

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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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 20, 2025

Start: 1:09 p.m.

Recess: 4:57 p.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Shekar Krishnan, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

David M. Carr
Robert F. Holden
Linda Lee
Julie Menin
Mercedes Narcisse
Vickie Paladino
Sandra Ung

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Christopher Marte
Gale A. Brewer
Alexa Avilés
Lincoln Restler

A P P E A R A N C E S

Sue Donoghue, Commissioner of New York City
Department of Parks and Recreation

Jennifer Greenfeld, Deputy Commissioner for
Environment and Planning

Margaret Nelson, Deputy Commissioner for Public
Programs and Community Engagement

Unidentified Administration member

Max Barton, Union Representative from Laborers
Local 1010

Dilcy Benn, President of Local 1505

Will Hiron, Labor's Local 1010 Liuna

Joseph Puleo, President of Local 93

Bismark Ghanny, High Line Fellows

Jasiah Vega, High Line Fellows

Aniyah Nicole Cameron, High Line Fellows

Nachelle Johnson, High Line Fellows

Evander Tomaschett, High Line Fellows

Adam Ganser, Executive Director of New Yorkers
for Parks

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

Deborah Kirshner, Vice President of External Relations at Prospect Park Alliance

Tamar Renaud, New York State Director of Trust for Public Land

Alia Soomro, Deputy Director for New York City Policy at the New York League of Conservation Voters

Roxanne Delgado, Founder of Friends of Pelham Park

Lynn Kelly, Executive Director of New York Restoration Project and Co-Chair of Parks and Open Space Partners

Emily Walker, Senior Manager of External Affairs at the Natural Areas Conservancy

Victoria Dearborn, representing Tami Lin-Moges, who is the Director of the Nature Conservancy's Cities Program in New York

Tessa Huxley, volunteer for the Sarah Roosevelt Park in the Lower East Side

Allie Ryan, self

Karen Horvat, President of NYC Tree Pit Services

Sally Burns, Planning Associate for Union Square Partnership

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

Heather Lubov, City Parks Foundation

Merritt Birnbaum, President and Chief Executive
Officer of Riverside Park Conservancy

Rosamond Fletcher, Executive Director of the Fort
Greene Park Conservancy

Michael Davis, community garden member at East
Harlem Rodale Community Garden

Giulietta Fiore, Historic House Trust of New York
City

Herbert Brooks, ropes course facilitator at Alley
Pond Park in Queens

Constance Lesold, self

Isabel Friedman, Environmental Health Advocate at
the Natural Resources Defense Council

Romke Hoogwaerts, self

Roberto Sosa, self

Alejandra Ng, Assistant Director of New York
Junior Tennis and Learning's Community Tennis
Programs

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

George Sands, Friends of Mount Prospect Park

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon, good afternoon. This is a microphone check for the Committee on Parks and Recreation, done on March 20, 2005. Recording done by Ginelle Yearwood. It's recorded in the Committee Room.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet, please. Thank you. Good afternoon. Welcome to the New York City Preliminary Budget Hearing on the Committee on Parks and Recreation.

Also, please silent all electronic devices at this time.

Please do not approach the dais.

If you have any questions, please raise your hand, and one of uh, the Sergeants-at-Arms, will kindly assist you.

Thank you very much for your kind cooperation.

Chair, we're ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: [GAVEL] Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome to the Parks and Recreation Committee's hearing in the New York City Council on the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget and the Preliminary Mayor's Management Report for the Department of Parks and Recreation. My name is Shekar

Krishnan, and I am the Chair of the Parks and Recreation Committee. I would like to acknowledge my fellow Council Members who are present here today. Council Member Marte, Council Member Carr, Council Member Brewer, and I know others will be joining as well.

