank you and
12 our—our first panel will consist of Heather Lubov
13 from the City Parks Foundation; Lynn Kelly from New
14 Yorkers for Parks [background comments, pause] as
15 well as—as Lynn (sic) from the New York City
16 Community Garden Coalition, and those—that's going to
17 be our fist panel. If you call could make your way
18 up. [background comments, pause] And—and sergeants
19 because—sergeants because we have a very, very thick
20 stack of people who want to testify, we're going to—
21 I'm going to ask you to use a two-minute clock here,
22 and Heather—Heather and Lynn if you're in place
23 please—Heather, why don't you kick us off?
24 [background comments]

2 HEATHER LUBOV: Thank you, Chairman
3 Levine and members of the committee. I'm Heather
4 Lubov. I'm the Executive of City Parks Foundation.
5 We are the only independent non-profit organization
6 with the mission to offer programs in public parks
7 throughout the city, and our goal is to help
8 transform parks into vibrant community centers. We
9 work in every Council District. We bring sports,
10 arts, education, and community development programs
11 to more than 350 parks, recreation centers and
12 schools across the city, and we reach 425,000 people
13 every year.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Oh, that's amazing.

15 HEATHER LUBOV: This year thanks to the
16 Council's Leadership Expense Funding we offer track
17 and field instruction in 12 parks to nearly 1,700
18 kids, bringing high quality lessons into
19 neighborhoods where few organized athletic activities
20 exist. Leadership funds also allowed us to connect
21 more than 2,400 students to experiential learning in
22 parks, gardens, forests, and coastal areas to nurture
23 a lifelong relationship between young people and the
24 environment. I also want to thank Council Members
25 for providing discretionary funding this year for

2 City Parks Founding Programming in their districts,
3 and the Council for providing \$2.6 million in the
4 capital appropriation for Summer Stage in Central
5 Park, which is currently in the design phase, and
6 should begin next summer. The Council's Parks Equity
7 Initiative and the NYC Parks Community Parks
8 Initiative has allowed us to grow Partnership for
9 Parks, which you heard was the public-private program
10 that we jointly manage with NYC Parks. Partnerships
11 has supported and championed a growing network of
12 volunteer groups caring for and advocating for
13 neighborhood parks. In the past three years with
14 this new funding we've been able to support 37% more
15 Friends of groups citywide. We've tripled the number
16 of community visioning consultations and skill
17 building workshops, and we've increased the number of
18 It's My Parks service projects by more than 60%.
19 These groups are comprised of volunteers. We have a
20 myriad of work and family obligations, but still find
21 the time to give back and improve their communities.
22 The Council's Parks Equity Initiative Funding is key
23 to making sure that these programs are successful,
24 and their work is sustainable in the long term.
25 We're proudly—we're proud to directly address the

2 Administration's strong focus on equity, and we
3 support NYC's Park-~~NYC~~ Parks emphasis on community
4 parks, and serving underserved communities. We're
5 committed to delivering the most responsive service
6 and so with the recent growth in Partnership for
7 Parks we've made improvements that include how we
8 identify and build new groups and coalitions in the
9 neediest parks, and also how we provide more advanced
10 support to our longer term groups. But at the most
11 basic level the more staff we have on the ground, the
12 more groups we'll be able to serve. To that end, we
13 would [bell] strong support adding new our outreach
14 coordinators allowing us to continue to build new
15 groups every year while supporting the growing number
16 of existing groups. Our programs are free and are
17 synchronized with New York City Parks, but the City
18 Parks Foundation is a non-profit organization and we
19 need the Council's assistant-assistance to continue
20 supporting the vision for an equitable park system.
21 Thank you for hearing my testimony, and I look
22 forward to working with you.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much.
24 Just to clarify, the number of outreach workers you
25 currently have is at?

2 HEATHER LUBOV: Sixteen.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Sixteen. Okay, so
4 each worker has how many parks under their portfolio?

5 HEATHER LUBOV: It's approximately 45 per
6 outreach coordinator.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But that seems like
8 an extremely heavy load, and I'm guessing they have
9 each two or three community boards as well?

10 HEATHER LUBOV: Yes.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That's a lot of
12 territory for one person to cover.

13 HEATHER LUBOV: It is a lot of territory.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And it probably
15 means they don't show up at any one park very often.

16 HEATHER LUBOV: I think they do their
17 best working nights and weekends and around the
18 clock. So they are serving all those groups as best
19 as they can, but we--

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] We-we
21 know they are.

22 HEATHER LUBOV: --we strongly advocate
23 for more outreach coordinators.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But we know that
25 they are super committed. So if you were to have

2 another 10 outreach coordinators, what would that do
3 to your impact?

4 HEATHER LUBOV: To give you a sense right
5 now, we're in about 30% of parks around the city. So
6 another ten would be another 30 to 35 parks per
7 person at minimum. So you can do the math on that.
8 They would have a huge impact on our ability to
9 building Friends group around the city.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So ten additional
11 outreach workers might translate into 300 parks that
12 could reach that you're not currently reaching?

13 HEATHER LUBOV: Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That's—that's really
15 significant, and I think justifies why we're pushing
16 for this funding in the budget. So thank—thank you
17 for the amazing work that City Parks Foundation does.
18 You've been really a strong partners for the City
19 Council and you've helped make the Community Parks
20 Initiative—the Parks Equity Initiative extremely
21 popular among my colleagues. So we thank for that.
22 Okay, Lynn.

23 LYNN KELLY: Good afternoon. I'm Lynn
24 Kelly, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks.
25 Thank you for inviting us to testify today on the

2 budget. Parks, as you know, has continued to make
3 meaningful investments throughout the city, but we
4 really feel strongly that there's more work still to
5 do. We understand the Administration's conservative
6 approach in this year's budget due to pending cuts
7 from Washington, and as you rightfully pointed out
8 Council Member the cuts CDBG Program is going to have
9 devastating effects on Green Thumb unfortunately.

10 And so we would urge the Council and the
11 Administration to consider funding \$1 million that
12 could be lost as a result of these cuts. One of the
13 most critical additions we believe needs to be
14 baselined in the city's budget is the \$9.6 million to
15 retain the 100 City Park workers and 50 gardeners
16 throughout the city. Again, as you rightly pointed
17 out this is our third time testifying to restore and
18 have this money there, and it's simply not tenable to
19 have the Council to continue to put this money in,
20 but these are real jobs for real New Yorkers, and we
21 hope that they will continue and remain.

22 Essentially, we see this as an infrastructure and an
23 investment in the infrastructure of the people of the
24 Parks system, and Parks has gone to great extents, as
25 you've heard today through the capital process to

2 invest in its infrastructure of the Parks itself, but
3 you need an equal investment in the infrastructure of
4 the people that run the parks. Along with those
5 lines, I'd like to actually talk a little bit about
6 Partnership for Parks. A budget—a budget allocation
7 of just \$1 million, Council Member, would allow for
8 these 10 million outreach coordinators, five new
9 program assistants. I just attended roughly all of
10 our five borough meetings that we've had on parks,
11 and hear time and time and again from Friends groups
12 and parks advocates that the folks that work for
13 Partnership for Parks are essentially the lifeline,
14 the blood line to their communities and to their park
15 system. And right now the—the list that these
16 outreach coordinators has is simply untenable. So we
17 would ask that the Council and the Administration
18 really push to have that money for the increasing in
19 staff. We'd also like see an allocation in this
20 year's budget of \$3 million to allow for [bell] 50
21 new Urban Park Rangers. Many of the Parks Department
22 staff that you see here today were Urban Park
23 Rangers, stated their careers in public service as
24 park rangers, as those green ambassadors in the
25 community. They also provide another set of eyes in

2 Parks. As we've heard today, there's been a lot of
3 talk about crime in parks, and maybe that would help
4 to go a long way to have increase in rangers. In the
5 Capital Budget, we're pleased to not the
6 Administration's commitment to infrastructure
7 improvements, retaining walls, comfort stations, HVAC
8 all the things that the public might not see as sexy,
9 but is so important to the life line of these parks
10 and for the ongoing maintenance of these parks, and
11 we're pleased to see the continued allocation or new
12 allocation of \$82 million committed toward new street
13 tree planting citywide. Our tree canopy is really
14 important to the city's public health, and we also
15 support the ongoing maintenance through an expense
16 commitment of \$2.7 million. Before I end my
17 testimony today, I would agree with you that now is
18 the time to really think creatively and boldly about
19 our park system. Not to be reactionary to Washington
20 but rather be proactive in what we're doing. And we
21 support projects such as BQ Green, QueensWay,
22 Daylighting in Tibbetts Brook because of their
23 vision. Much in the way we support our Community
24 Parks Initiative, parks without borders and anchor
25 parks. Now is the time to really be the leader for

2 this nation [bell] and the park system and to really
3 send the message back to Washington that is not
4 acceptable to make these cuts to what we consider
5 critical urban infrastructure in New York City.
6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Lynn, and
8 your point on--on the imperative now that we lead
9 locally at a time when the help is not coming from
10 Washington. I--I want to whole heartedly endorse I
11 don't--I think we need to do more than just play
12 decent. We need to play offense and that means
13 scoring wins for our public space in this city.
14 Whatever is coming out of Washington and the projects
15 you laid out, would be a very powerful way to do
16 that. So, thank you for your continued advocacy for
17 the park system. You're off to a great start in your
18 new role. Thank you both very much and. Alright,
19 our next panel will be Peter Stein from Local 508 of
20 DC37; Joe Puleo, from Local 983 also DC37; and Josie
21 Bennett from Local 1505. [background comments,
22 pause]

23 JOE PULEO: Good afternoon. Good
24 afternoon City Council--

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good afternoon.

2 JOE PULEO: --and Chair and Council

3 Members. [coughs] my--excuses me [coughs] excuse me.

4 My name is Joe Puleo. I'm President of Local 983. I

5 represent a number of parks titles. I represent the

6 Urban Parks Rangers, better known with the PEP

7 officers within that--with that title, the Assistant--

8 excuse me--the Associate Park Workers and the City's

9 Seasonal Aids. I'd like to begin by stating that

10 crime has arisen in Parks. If you look at the

11 COMPSTAT Reports from the Third Quarter of 2015 and

12 2016, it went from 391 in '15 to 495. That's over a

13 third, you know, percentage spike. If it were in

14 any--any precinct that I would probably think that

15 there would be a serious uproar. New York City parks

16 are sanctuaries for most people. This is where our

17 seniors, our children they go to these places to seek

18 refuge from the city. They should not be treated at

19 the same level as being at Times Square or riding the

20 R-Train at 2:00 in the morning. When--when I hear

21 people say well it's not that bad, it is bad and it's

22 getting worse. You know, we need more Parks

23 Enforcement Officers. They do the job best in New

24 York City Parks. NYPD does a great job out in the

25 streets. Almost five percent decline from last year

2 to this year in overall park crimes. The reason why
3 they haven't matched the parks when it comes to
4 lowering the Crime stats, is because we don't enough
5 Parks Enforcement Officers. You know, we need about
6 200 by the Parks Department estimates. That will be
7 [bell] about \$11.9 million. Last year we did not
8 receive any funding from the City Council when it
9 came to the Parks Enforcement. We did receive some
10 from the Mayor's Office, but then again, you know,
11 the job—the job is not yet over. We need—we need
12 more presence in—in our parks. People need to be—
13 feel safe in our parks and, you now, time and time
14 again it has proven that where you have PEP Officers,
15 you have a reduction in crime. We also would like to
16 see included in that 200 at the agency's discretion
17 because I heard mention of Urban Park Rangers, well
18 our PEP Officers come from the title of Urban Park
19 Rangers, but we also have ones that do dedicated
20 service to stewardship. They give out tour guides.
21 They do mostly educational parts—parts of the job
22 description. We encourage the City Council to and
23 the Parks Department to hire more of them. There is
24 only 35, 35 citywide, you know. These are the people
25 who probably would do the most in combatting crime

2 for the future because they reach out to the
3 children. They explain to them the essentials of why
4 it is important to—to not, you know, destroy our
5 parks, why—why the ecosystem is so—is so—so fragile.
6 So, with—without them, you know, it's just going to
7 be crime and punishment, you know, for—for our future
8 to come. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, thank you, Mr.
10 Puleo, for your advocacy for these incredibly
11 important workers, and as you know, I—I
12 wholeheartedly agree that we need to increase the
13 ranks both of PEP Officers and Urban Park Rangers.
14 There is really embarrassing few of each category
15 right now, and we can do much better. So thank you,
16 sir. Alright, Ms. Bennett.

17 JOE PULEO: Thank you.

18 JOSIE BENNETT: Good—good afternoon
19 Chairman Levine and fellow Parks Committee members.
20 My name is Josie Bennett. I'm the President of Local
21 1505 representing the City Park Workers. I have
22 members in DOT, Sanitation, Parks and DEP. Our
23 members work in all five boroughs conducting
24 maintenance in all city parks. I'm—I'm and my people
25 are in charge of all the maintenance operations in

2 all the boroughs. I want to first start off by
3 thanking the Council for funding my people the City
4 Park Workers in 2017 from the Parks Department. The
5 funding was used to maintain city funded line for 100
6 city park workers and 50 gardeners. Parks has over
7 39,000 acres of land meaning that one gardener is
8 responsible for maintaining an average 254 acres of
9 parkland. The Department of Parks and Recreation is
10 woefully unfunded and we request your support in
11 making our communities and those underserved parks in
12 our communities beautiful. Since the—since the
13 Fiscal Budget year funding has been baseline for—
14 baselined for 2018, I'm urging the Council to restore
15 the increase in the funding. If this funding is not
16 restored, there will not be enough workers in the
17 city—in the city park workers and gardener titles to
18 perform their duties as stated above. Therefore, the
19 maintenance and upkeep of the parks will suffer
20 leading to blight and-and neighborhood decay. I'm
21 sorry. [laughs] As we approach the spring season in
22 the next several weeks, they have a lot of work to be
23 done to prepare for the summer. The booths are
24 opening, and I get additional lines during the
25 summer, but without these 150 lines, we don't—our

2 maintenance will be down. The council down. The
3 parks are not safe. My people also have saved rapes,
4 murders, and I'm quite sure my people have been
5 awarded for stopping crimes in the parks. [bell] My
6 people also do the late lockup in the parks at
7 nights. They open up the parks and they lock the
8 parks up at night. My-my maintenance crew like I
9 said, it harms-it-they have been put in harm's way
10 everyday, and like I said, without these 150 lines,
11 the parks are going to suffer. Okay. I want to
12 thank you for taking the time to hear on-on what I
13 had to say to you and what I had to say when it came
14 to the maintenance and the park workers, and I want
15 to thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I
16 anted to know if you have any questions for me.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, thank you,
18 Madam President for advocacy on these-on behalf of
19 this incredibly important workforce-workforce, which
20 is critical to keeping our parks healthy and inviting
21 and as you point out, far too often they're involved
22 in difficult incidents that require them to
23 intervene, often putting their own safety at risk.
24 We've honored of a few of your members who have acted
25 heroically to protect people in the park. But I want

2 to just clarify a statistic. You said that on
3 average each gardener has to care for 254 acres
4 system wide?

5 JOSIE BENNETT: Yes because they don't
6 have enough gardeners in the Parks Department to
7 cover all the land.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: That's--that's--

9 JOSIE BENNETT: There's 39 acres--there's
10 90--39,000 acres.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And how many total
12 gardeners do we have?

13 JOSIE BENNETT: I don't know in total
14 numbers. Susan might know a number. Do you have a
15 total number, Susan? I think it's 200--

16 MALE SPEAKER: It's 200.

17 JOSIE BENNETT: --a year it's about 200
18 and something in total between the gardeners and the
19 assistant gardeners. It's not a lot of gardeners.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So when--when--when
21 you put in perspective to lose 50 gardeners is a huge
22 chunk of the existing workforce.

23 JOSIE BENNETT: Yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I mean that--that--
25 that is a quarter roughly of the existing workforce.

2 So imagine one-quarter less gardening work, one-
3 quarter less in every park, and you get a picture of
4 the impact that will be felt all over the city and,
5 of course, the maintenance workers where the proposed
6 cut is even larger of 100 just do such important
7 work. Difficult work by the way, but they really are
8 the heart of the operations--

9 JOSIE BENNETT: Maintenance and
10 operations.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --and at the end of
12 the day, if you don't have men and women out there in
13 the field doing the heavy lifting in cold weather and
14 hot weather, then the parks are going to suffer.