Today, we will be hearing from the Department of Parks and Recreation on its Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget, which totals 640.4 million dollars. While it is an increase of about 22.4 million dollars since adoption, this is still nowhere near the budget that the Parks Department of New York City deserves. It is nowhere near the goal of 1 billion dollars that Mayor Adams campaigned on four years ago and has consistently broken that promise, and it is nowhere near what other large cities across America devote to their parks budget every year. If we want to be serious about investing in the well-being of New Yorkers, if we want to be serious about investing in New Yorkers' public health as well as mental health, then we need to take the steps towards improving our parks, making them safer and cleaner, and you do that by investing in them, not by cutting their budget.

There are still major gaps in the Department's funding, specifically with regard to Urban Park Rangers, PEP officers, and natural areas funding. Let's look at this very clearly. If we want our parks to be safe, if we want them to be clean, if we want to protect our trees and our forests from the wildfires that we have seen happen across our city, then we need to invest in our Parks workers and the areas of the budget that care for these things. The Urban Park Rangers, the PEP officers, and our forestry funding capture perfectly the fact that we need to do far more to invest in those areas of the Department to make our parks safer, cleaner, and greener. But as of January, the reality is that we do not have enough staff to cover the entire 30,000 acres of New York City parks. As of January, there were less than 300 PEP officers covering all the parks across New York City. Nowhere near the headcount that is needed to provide protection for park goers and keep our parks safe.

Additionally, we have been fighting for Urban Park Rangers to receive permanent funding so that 50 City employees don't have to worry about potentially losing their job every year. We have seen

on the federal level the way in which the budget of the National Park Service is being decimated and the impact that it has had on our rangers on the federal level. Here in New York City, we are still fighting to protect our Parks budget. Our Urban Park Rangers, 50 of them every year, are relying on the City Council to fund them from year to year. That is unacceptable. Supporting our Parks workers not only ensures our parks are taken care of, but investing in these workers and their jobs ensures that they can provide for their family, pay their rent or mortgage, and pay for childcare, and that can only happen if and when this Mayor joins the City Council in investing in workers and their jobs. If it were up to this City Council alone, their jobs and many more would no longer be at the discretion of yearly budget negotiations. That is not the way to run an agency's budget in New York City.

We need good paying, stable jobs for New Yorkers. Working in our Parks Department can provide that path so long as we invest in those jobs, and these temporary one-year allocations of funding, or one-shots, are no way to sustain good paying, stable jobs. It is no way to show our investment and

gratitude for the Parks workers who care for our green spaces every single day of the year, rain, shine, or in the snow.

What I hope to show throughout this budget hearing is that our parks are severely underfunded and, year after year, we are here highlighting how essential our parks are to the well-being of our city, to the livability of our city, and yet we are battling cuts from this City Hall in budget after budget that we are fighting to replace. We are heading in a direction that scares me and my constituents and should scare all New Yorkers.

If we care about our city and its well-being, if we want to make sure every community in New York City thrives, then we need to prioritize our Parks Department and its budget. The Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget includes 23.5 million dollars in new needs for FY 2026, 173,000 other adjustments and, thankfully, no PEGs, but I will say again, we cannot be operating from this mindset of scarcity. But we are here reflecting on the fact that we don't have cuts. Where every budget fight we engage in is finding ways to replace cuts. We are not moving forward, we are actually moving backwards. And so

while there are no cuts to the Department this year, the fact is the gigantic cuts over the prior years have set this Department back on the work it is able to do for our green spaces across the city, and that is no way our city should be managed or run.

Now there are several new needs in this plan, including an expansion of the Second Shift Program that we fought for last year, as well as an expansion of the Swim Safety Program, which will improve our children's ability to safely use our beaches and pools. There is also funding for the Shirley Chisholm Park positions, as well as tree bed rat mitigation. The Committee looks forward to hearing testimony about the FY 2026 Preliminary Plan, and in these areas in particular, Second Shift Program, lifeguards, and most fundamentally the headcount of workers in the Parks Department.

Before we begin with the testimony, I would like to thank Council Staff for their hard work, our Finance Team of Chima Obichere, Jack Storey, and Michael Sherman, our Committee Staff, Christopher Sartori and Patrick Mulvihill, and my own Staff, Greg and Chanel Martinez.