15 JOSIE BENNETT: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And I-I repeat the
17 irony of the fact that these workers have been
18 deployed into what is really a pet project of the
19 Mayor, which is the CPI Parks, and we-we support that
20 program. But these are clearly core to the mission
21 of the department, and it's really deeply unfortunate
22 that for the third year in a row, we now have to
23 fight just to keep our-our existing staffing levels.

24 JOSIE BENNETT: Again.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We should be
3 fighting to increase the ranks of gardeners and—and
4 maintenance workers and, of course, PEP officers and
5 others, and instead we're back in the trenches just
6 trying to keep these men and women on the job, and
7 let's make this real. If we don't succeed on June
8 30th, all of them are getting laid off.

9 JOSIE BENNETT: All of them are getting
10 laid off and like I said, I would love to have them
11 on a permanent basis, but I haven't been that lucky.
12 So every year we come back in here and we have to
13 fight again. And like I said, I want to thank the
14 City Council for backing me. Every year that we came
15 back in here, my people have been called back and I
16 thank you for that.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, we—we—we value
18 working with you. We want to baseline these workers,
19 but until that happens we're going to fight to get
20 them in the budget this year.

21 JOSIE BENNETT: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Madam
23 President. Thank you, Mr. Puleo. Than you to you.

24 JOE PULEO: It's a pleasure to be here.

25 JOSIE BENNETT: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright.

3 JOE PULEO: Good afternoon.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Next up we have
5 Pamela Pettyjohn from the Coney Island Beautification
6 Project; Dan Cohen, my friend from the Anibal Aviles
7 (sic) Playground; Nora MacCauley from Love Our Pool;
8 and also Lee Levine from Love Our Pool. [background
9 comments] And I—I should clarify that Love Our Pool
10 is connected to Brooklyn Bridge Park. [background
11 comments] Okay, Ms. Pettyjohn, would you like to kick
12 us off?

13 PAMELA PETTYJOHN: [off mic] Yes. Good
14 afternoon. I'm Pettyjohn.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Could you make sure
16 your mic is on, please?

17 PAMELA PETTYJOHN: Okay, is that better?

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good.

19 PAMELA PETTYJOHN: Okay great. I'm Pamela
20 Pettyjohn, President of Coney Island Beautification
21 Project, a volunteer community group, which works
22 closely with Partnership for Parks. Our members have
23 a passion for assisting in the beautification and
24 upkeep of our public spaces. Many New Yorkers are
25 more than eager to donate their time, energy,

2 expertise in helping in weeding, planting, painting

3 and doing whatever it takes to maintain the

4 aesthetics of and of diverse usage of our parks

5 ground. During our tenure working with Partnership

6 for Parks, we have become aware of the thousands of

7 hands needed to preserve our parks and public spaces.

8 Just look around. You'll be amazed at the tremendous

9 amount of accomplishments that our brought by our

10 volunteers every year throughout the vast acreage in

11 each of the five boroughs. From our very first

12 event, the role of Partnership for Parks was

13 immeasurable. Their contribution was tantamount to a

14 successful community affair. From our initial

15 introduction, Partnership for Parks supported us by

16 providing in-depth workshops such as how to work with

17 parks and the elected officials. Hello, we are all

18 here. [laughs] Time management and networking with

19 other park leaders how to apply for 501(c)(3) et

20 cetera. Partnership for Parks also connected us to

21 financial resources. Example: Applying for grants

22 in in-kind of services. It's My Park Day afforded

23 Coney Island Beautification Project to organize

24 approximately ten Coney Island area schools, 12

25 community groups, neighborhood businesses and several

2 elected official. You know, Mr. Treyger is one of
3 them if he was here today and cleaning and greening
4 our 21 blocks of commercial corridor. How grateful
5 was the group to [bell] Partnership for Parks for all
6 it's assistance. Partnership for Parks without a
7 doubt and amplified city resources multiplied several
8 times by factors of Excel (sic) for each Partnership
9 for Parks workers supported by the city. There is a
10 product gain and numerous non-paid volunteers.
11 Community engagement and pride and public is the non-
12 monetary bi-product of Partnership for Parks. Please
13 tally the value of Partnership for Parks programs and
14 budget in your worthy-worthy discretionary fund
15 budget line. I urge the City Council to please
16 double the contribution to Partnership for Parks to
17 fill the empty positions of outreach coordinators so
18 that more parks and communities can benefit from
19 these wonderful program.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, thank you
21 Ms. Pettyjohn and Council Member Treyger was here
22 before, and I know he loves your work, and we
23 appreciate your testimony on the great work of
24 Partnership for Parks. It's good to hear a real life
25 example of the impact, and I strongly support

2 increasing the budget particularly for outreach
3 workers. Who is your outreach worker?

4 PAMELA PETTYJOHN: Hannah Barfield (sp?)
5 and Ted Enochs (sp?), but can I just go off.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Sure, briefly yes.

7 PAMELA PETTYJOHN: --on more thing. O
8 was listening to everyone and--and everyone's
9 concerns, but some of these--or I didn't get a chance
10 to listen to some of the events that we have in Coney
11 Island, but as far as crime and everything is
12 concerned, we have annual events for the Explorers
13 and--and law enforcement Explores, and so we have
14 Explorers from the Police Department, Homeland
15 Security, Amtrak, FBI, all come out to the parks and
16 celebrate together. We have the Girl Scouts, the Boy
17 Scouts. We have these environmental educational
18 programs. With all these programs Partnership for
19 Parks has helped us put these programs together not
20 only for the community, but for South Brooklyn and
21 even the--the schools. This cuts down on a lot of
22 crime. It involves the people in the parks and--and
23 other--and--and, you know, keeps people involved in all
24 of these community events, and it--it helps immensely.
25 Without out, I don't what we would do.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank-thank you.

3 We—we appreciate that and I appreciate you speaking
4 out today and thank for all you do for that wonderful
5 park. Dan Cohen, please.

6 DAN COHEN: Good afternoon. I am Daniel
7 Marks Cohen, the President of Friends of Anibal
8 Aviles Playground [Speaking Spanish] which is on West
9 108th Street between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenue in
10 Manhattan Valley. Manhattan Valley Neighborhood of
11 the Upper West Side ably represented in the City
12 Council by the astonishing City Councilman Mark
13 Levine. [laughter] I am testifying to the
14 relationship--

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: We give extra money
16 for that.

17 DAN COHEN: Yeah. [laughter] Thank you
18 very much. I'm testifying to the relationship of the
19 Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground to the Parks
20 Department, Partnership for Parks and City Parks
21 Foundation. I want to state right up front that we
22 would not exist without the generous and sustained
23 support of the Partnership for Parks and the City
24 Parks Foundation. The playground honoring—honors the
25 memory of Anibal Aviles, a gifted athlete who

1 attended nearby Junior High School 54 where he was
2 captain of the basketball and track teams. He was
3 raised on West 109th Street. Aviles belong to a
4 local Catholic youth organization, participated in
5 other organized athletic programs in the
6 neighborhood. He left school to enlist in the United
7 States Marine Corps and was killed in the Vietnam
8 War. His brief life ended on March 5, 1966 when he
9 was killed in action. He died a month away from his
10 20th birthday. The park is a fitting memorial for
11 Corporal Aviles who played in the neighborhood as a
12 child and whose name graces the refuge for today's
13 children. I found the Friends of Anibal Aviles
14 Playground in July 2015. It is an all volunteer
15 organization. The group exists to support the
16 playground one of the few Upper Manhattan playgrounds
17 with sufficient shade to protect children from sun in
18 the hot summer months. Virtually all of the
19 neighborhood playgrounds in my community are
20 difficult for children to use by June as the direct
21 exposure of the sun on the metal playground equipment
22 makes it too hot to touch, but not Anibal Aviles.
23 Once it gets warm enough to go outside, my almost
24 five-year-old son is there almost everyday. When we
25

1 happened upon the park three years ago, we noted that
2 it was spacious but underutilized and a bit run down
3 as it had not seen a significant investment since the
4 Jenkins Administration almost 25 years ago. It was
5 with the help of Partnership for Parks and the City
6 Parks Foundation that led [bell] to our creating the
7 Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground. From there,
8 things moved swiftly. By December 2015, we had
9 succeeded in persuading the Parks Department to
10 install a new child safety fence to prevent children
11 and toys from rolling out onto the street, and
12 several months later in February 2016, we won a small
13 grant from the City Parks Foundation that enabled us
14 to hold a successful It's My Park Day a few months
15 later in April. Over 100 people attended including
16 Borough President Gale Brewer. Shortly thereafter,
17 City Parks Foundation recommended that the Friends of
18 Anibal Aviles be featured in the City Parks
19 Foundation's Capacity Fund Grant sponsor, TD Banks
20 rooted in New York Campaign, which last summer
21 featured a local park volunteer and board member
22 Morris Grady. He looked fabulous by the way. More
23 recently in October Anibal Aviles Playground was
24 repainted through the Parks Department Community
25

2 Parks Initiative. In December we participated in New
3 Yorkers for Parks Daffodil Project, and planted 250
4 bulbs in the gardening area of the playground with
5 the help of 20 children and parents from a local
6 preschool. Our next It's My Park Day project is
7 coming up this spring, and we expect it to be even
8 bigger and better than last year. But we are not done
9 yet. We have secured a commitment from a local non-
10 profit to construct a public bathroom on their
11 property, but accessible to the playground they
12 succeed in their ULURP application for affordable
13 housing to be constructed next door.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] And-
15 and sorry if you can—if you can--

16 DAN COHEN: [interposing] Last sentence.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --finish up there.

18 DAN COHEN: We have ambitions for new
19 playground equipment. Much is done—much has been
20 done, and much remains to be—to be done. The Parks
21 Department and Partnership for Parks and City Parks
22 Foundation will help us get there. We could not have
23 done it without them and we are immensely grateful
24 for their support.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, thank you,
3 Dan, for working on behalf of this jewel of a park.
4 You've really done amazing things in building this
5 coalition and we're grateful for your service, and
6 again it's good to hear about a real life testimony
7 on the important of Partnership for Parks. To have
8 two examples of some different parks in the city,
9 really makes the case better than I could. So thank
10 you being here, and for your great work on behalf of
11 the playground.

12 DAN COHEN: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, please.

14 NORA MCCAULEY: [coughs] Hi, City Council
15 members and thank you for holding this hearing today.
16 My name is Nora McCauley and I'm from a small
17 volunteer organization with many members called Love
18 Our Pool, and we rep—we represent the—the users, the
19 enthusiastic supporters of the pool in Brooklyn
20 Bridge Park and our—our objective is to keep a pool
21 in Brooklyn Bridge--Brooklyn Bridge Park, and we have
22 an interesting moment right now. I realize this the—
23 one of the first times that we've talked about pools
24 today at all. The situation in Brooklyn Bridge Park
25 is that there is a small pool, which is well loved

2 and used not just by every-by constituents in every
3 city council district in Brooklyn because we did a
4 survey last summer and had a petition. But also by
5 people from City Council districts in every other
6 borough and, of course, the many visitors from out of
7 state and even out of country that come to Brooklyn
8 Bridge Park. We were every pleased at the beginning
9 of today's hearing to hear Brooklyn Bridge Park
10 listed with Central Park and the High Line as-as some
11 of the-the top park attractions in the city. That
12 was very gratifying. The-the Park Corporation, with
13 whom we've met, is on track to pull out the little
14 pool that's currently there because in their vision
15 they have a vision for a much larger, more dramatic
16 pool, probably a floating pool to go into the water,
17 and this is a very large and complicated project.
18 As I'm sure everybody is aware, Brooklyn Bridge Park
19 is not just a-is not just city a park, although it's
20 used and loved and treated like a city park, but the
21 funding is-is complex. And there's also-there's
22 state parkland so there's state money and there's
23 [coughs] a private corporation that does money with
24 real estate there. So the potential is there for
25 money to be raised, but at our meeting we have heard

2 a price tag of between [bell] \$10 and \$20 million for
3 a pool. So that—that's staggering actually. It's
4 very substantial. What we are hoping--and my
5 colleague Lee may speak to this as well--what we're
6 hoping to put forward to the City Council is
7 there's--there's ample opportunity for matching funds
8 I think but we would love and the--the conservancy and
9 the corporation of Borough President as well would
10 love to be able to speak to the City Council for a
11 commitment that could then be matched by additional
12 funders because this is a--

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing]

14 Alright. Sorry to jump in. Only because I know that
15 Lee wants to speak and we're--we're super short on
16 time. So--so my--my--my long lost cousin Lee Levine is
17 here.

18 LEE LEVINE: Yep, I was say going to say
19 that. I was going to attest to that. Thank you.
20 Let me just quickly flesh out some numbers. So, in
21 the survey that was done for the little pop-up pool
22 that exists right now, besides having a thousand
23 petition signers, we serve 31 different zip codes and
24 82% of the users of Brooklyn Bridge Park's pop-up
25 pool do not come from the neighborhood. So we come

2 from -we deal with underserved communities. So
3 Council Member Treyger and Council Member Mealy have
4 a robust constituency that use our pool. Recently,
5 Douglas DeGraw Pool has had some environmental
6 upgrade needs that are about to come to fruition in
7 the next two years. So if that pool is taken out
8 that's an important piece of the pool for our area
9 and for our constituents and to juxtapose what we're
10 dealing with, public parkland has been used by the
11 one hotel that's just opened in Brooklyn Bridge Park,
12 and now we've just heard that Governor's Island is
13 going to put in a day spa on public parkland, and so
14 to juxtapose these very privileged and luxurious
15 options for pools with our, you know, very meager
16 needs to serve the community it's critical. So we're
17 asking the Council to help us advocate with the Mayor
18 to get the necessary funding. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, well I
20 appreciate that and we'll be checking with your local
21 council member on this topic as well, but thank you
22 for coming with your advocacy for these important
23 resources. Thank you, panel. We have to move on.
24 I'm sorry. We have so many people who still want to
25 testify. We have next Aziz Dehkan from New York City

2 Community Gardens Coalition; Ed Janoff (sic) from
3 Madison Square Park Conservancy and Marie Winfield
4 from Community Board 11 and as you're making your way
5 to the table, I'll—I'll remind folks that despite the
6 low headcount currently at the table up here,
7 everything you say is being entered into the record.
8 It's being live streamed now on the web and will be
9 transcribed so that what you say does matter, and
10 we're glad you're here to speak up, and Azusa, I will
11 pass it to you first.

12 AZIZ DEHKAN: So thank you for having me
13 be here today.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Could you maybe
15 speak into the mic and make sure it's on, and—and
16 that is--[background noise]

17 MALE SPEAKER: You're good.

18 AZIZ DEHKAN: Okay. My name is Aziz
19 Dehkan. I'm the Executive Director of the New York
20 City Community Garden Coalition. I thank everybody
21 for allowing me to take a few seconds here to talk
22 about the importance of this budget. There are 600
23 community gardens in New York City. It's about 100
24 acres of land. We continually work to make them
25 better. They're community pieces. They're called

2 community gardens because they are shared by
3 everybody in the community. We're very proud of the
4 work that we're doing in those community garden. A
5 lot of it is the sweat equity of gardeners, but a lot
6 of it has to do with being able to get the support of
7 Green Thumb to help us get resources and materials
8 into those gardens. And we would be—neglect not to
9 say that, and you know, often times we're community
10 gardeners and we think we do everything on our own,
11 but we're really aware that—that we need Green Thumb
12 to help us and continue to support us, and as an
13 advocate for community gardens within the city
14 agencies, it's really important to keep this budget
15 and to keep funding it and expanding on it. And I
16 know Councilman you've done quite a bit to help us do
17 that, and we really appreciate the work that you've
18 done to support community gardens, and we continue to
19 hope that that this new assault from the federal
20 level on community gardens and on the Parks
21 Department in general can be stopped, and I'm a firm
22 believer in—in the people power of us and working
23 together through agencies and through government and
24 through again the sweat equity of people. So we're
25 not going to give up on this. We know that you're

2 not and you've been really supportive. Again, and
3 I'll stop because I know I have two other colleagues
4 here who want to speak, but Green Thumb is-is a vital
5 piece of what we do in community gardens. [bell]
6 We're on parkland essentially, and our-my-my
7 organization the New York City Community Garden
8 Coalition our goal is to mote-promote, preserve and
9 create more community gardens, and we can't do that
10 without the-the work and the-the backing of different
11 organization and different agencies in the city. So,
12 whatever we can do, we will do to make sure that
13 this-these budget cuts don't affect us, don't affect
14 Green Thumb and don't affect the city in general. I
15 mean it's not just community gardens. It's-it's
16 Meals on Wheels. It's everything that we believe in.
17 It's everything the community is about. So that's
18 what we're going to try to do, and we thank you for
19 giving us this--

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Thank-
21 thank you, Aziz for what you've done, and leading the
22 Coalition and the building it is just incredible and
23 so important, and even more importantly what the
24 gardeners are doing, thousands of them and the 600
25 properties. It's just-it's just making our city a

2 better place and helping our environment and our
3 physical health, and so much more. And as you
4 pointed out, these gardeners don't generally ask for
5 a lot of help. Sometimes all they want is for us to
6 get out of the way, but there are some very important
7 targeted supports, which Green Thumb has done, which
8 has made Green Thumb essential. In some cases it's
9 resources. In some cases it's technical support.
10 It's also connecting gardeners to each other across
11 neighborhoods in the city, and it would just be a
12 body blow to our community gardens if that work
13 stopped, and it's why I have joined you and shining a
14 light on this threat so that it doesn't happen
15 without us fighting back hard, and I'm definitely
16 committed to standing with you in that fight.