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2 I also want to acknowledge that we have
3 several other Council Members join us as well,
4 Council Member Julie Menin and Council Member Linda
5 Lee.

6 And I will now ask the Committee Counsel
7 to go over some procedural items and swear in the
8 representatives from the Parks Department.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYNUM: Good afternoon.
10 Please raise your right hand.

11 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
12 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
13 Committee and respond honestly to Council Member
14 questions?

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I do.

16 UNIDENTIFIED: : I do.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYNUM: Thank you.
18 Please state your name and position for the record
19 when you begin, and you may begin when you're ready.
20 Thank you.

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Great. Thank you.
22 Good afternoon, Chair Krishnan and Members of the
23 Parks Committee and other Members of the Council, and
24 importantly, happy first day of spring. My name is
25 Sue Donoghue, Commissioner of the New York City

Department of Parks and Recreation. I'm pleased to be here today to testify regarding the agency's Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget, and I am also pleased to be joined by several members of my incredible agency senior staff leadership with me today.

New York City Parks plans, maintains, and cares for over 30,000 acres of green and open space, encompassing 5,000 individual properties, ranging from playgrounds and beaches to community gardens and natural areas, and over 5.7 million trees. We provide tens of thousands of recreational and educational public programs throughout the year, including free classes and programs offered in our recreation centers, Shape Up NYC fitness classes hosted in locations all over the city, Kids in Motion children's programming in our playgrounds led by our playground associates, and nature walks and other educational programs provided by our Urban Park Rangers in our parks, natural areas, and our nature centers. I want to thank the Council for its continued support of our City's open spaces over the past year, and for championing the importance of parks for all New Yorkers. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to discuss the agency's Preliminary

Budget and to provide an overview of our efforts over the past year to continue delivering on our mission to build and maintain a restorative and thriving park system.

Parks are essential and touch every facet of our daily lives. Just as we invest in better roads and sewers, we must invest in our parks to help safeguard our city's present and future. Unlike other forms of urban infrastructure, parks evolve and change over time, but their importance to New Yorkers remains consistent. Our parks need to be clean and safe, green and resilient, and supported by engaged and empowered New Yorkers. By creating clean and safe public spaces, we can make our communities more secure, providing young people with accessible outlets for fun and active play, while giving neighbors places to connect, swap stories, and build community. With green and resilient spaces, New Yorkers can experience all the health benefits, both mental and physical, of time out in the great outdoors, and our city will be better prepared to withstand the challenges of climate change. And by engaging New Yorkers in the care of our shared green spaces, we can strengthen our civic community,

counteract the loneliness crisis, and empower people of all backgrounds to advocate for the resources they need.

With all this in mind, in June of 2024, we released Vital Parks for All, investing in New York City's living infrastructure. The agency's 3.2-billion-dollar plan to improve existing park facilities, equitably deliver new resources to underserved communities, and equip New Yorkers with the information they need to better enjoy, celebrate, and support their parks. Through this plan, we are undertaking ambitious initiatives, expanding bathroom access, upgrading our citywide network of public pools, expanding our tree canopy, growing our greenways, promoting public safety, empowering grassroots action, and expanding recreation center access. In conjunction with the plan, we have also developed the Vital Parks Explorer, a digital map available on our agency website that empowers New Yorkers with information regarding how their neighborhood compares to the citywide average on critical components of a vital park system, including dog runs, greenways, volunteer groups, park rule enforcement, and more. Additionally, New Yorkers can

get information about their local park's vital signs, including a park condition score, recent investment, upcoming events, and volunteer opportunities. This data can help New Yorkers better understand and appreciate the open space resources they have and better advocate for what they need. We have been introducing New Yorkers to this new strategic framework and these new tools through various public events and briefings, and we welcome the Council's partnership in helping New Yorkers learn more about their park system.