17 AZIZ DEHKAN: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Aziz.

19 Yes, please.

20 ED JANOFF: Good afternoon, Chairman
21 Levine and members of the City Council Parks
22 Committee. My name is Ed Janoff. I'm the Director
23 of External Affairs for Madison Square Park
24 Conservancy in Manhattan. We're a non-profit
25 organization, which is responsible for maintaining

2 that park at 23rd Street and Broadway. I'm testifying
3 today to ask the Council to allocate funding in the
4 FY18 Capital Budget to improving a very important
5 monument in Madison Square Park, which is the Eternal
6 Light Flagstaff. The Eternal Light Flagstaff is a
7 monument, which was dedicated in 1923 to the
8 victorious military forces of World War I. Today the
9 Flagstaff is the starting place of New York City's
10 Annual Veterans Day Parade where wreaths are laid in
11 a-in an important ceremony paying homage to-to all
12 those who have made the sacrifice defending our
13 freedom. The Veterans Day Parade draws New Yorkers
14 from all boroughs and this monument is a very
15 important art space for the local veterans community,
16 which encompasses New Yorkers that have a background.
17 This location has historic significance as a starting
18 point for parade units returning home from World War
19 I including marches for the Fighting 69th comprised
20 largely of Irish-Americans of the 77th Division that
21 by Chinese-American Color Sergeant Sin Kao Ki (sp?)
22 and the famed African-American 369th Infantry Regiment
23 and the fact that historians point to that parade for
24 the 369th as the start of the-the Harlem Renaissance.
25 Unfortunately, over the many decades since the

monument was erected its frontage along Fifth Avenue has blocked and crowded by-by park fencing enshrouded in overgrowth, which is really hiding it from public view and creates a challenging bottleneck for the parade family. So in response, Madison Square Park Conservancy in partnership with the United War Veterans Council is proposing that that monument be opened up to Fifth Avenue to make a prominent new entrance plaza for the park at West 24th Street complete with paving and benches and landscaping, and event infrastructure for the Veterans Day Parade. This grand entrance plaza would be well aligned with a new direct pedestrian crossing at Fifth Avenue at West 24th Street [bell] fulfilling DOT Vision Zero safety objectives and NYC Parks Without Border Design Principles. [background comments] The estimated cost of the project is \$2 million. The Conservancy has committed to raising at least 25% of that privately, and we're almost all the way there thanks to a great commitment from New York Life Insurance Company of \$400,000. So we're asking the Council for a million dollars in capital funding for this project in FY18 to make it possible to renovate the monument in time for the important and highly visible upcoming

2 International Centennials of the end of World War I
3 in 2018 and the First Veterans Day Parade in 2019.
4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And you're hoping
6 that this capital project will be completed by 2018
7 or funded by 2018?

8 ED JANOFF: We can phase it.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] You
10 might not have been here for the earlier part of the
11 hearing.

12 ED JANOFF: Yeah, we can—we can—we
13 believe we can build it privately, and do half of it
14 in time for '18 and the other half in time for '19.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, well, it's—
16 it's an incredibly worthy project, one that I've
17 heard a fair amount from other sources, and I know
18 that our colleagues, the Chairs of the Veterans
19 Affairs Committee Council Member Eric Ulrich who was
20 here in the—in the hearing earlier is involved and
21 very supportive, and so we—we appreciate you speaking
22 out to get that on the record here, and we look
23 forward to—to coordinating with you and the
24 Conservancy throughout the budge process.

25 ED JANOFF: Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You got it. Okay,
3 so Ms. Winfield.

4 MARIE WINFIELD: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Sure.

6 MARIE WINFIELD: Good afternoon. My name
7 is Marie Winfield. I'm testifying on behalf of
8 Community Board 11 in Manhattan, which is East
9 Harlem, as the Vice Chair of the Environment Open
10 Space and Parks Committee. Since East Harlem has been
11 slated for rezoning under the Mayor's Housing Plan,
12 we obviously have serious concerns about our Built
13 Environment Open Space and Parks Portfolio. We're a
14 Community Parks Initiative zone, and we remain a
15 neighborhood where our parks playgrounds and
16 waterfront areas serve. Haven't seen the needed
17 investment to accommodate our existing community much
18 less an eventual up-zoning. Our parks and
19 playgrounds serve very vulnerable populations. Our
20 students in city schools, we're in East Harlem. We
21 have sizable numbers of homeless families estimate at
22 over 2,000 children, the largest percentage at 40% at
23 PS 38 on East 103rd Street, and we certainly have a
24 moral obligation to ensure that there are spaces in
25 our communities where children can be children,

2 experience play and a sense of childhood at safe
3 rehabilitate—rehabilitative spaces, and it's
4 certainly not an equitable framework to suggest that
5 volunteer work should make up cuts in staffing by the
6 Parks Department in our most vulnerable communities.
7 Our longstanding budget priorities reflect these
8 concerns like renovating the East River Esplanade,
9 and we recommend the comprehensive plan for funding
10 these priorities in this budget cycle, which is
11 reflected in our—in our budget response. There are
12 several things that we would like to point out,
13 mainly that we would like to see increase in BPR
14 staffing and PEP officers to improve upkeep,
15 maintenance and safety, Poor Richards Playground
16 rehabilitation—rehabilitation of the field turf at
17 Eugene McCade Field as well as increase in funding
18 for street tree maintenance and Green Thumb staffing
19 for our local community gardens. More specifically,
20 we have three playground associates that have been—
21 are right now paid for through a deal between the MTA
22 [bell] which took over staffing of the Second Avenue
23 Subway, and we need to see those playground
24 associates baselined in this year's budget, and we'd
25 really like to see Poor Richard's Playground also

2 renovated, and so I thank you for time and
3 consideration.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Ms.
5 Winfield. Excellent points and we thank this panel.
6 We'll move onto the next one. Appreciate it. We're
7 going to hear from Kelly Vilar from Let's Rebuild the
8 Cromwell Coalition; Virginia Ribot and Edna Figueroa
9 from El Puente; John Butler from Friends of Van
10 Cortlandt Park and Paulette Spencer from the Bronx
11 Community Health Network. [background comments,
12 pause] Alright, Kelly, would you like to kick us off?

13 KELLY VILAR: Yes, thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay.

15 KELLY VILAR: First of all, running for
16 the ferry over here I have some misspellings on here
17 so I've got to apologize for that. My name is Kelly
18 Vilar, and I represent the Let's Rebuild Cromwell
19 Community Coalition on Staten Island. The Let's
20 Rebuild Cromwell Community Coalition stands with
21 thousands of Staten Islanders and virtually every
22 elected official including Council Member Rose to
23 urge our city government to rebuild the Cromwell
24 Recreation Center. This is a major capital project
25 that Staten Island and our city needs right now. I

1 want to remind you that on October 9, 2015 a 16-year-
2 old boy fell to his death playing on—in an abandoned
3 building on the North Shore Staten Island. This was
4 only a few blocks from Eric Garner was killed. Up
5 until seven years ago and a stone's throw away, was
6 where Cromwell once stood right at the physical
7 center of these unfortunate events and it's stood
8 there for 73 years. Cromwell was the largest public
9 recreation center on Staten Island that served an
10 average of 750 people daily, and I promise you
11 there's no place on Staten Island where people—750
12 people get together. Youth from all over the island
13 had frequented Cromwell since the 1950s, and as a
14 result of years of storm and shoreline damages, our
15 center was demolished in 2010. Finally, all hopes of
16 it had—all hopes of it of ever being rebuilt were
17 ravaged by, of course, Hurricane Sandy. Right now in
18 the very vicinity of where Cromwell now stands—where
19 Cromwell was is Staten Island's North Shore
20 Waterfront is experiencing the largest economic
21 development project in 30 years, and our community
22 has broken ground on a courthouse for criminals, an
23 observation wheel for tourists, malls with high end
24 stores for shoppers and a luxury hotel with exclusive
25

2 waterfront apartments. [bell] But Staten Island
3 hasn't broken ground on a single facility for public
4 use on the North Shore. Some urging, you know, the
5 Council to help us. We've met with—with the Speaker
6 about this. We've met with several Council Members
7 about this. We are engaging the Mayor on a
8 discussion on this, but this is becoming an issue of
9 really dire need because now it's a race for space
10 and—and the commitment, and we're losing kids. There
11 are no rec centers of this size of—of even close to
12 this size on Staten Island, and I really urge the
13 Council if you can help us getting this into the
14 budget. It is a big ask, but we think that Staten
15 Island has waited a long time and deserves it.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: There's no doubt the
17 North Shore is gaining population and we need to do
18 more to enhance public space there to meet that
19 demand. So we thank you for running for the ferry
20 today. [laughter] Sorry for mispronouncing your
21 name earlier, Ms. Vilar, but we're—we're happy that
22 you came and spoke out. I'm not sure which one is
23 Virginia and Edna, but are you all a team? Okay.
24 Take it away.

2 VIRGINIA RIBOT: Good afternoon and thank
3 you for the opportunity of letting us speak. My name
4 is Virginia Ribot. I am a community organizer at El
5 Puente. That's a non-profit organization in Brooklyn
6 in the east part Brooklyn and the south side of
7 Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and I—I was born and raised
8 there in Williamsburg. So I know the neighborhood
9 for many years. All throughout my childhood there.
10 I've seen the changes that everyone else seen. I've
11 seen the poverty. I've the corners. I've seen
12 gentrification. So I've that all, and there's been a
13 lot of changes. One thing that did not change was
14 our air pollution, our air pollution. We at El
15 Puente are now conducting with an organization called
16 Mothers Upfront and we're conducting air monitoring
17 and it's extremely high. So this is the second time
18 El Puente has this campaign on the air pollution. So
19 we're here to advocate for the BQ Green. The BQ
20 Green is a project that was designed by Borough
21 President Diana Hannah (sp?) and so we have worked
22 very close with her because she is rezoning from our
23 neighborhood. So are actually working very close
24 with mothers and students to do this study. So we
25 did the study as the pilot and now we got funded by

2 different universities. So we're working with
3 different and different organizations. So we're here
4 to bring our project which has--had been mentioned at
5 the beginning, and I was very happy it has been
6 mentioned because to work and see the numbers that
7 see unfortunately it was a last minute call. So I
8 don't have the numbers with me, but it's amazing how
9 I lived there. Maybe I got used to it, but when you
10 see the numbers and you could breathe by--right by the
11 edge of the Williamsburg Bridge it's--it's stunning.
12 And I also want to share that two of those parks have
13 kids that go there for their recreation because they
14 just--for example if they're charter schools, they
15 don't have their own gym, and they're sharing with
16 the public school system their gym. So when they
17 have recess, that's the parks that these children go
18 to. So for the health of--of the children and for the
19 families that live there, I came to advocate for this
20 big project. Again, like I have heard through the
21 day, it is a big project, but I think it's more
22 important the health of our children. I am an
23 asthmatic born and raised there. My son is also
24 asthmatic, and I personally have the experience of
25 bringing him to that park, and taking him to the

2 emergency room right after. Then not knowing why and
3 now knowing why [bell] my passion is really, really
4 strong now as a mother and as a community member.

5 Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you, Virginia
7 and Edna.

8 EDNA FIGUEROA: Good afternoon. I also
9 work for the El Puente community based organization,
10 but I coming as life time resident of Williamsburg.
11 I was born and raised there, and I am here to support
12 Green Thumb and the Parks Department. We have a
13 beautiful garden on South Second between Robling
14 (sic) and Griggs and it's green-oh, a few of the
15 green spaces and it's very community-oriented and the
16 community comes out and they-they have their lunch
17 there on Saturdays and Sundays. You can see children
18 playing in our garden, and Green Thumb and the Parks
19 Department has helped us a lot in building the beds
20 and building a stage and just making the overall look
21 of the garden inviting. And without them we couldn't
22 have done it because we are volunteers and we just
23 make up so much, but they give us volunteers and they
24 help us build these beds and without them I-it would
25 just be a hole in the wall, a department building and

2 we're so grateful for them. So I'm just here to
3 support them as a community member. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well, we're happy to
5 hear that. I'm a big, big supporter of the BQ Green
6 and have been since Council Member Reyna's days and,
7 of course, Council Member Reynoso is a huge booster
8 and he and I have worked together on this, and we're
9 going to keep pushing for a project that would really
10 transform people's lives in a very, very needy area.

11 EDNA FIGUEROA: So thank you.

12 VIRGINIA RIBOT: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So we thank you for
14 that. Ms. Spencer.

15 PAULETTE SPENCER: Hello, can you hear
16 me. Thank you very much for having this meeting,
17 Councilman Levine and the rest of the committee. My
18 name is Paulette Spencer. I am the Community
19 Engagement and Policy Analyst from the Bronx
20 Community Health Network, and I work with the project
21 called the Bronx REACH CHAMPS for Parks and Open
22 Spaces. REACH stands for Racial and Ethnic
23 Approaches to Community Health, and what we are doing
24 through this CDC Center for Disease and Control
25 Prevention granted—excuse me. I'm a little nervous.

2 Forgive me. We were funded by the CDC, and Bronx
3 Community Health Network is a 501(c)(3) federally
4 funded health center where we provide subsidized
5 primary and preventive medical care in 12 clinics run
6 by the Montefiore Center and the Causey (sic) Network
7 in the Bronx, and six clinics in public schools. Our
8 services are available to community residents
9 regardless of their ability to pay. And in addition,
10 through our Community Health Worker–Health Educator
11 and Patient Navigator Programs we increased access
12 for community residents to social services and health
13 literacy in our communities. So my project Bronx
14 REACH CHAMPS for Parks and Open Spaces in partnership
15 with New Yorkers for Parks and the Montefiore Office
16 for Community and Population Health is taking steps
17 to increase the physical activity in parks by–Bronx
18 parks by making parks more accessible to community
19 residents and thereby improve health outcomes. From
20 May to August of last year, our 34 members strong
21 Coalition for Community Partners–or Community
22 Partners for Parks and Open Spaces brainstormed on
23 ideas [bell] to increase access to Bronx parks. The
24 outcome included the park–park–a series of park work–
25 workshops and a series of colorful and informative

2 park visitors guides prepared by New Yorkers for
3 Parks, which includes a park map and description of
4 park facilities and instructions on how to obtain
5 park permits. In the late summer of 2016, park
6 visitors found a space for mental relaxation,
7 educational resources on nutrition and a few
8 demonstrations in physical fitness in seven Central
9 and Northeast Bronx Parks including Shoelace, Seton
10 Falls, Poe, Saint James, Devou, Soundview and
11 Aqueduct Parks. During our outdoor activities--

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] And
13 if--and if you can--if you can just wrap up on it
14 because we're short on time.

15 PAULETTE SPENCER: Sure. Sorry about
16 that. We are interested in strengthening our parks
17 programs. We have Train the Trainer programs to
18 provide community residents with the ability to learn
19 some of the techniques to relaxation so that they can
20 teach each other and utilize the parks more in ways
21 that could benefit their health, we are seeking your
22 support for all of it.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, thank you
24 and--and I couldn't agree more with the link that you
25 point out between physical space of a wonderful park

2 and our health. It's been proven time and again, and
3 that's great to hear how a professional is making
4 that case here. So thank you for coming out.