We're focusing on keeping New Yorkers engaged and informed because it's so important to sustaining our park system. In 2024, we celebrated getting a record number of volunteers involved in their local parks through our Let's Green NYC initiative. Since the start of the campaign in 2023, we have engaged nearly 850,000 New Yorkers, volunteers in park stewardship and engagement activities. This ambitious effort to encourage New Yorkers to participate more deeply in the care of our shared green spaces also included an inventive online directory to help New Yorkers find the volunteer opportunities that best align with their interests,

channeling their enthusiasm and their energy in the most productive direction.

Fostering and shepherding New York's love for parks requires hard work and dedication from every corner of our agency, but especially the staff leading Partnership for Parks, our unique public-private partnership with City Parks Foundation, which is our primary mechanism to support and champion neighborhood park volunteers by giving them the tools they need to advocate and care for their neighborhood parks and green spaces in a dedicated, sustained way. From planting a record number of trees along our city streets to launching the biggest investment in our public pools in decades, 2024 was a milestone year for our city's living infrastructure.

I'm extremely grateful to all of the park's employees, volunteers and partners who have helped make our city greener, safer and more livable in the past year. So, I'd like to briefly mention a few of our highlights and successes. Despite a persistent lifeguard shortage that has affected municipalities across the country, we were able to safely welcome more than 8 million visitors to our beaches and pools during the 2024 season. This was

made possible thanks to our dedicated and focused efforts to increase lifeguard recruitment, which resulted in a 43 percent increase in new recruits over the 2023 beach season. In addition to an extensive lifeguard recruitment campaign, the City reached a new agreement with DC37, enabling closer collaboration and improvements to our lifeguard recruitment and training processes, and we're building on that foundation as we are already well into our lifeguard recruitment drive for the 2025 beach and pool season. To expand New Yorkers' access to swim safety skills and vital relief from the heat, we also launched Let's Swim NYC, a capital investment of more than 1 billion dollars for building, improving and protecting New York City's public pools over the course of five years, the largest investment in swim infrastructure since the 1970s. We are also well into construction on the 92-million-dollar Mary Cali Dalton Recreation Center on Staten Island and the 141-million-dollar Shirley Chisholm Recreation Center in Brooklyn, both of which are utilizing an innovative design-build approach led by our sister agency colleagues at DDC. Last November, the design for a new 90-million-dollar recreation center at

Walter Gladwin Park in the Bronx was the recipient of an award for excellence in design from the Public Design Commission, and we're very excited to see that incredible project moving forward.

As part of the Fiscal Year 2025 budget adopted last June, the Administration also dedicated 160 million dollars to completely rebuild the beloved Brownsville Recreation Center, which had fallen into serious disrepair. Just last month, we were proud to join our agency partners in announcing the Administration's creative and bold vision for transforming an underutilized site in Manhattan's Hudson Square neighborhood into a vibrant, community-focused, mixed-use development, which will include a multi-floor recreation center to provide year-round recreation, health, and wellness opportunities for community members of all ages and abilities.

Beyond expanding recreation access to New Yorkers through brand-new, state-of-the-art facilities, these projects represent hundreds of millions of dollars in major investments in public health and safety, providing safe and affordable spaces and strengthening community bonds. We also help New Yorkers enjoy our green spaces more

comfortably with investments in our public amenities, making sure no one has to cut their time in a park short just because nature is calling. In 2024, we installed new baby-changing tables in over 1,200 park restrooms across the city, providing a vital amenity for parents looking to keep their little ones happy and healthy. And it's not just kids and parents who are getting relief. Together with our partners across the Administration, we launched an ambitious initiative to build new restrooms and renovate existing restrooms throughout the five boroughs, some of which are utilizing creative modular designs to help us provide public restrooms faster and at a lower cost. As stewards of our city's natural resources, we work year-round to keep the five boroughs' diverse ecosystems healthy and thriving, from our wild natural areas and forests to the urban tree canopy along our city streets. In the face of extreme heat, the environmental benefits of tree cover have never been so evident. In 2024, we planted nearly 18,000 new trees along streets and in landscaped areas of parks, the most since Fiscal Year 2016, and with a special focus on neighborhoods impacted by high heat vulnerability. To continue that

momentum in a more efficient and strategic manner, we have unveiled the Neighborhood Tree Planting Program, a new planting strategy that will help us plant even more trees and further expand our focus on equity by prioritizing the most vulnerable neighborhoods. Over the next decade, through this new block planting strategy, baseline capital funds are in place for the agency to ensure that every viable and appropriate location for hosting a street tree gets inspected and planted, along with other tree-related streetscape improvements.