5 PAULETTE SPENCER: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Mr. Butler.

7 JOHN BUTLER: Hi and thanks for having me
8 today. My name is John Butler and I'm the Ecological
9 Project Manager at the Friends of Van Cortlandt Park.
10 You normally see my boss Christina. She's on
11 vacation so I'm here in support. So first of all, on
12 behalf of the staff and the boards of Friends, I want
13 to thank Council Member Andrew Cohen for his vital
14 support of Friends and Van Cortlandt Park as well we
15 are extremely thankful of you Councilman Levine for
16 your support on our efforts Daylight Tibbetts Brook.
17 So just if you don't know, the Friends are an
18 independent community based organization that
19 actively promotes the conservation and improvement of
20 Van Cortlandt Park through environmental education,
21 restoration and enhancement and we began in 1992.
22 So, basically we're the third largest park of the
23 first largest park in Pelham Bay and the third
24 largest park in Van Cortlandt in the Bronx. The Bronx
25 has more parkland than any other borough, but we

2 often wonder if we're getting our fair share of
3 budget to maintain these parks and keep them up to
4 the levels that Bronxites deserve. So for the
5 upcoming fiscal year the Friends are looking to
6 request funding for the following projects: One is--
7 is Daylighting Tibbetts Brook. So New York City
8 Parks is in the process of designing phase one of
9 this project, which involves wetland restoration
10 within the Van Cortlandt Park to begin decreasing the
11 amount of brook water entering the city's sewer
12 system. Daylighting Tibbett Brook has been a
13 potential project for about 20 years, and we've made
14 tremendous progress over the last couple of years,
15 but we need to make--keep that momentum going and
16 begin phase 1 as soon as possible. Since December
17 2015, the Friends have been monitoring the water
18 quality of Tibbetts Brook and its importance to the
19 biodiversity of--of New York City. Two is the Friends
20 have a trails plan for Van Cortlandt Park and we're--
21 we're really in--depth in the maintenance of the
22 hiking trails, the 20 plus miles of hiking trails in
23 the park, and--[bell--and we'd like to make some more
24 significant progress on our trails plan and the third
25 is just shadowing what many other people said, which

2 is maintenance funding. We see a lot of money go to
3 capital projects, but we need to maintain those as
4 well after-after they're done. So, the Friends fully
5 support the New York City Parks Department and-and
6 our efforts to maintain and improve all the parks in
7 New York City.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay, John, you know
9 I'm a big supporter of the park and Tibbetts Brook
10 Daylighting plan, and we look forward to continuing
11 with you for that.

12 JOHN BUTLER: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And thank you very
14 much, panel. Okay, our final panel we're going to
15 try and squeeze them. We have seven speakers on the
16 topic of Roosevelt Park. So I'm going to ask Camille
17 Dana, Judith Calamandre. [pause] Okay. William
18 Roddenbush, Regina Clark, Claudia DiSalvo, Fritz
19 Mueller, and Carey Goodman. [background comments,
20 pause] And-and I'm happy that you are so well
21 represented here. I will just ask in the interest of
22 time if you could-if-if one of your colleagues has
23 already made a point, if you could not repeat that
24 would be very helpful, and ma'am, why don't you start

2 us off. [background comments] [coughing] Go ahead,
3 ma'am, you can start us off.

4 FEMALE SPEAKER: I should start.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Yes.

6 FEMALE SPEAKER: Okay, press the button.

7 [background comments, pause] Thank you for the
8 opportunity to express our community's opposition to
9 the proposed funding for the expansion of the
10 American Museum of Natural History onto Parks
11 property. I am President of the Friends of Damrosch
12 Park and a member of the Committee for
13 Environmentally Sound Development. We were lead
14 plaintiffs that brought a suit against New York City
15 Parks under Adrian Benepe (sp?), New York City under
16 Mayor Bloomberg and Lincoln Center for the Performing
17 Arts under Ben Levy. Plaintiffs were successful in
18 ousting the powerful conglomerate fashion Week from
19 Damrosch Park in 2014. Equally impressive our
20 settlement agreement required that Lincoln Center
21 restore the park. New Yorkers were horrified to wake
22 up one morning 2010 to find 47 trees in Damrosch Park
23 cut down. The famous then Kiley (sp?) Gardens were
24 decimated and the park closed to the public.
25 Shamefully, Parks Department was complicit in the

2 destruction of those beautiful established shade
3 trees without any notice to the community. Trees
4 that were listed as healthy on the Parks own website
5 were criminally destroyed without so much as
6 mandatory forest permit, a jewel of a park that
7 served the community so well was destroyed overnight
8 while our elected officials said nothing. Today,
9 park advocates oppose the destruction of another
10 idyllic setting less than a mile away. We opposed
11 the destruction of established trees by a museum that
12 exists that teach the public about the glory of our
13 natural habitat. We oppose the taking of spoonful of
14 [bell] Teddy Roosevelt Park, a little oasis that has
15 served the community so well as a retreat in an
16 overbuilt community in order to build an incongruous
17 massive \$350 million edifice that will primarily
18 serve as an entertainment venue purporting to be a
19 center for innovative science. Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, thank you
21 very. Thank you for being very timely. We
22 appreciate that. Go ahead, ma'am. [background
23 noise, pause]

24 JUDITH CALAMANDRA: Hello, my name is
25 Judith Calamandra. I live on West 79th Street. I am

2 the neighbor of the park and the museum. A week ago,
3 the day before St. Patrick's Day, there was a very
4 timely illustrated article in the Times and the
5 headline is *Thinking Inside the Footprint*. Instead of
6 being exhorted to think outside the box. Here are
7 examples of other museums and institutions with an
8 amount of money expected to do this being a fraction
9 of the \$300 and something million here that the
10 Museum of Natural History proposes to put there. I
11 call it a mini Guggenheim Museum there. When you
12 look where are—if you have a minute to read this, and
13 I hope you will, there are—there are statements here
14 from among others the Dean of the Architectural
15 School at Yale, which knows the gang (sic)
16 associates. They are saying that it is unseemly at
17 this time, and even someone says tone deaf to go
18 ahead with the idea of new large buildings and in our
19 case taking away from this tiny little park, which
20 has nothing to spare, which is well used. Everybody
21 loves it. Why [bell] put a wall around the trees and
22 by their own description have a couple of trees and
23 benches inside. They're already outside. You don't
24 have to do anything with wise use of it. You got to
25 do with what you got.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, thank you
3 very much. I realized we skipped one of the
4 colleagues. Were—are you here to speak as well,
5 ma'am. [pause] Then we will continue down the row.
6 [background comments] Okay, go ahead, sir.

7 MALE SPEAKER: I'll go ahead. I'd like
8 to pivot a little bit and talk about something that's
9 near and dear to your heart, Chair and your heart,
10 council members, which is transparency. It's
11 bewildering as a citizen the opaqueness and the
12 impenetrable nature of the Parks Department when it
13 come to their budget, when it comes to their items on
14 their budget. I know you've done great work so far,
15 and I know that 1340 is progressing so you can get
16 updates on capital projects. But let me be positive
17 about the effects of having transparency when it
18 comes the budget in the Parks Department. One of the
19 things is you can be engaged in public/private
20 partners in a meaningful way in order to further the
21 vast resources of the private citizen when it comes
22 to their capital projects in their park. This helps
23 us with the staffs like I think we're all bewildered
24 when we heard 200 plus acres per gardener. You know,
25 when you can start funding these wealthy

2 neighborhoods and their parks you can start resources
3 everywhere, but you can't do it without transparency.
4 The reason you can't do it is because you can't go
5 advocate for something that in turn turns into a
6 boondoggle for several years and when you go to check
7 in on it, for instance we've got a project going
8 right now in Teddy Roosevelt Park that we heard from
9 the Parks Department in 2015 about this dog run and
10 that it as funded and everything, and now it's
11 supposed to be finished the month. We have yet to
12 see a shovel. It's between the \$1 and \$3 million.
13 It's separated into five pieces under the same code
14 over several parks, and we have no clue about this
15 project. Now, I'll tell you about this museum. When
16 you're sitting there and you're a member of a
17 community, and you see that a museum and a
18 "conservancy" effort—I put that in quotation—and the
19 Department of Parks has a memorandum of understanding
20 to manage your park, and you have them saying that
21 they don't want money for the park because that would
22 make the park shine and make it difficult for them to
23 build on. You see that there is \$130 million going
24 to this project, and this museum has debt, \$477
25 million when you total it all up [bell] and

2 everything is paid off, and you wonder how are we as
3 a community supposed to manage our park when all this
4 money is going to them and going to what it should be
5 going to, which is the head room we need in this
6 budget for the oncoming onslaught to our way of life.
7 Thank you very much.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very much
9 as well. Alright, please.