Turning to the specific topic for this hearing, the Fiscal Year 2026 preliminary expense operating budget for NYC Parks is 640 million dollars, a 22-million-dollar increase over the agency's Fiscal Year 2025 annual budget. This financial plan demonstrates the Administration's ongoing commitment to promoting equitable investments in a greener, healthier city and giving our agency the resources we need to continue getting the job done, delivering core services and keeping our city parks clean and safe. The plan includes 5 million dollars in new baseline funding for aquatics and lifeguard staff, allowing us to partner with NYC

schools to expand our existing Swim for Life and Learn to Swim programs at school pools, so that more children can learn water safety and swimming skills to keep them safe.

We're also receiving 1 million dollars in new dedicated funding for rat mitigation in street tree beds. This is another important step forward in this Administration's effort to clean up the city and reduce the presence of rodents, alongside the unveiling of creative new parks trash receptacles designed specifically for pizza boxes, limiting the food available to rodents, as well as a 2-million-dollar investment last November, which will allow our agency to containerize our curbside trash collection with over 9,000 lockable street trash bins.

We're also excited to be expanding our second shift evening and weekend park maintenance strategy, with over 12 million dollars in new baseline funding for staff to clean 100 additional busy park hot spots when they're being most heavily used. This builds upon the initial wave of second shift maintenance funding provided in the most recent Fiscal Year 2025 adopted budget, which will provide weekend and evening coverage at a total of 200

separate locations in 121 of our busiest parks. We're in the process of recruiting and interviewing these new hires and are aiming for full deployment by mid-April as the weather begins to warm and our busiest season gets underway.

The agency has a 10-year capital plan of over 10 billion dollars, representing 424 million dollars in new capital for projects, including the reconstruction of the iconic Passerelle Pedestrian Bridge in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, which serves as a primary entrance into the park for countless visitors every year, as well as close to a dozen incredible park investments across the city that were included last year as part of this Administration's landmark City of Yes Housing and Economic Opportunity Initiative.

Our Capital Division staff works tirelessly, advancing hundreds of projects, many of which were made possible with generous discretionary funding from this Council to build and improve our parks and playgrounds in a timely and efficient manner. We pride ourselves on our creative designs, which are shaped by public input so that these spaces can best serve the local community. This design

approach is a cornerstone for the capital projects being advanced through the Community Parks Initiative, our signature Equity-Driven Investment Program through which Parks enhances green spaces in underserved neighborhoods. Through this initiative, we are both using data-driven methodology and working with communities to create thriving public spaces. Over the past decade, we have reimagined and reconstructed 67 CPI projects for local neighborhood parks and have another 40 projects actively underway. Over half a billion dollars of capital funding for rebuilding parks and playgrounds that haven't seen significant investment in decades. Through a partnership with the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health, we have assessed the positive health and social impacts of CPI, and this study has been extended to research the impact of local programming and activation in our CPI parks on quality of life and well-being so that we can best understand how quality parks can benefit everyone in our communities. We'll be making some exciting new CPI project announcements in the near future, so stay tuned, and we look forward to inviting you to many

more community input meetings, groundbreakings, and ribbon-cuttings as these projects progress.

In closing, I want to thank my entire team at the Parks Department for their continued hard work and dedication to our mission. I'm honored and grateful to be able to lead this agency. I also want to thank the Council for the opportunity to work with each of you to continue improving our parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers. We look forward to continuing our close partnership with the Council to create a bright, green future with a more equitable, inclusive, and resilient park system. We'd now be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Well, thank you so much, Commissioner, for your testimony and for your leadership of the Parks Department.