10 REGINA CLARK: I am Regina Clark. On the
11 Upper West Side of Manhattan is a very small park,
12 Theodore Roosevelt Park. On a quite morning in
13 springtime it seems wonderfully at odds with the
14 surrounding city. It pits green swad against the
15 city's sharp angles, green life against brick and
16 asphalt, winding paths against the unbending streets
17 of New York's remorseless grid into which it has been
18 squeezed as if in a vice. On such a favorable
19 morning, Theodore Roosevelt Park resembles nothing so
20 much as a small defenseless principality surrounded
21 by a predatory empire, hostile to its spirit,
22 covetous of its green fields, yet miraculously
23 surviving nonetheless, a sort of municipal
24 Lichtenstein. In the least poetical of cities it
25 makes the unexpected triumph of poetry over

2 practicality in a certain vague sentiment over the
3 hard calculations of interest and profit. Its
4 mission is so singular, so beautiful and gallant, and
5 that is why so many New Yorkers, tourists and
6 especially the Upper Westsiders have taken to their
7 hearts. Let us hope that this little principality
8 can survive in the center of the Empire City.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, thank you
10 and thank you for being succinct. We appreciate
11 that. Yes, sir.

12 FRITZ MUELLER: [off mic] My name is
13 Fritz Mueller, and I live West 72nd Street. [coughs]
14 I-I talked to---

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Lift
16 the mic up, sir, just to make sure. There--there you
17 go.

18 FRITZ MUELLER: [off mic] -I live on West
19 72nd Street. The city has been allocating any more
20 profit money for the expansion--[on mic] Oh, sorry.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Great.

22 FRITZ MUELLER: So, now you're hearing
23 again. Is it red now?

24

25 FEMALE SPEAKER: Yes, it is.

2 FRITZ MUELLER: [laughter] Fritz Mueller
3 is still my name against allocating of more public
4 money for the expansion of some natural history
5 museums—museum into Theodor Roosevelt Park to—to in
6 order to build a center for science, education and
7 innovation. Science, education and innovation, these
8 two—these threes words serve in my opinion only to
9 distract from the real purpose of this—of this
10 project, namely to create a large brand new entrance
11 for the museum. It's—it's 89th Street and Columbus.
12 And starting work to restore the entry hall in my
13 opinion is just a big vanity showpiece with a—with a
14 billionaire's name on it. It does nothing for
15 science, education and innovation, but it may be a
16 good venue for a fundraiser for example. And besides
17 the loss of park bench a large new entry at this spot
18 on Columbus and 79th Street will bring a total influx
19 of traffic, foot traffic and vehicular—vehicular
20 traffic into such multi-use and already very
21 overburdened section of Columbus Avenue. Such a new
22 center or such new space for science, innovation and
23 education, which the museum wants to build minus a
24 new entry hall could easily be put into a—could
25 easily be created within that underutilized footprint

2 of the present museum. All you have to do is make
3 it--do the earth (sic) the museum from the top down,
4 and you see how much space there is still within the
5 museum [bell] especially in terms of volume to-to
6 develop. In such space--

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Just
8 briefly. If you could wrap up, Mr. Mueller so--

9 FRITZ MUELLER: After this context I
10 would like to also sites that occupy Jan Devine (sic)
11 and parts of--also museums go with parts of expansions
12 such as the American History and the Natural History
13 Museum is the only museum and this big history museum
14 goes outside its footprint.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Alright, we
16 appreciate that and --

17 FRITZ MUELLER: Good day.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: --just briefly, if
19 you could briefly so that Mr. Goodman can pick up the
20 baton and continue your line of reasoning.

21 CARY GOODMAN: I had the pleasure of
22 listening to the Commissioner and all the
23 Commissioner's men earlier. So I think I'll
24 integrate that into my remarks if I can. I'm here--
25 I'm Dr. Cary Goodman. I live not far from the

2 museum, and I'm here to call for Commissioner
3 Silver's resignation. Commissioner Silver as charged
4 by the Charter is responsible for and I'm quoting
5 "his duty to manage and care for all parks." Instead
6 of managing Teddy Roosevelt Park effectively, this
7 Commissioner has targeted it, and I heard you, Mr.
8 Chairman talk about targeted investments earlier in
9 you—in the session. The \$8 million that you
10 mentioned as a heavy lift of the gap between what the
11 Commissioner says is coming to this Fiscal Year 18
12 budget and what is needed. That \$8 million is back
13 in the budget again this year by Council Member, your
14 colleague, Helen Rosenthal for another \$8 million to
15 go to the Natural History. Now, there's already
16 been, and there's some dispute between \$100 and \$130
17 million steered into this project without one Parks
18 Committee hearing on it, without one community board
19 hearing on it. The first time this conversation
20 every took a public forum was in the Parks
21 Department's scoping session last April. We had a
22 new dialogue without any communication, and it's
23 really a tragedy. You mentioned earlier that there
24 are a lot of things that the parks need to have
25 happen for them. We couldn't agree more. The \$100

2 million could be clawed back since there's not been a
3 building permit or, you know, a green light given to
4 the project, and to—and could be used for many of the
5 things that you outlined. Commissioner Silver
6 himself mentioned earlier that he wants to have a
7 more equitable park system for all New Yorkers. What
8 sense does it make to put another cultural
9 institution into the Upper West Side? I know you're
10 a neighbor of Lincoln Center already the Museum of
11 Natural History. New York Historical Society, and
12 Manas (sic) Children's Museum. They're all within a
13 few blocks [bell] but this is a great cultural center
14 for all New Yorkers? Let's put it somewhere else
15 where other New Yorkers will have the kind of access
16 that we as Upper Westsiders have. So I urge you if
17 you're not going to ask for the Commissioner's
18 resignation, would you be kind enough to convene a
19 Parks Committee Hearing where people like this good
20 folks here who live near the museum—we have over
21 4,000 signatures of people who don't want where that
22 kind of thing can take it away.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: [interposing] Okay,
24 okay, you're—you're over time. I ask the questions
25 around here not vice versa. [laughter] We don't do

2 a hearing on individual park projects. We've never
3 done one during my tenure. We focus on broad policy
4 here. Did you have comments as well, ma'am. Okay,
5 take it away.

6 CLAUDIO DISALVO: Can you hear me? Okay.
7 My name is Claudia DiSalvo. I'm President of
8 Community United to Protect Teddy Roosevelt Park.
9 After \$130 million of taxpayer money taking seven
10 trees and losing our canopy, losing our park, the
11 museum continues to have a voracious appetite. Their
12 appetite can be traced back to the 1800s where in
13 1885 they made a presentation to the Committee for
14 Appropriations to build more lecture halls, more
15 rooms for teachers and where they more space for
16 exhibitions and dioramas, et cetera, et cetera, and
17 they were turned down in 1885 for this expansion. It
18 is time for our city to start turning to the more
19 powerful elite in this city who have access to—to so
20 much. Hundreds of organizations come to you with
21 budgets that are so stretched for assistance. When
22 we—when the hurricane hit and NYU lost its library,
23 they have now completed a digital medical library
24 that's one room. The museum wants to build an event
25 center. They want to add more space for events

2 making for their revenue streams to bring in more
3 money. This is not going to be an area of science,
4 and what about what we're living in today? If we're
5 thinking of the museum for the 21st Century we could—
6 are now moving into interactive digital work. There
7 should be gilder cloud, a gilder cloud that will
8 expand and bring this museum into a world class
9 education setting. I'm an educator for 47 years. We
10 don't need more classrooms. We don't need more brick
11 and mortar. We don't need to take parks from people.
12 Once it's cemented and rolled over, we will never
13 have the opportunity. You need to speak to the
14 people in our community to understand the passions,
15 the history, how they feel about this park leaving
16 them and, of course, what we will lose with the fact
17 of [bell] what we'll have with pollution, what we
18 will have with our transportation systems, what we
19 will having with all for three years of construction
20 what we're going to have to live. So we would
21 appreciate for your consideration, and we need an
22 interactive museum, not another brick and mortar.
23 Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you. Thank
25 you to all our witnesses today. This is our final

2 panel. This concludes our hearing. [gavel] Thank
3 you very much.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date April 12, 2017