Before we get started, I also want to just recognize that we've been joined also by Council Member Ung and Council Member Holden virtually, and I also want to thank our Committee Counsel for today, Natasha Bynum, for your great work as well. And Council Member Avilés has also joined us as well.

So for this hearing, because we have a number of Members here, too, I'm going to ask, and

Council Member Restler is walking in right now, too. Late, but still here. Sure, sure. But, you know, because the number of Council Members here, too, what I'll do is I'll ask a couple categories of questions, and then turn it over to my Colleagues, and then I'll come back for more of my questions and keep going back and forth like that.

So just taking a step back, Commissioner, we've every year had to, unfortunately, do this budget dance battle with City Hall, as I mentioned before, not over investments, but over cuts, and then reversing those cuts, and every year, we're going through that cycle and making no progress, and if anything, we've slid backwards than moved forward. Zooming out, we know that there are no cuts in this plan, but there are also no restorations to the disastrous and damaging cuts that we have seen over the last several years to the Parks Department, and there are no proposals to reverse the profound and harmful impact those cuts have had on this agency. We've seen hundreds of positions reduced, many programs delayed or outright eliminated as "cost-saving measures," but we know in reality they are just harming and hampering this Department's ability

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2 to do its job, and that has undoubtedly impacted our
3 green space, our workers, and the City's ability to
4 care for them. Looking back over the last several
5 years, isn't it true that in total, the Parks
6 Department has lost about 700 positions, give or
7 take, because of these cuts?

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council
9 Member Krishnan, for the question. And it is the case
10 that in order to meet our agency PEG-saving targets
11 implemented both in November '23 Financial Plan, and
12 the January '24 Financial Plan, it was necessary to
13 reduce existing vacant year-round positions as well
14 as future vacancies that will be created through
15 attrition so the agency remains in a hiring slowdown.
16 And yes, after the agency fulfills its savings
17 targets, the total PEG will amount to roughly the 700
18 positions you mentioned. But we are pleased to note,
19 as you said at the beginning, the new FY26
20 Preliminary Budget does include significant baseline
21 headcount increases for specific agency efforts,
22 second shift expansion, swim safety, staffing for the
23 soon-to-be-open Shirley Chisholm Rec Center, so
24 important adds to areas that are helpful for the
25 agency.

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2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Understood, but as
3 you recognized too, we are still 700 positions short.
4 And in fact, if you go back to the FY23 Preliminary
5 Plan, I'm just going to briefly read here, 250
6 positions cut in the FY23 Preliminary Plan, 200
7 positions cut in the FY23 November Plan, 118
8 positions cut in the FY24 November Plan, 375
9 positions cut in the FY25 Preliminary Plan. Cuts
10 after cuts after cuts, whatever metric you look at it
11 by, I mean that's well more than 700, but however you
12 look at it, we have seen the agency's positions being
13 reduced tremendously. On top of that, for years now,
14 the agency has been subject to a two-for-one hiring
15 freeze, which means that you all cannot hire one
16 worker unless two leave the Department. Is that
17 correct?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It's true, Council
19 Member, that there's a two-for-one citywide hiring
20 freeze is in place for many agencies, including
21 Parks, as the City continues to deal with economic
22 constraints. However, many positions related to
23 public safety or similar needs are exempt from this
24 broader hiring restriction. But the two-for-one
25 hiring restriction is not particularly impactful for

Parks as we're already subject to PEG-saving targets from expected attrition so the agency will remain kind of in a hiring slowdown so it's not just the two-for-one, it's more meeting the PEG attrition targets.

But, as I said, there are, importantly, certain positions that are exempt from that, PEP, recreation, engineers that are exempt from that.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But the vast majority of positions in Parks are still subject to the hiring freeze, right?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. It's the hiring freeze in addition to our PEG target that we have to meet that is really about savings through attrition so when people leave, not being able to hire them.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So 700 positions lost, the inability to hire for many of those positions, and the impact on the headcount as a result, the impact on the hiring of workers has been drastic. Have you had conversations with OMB about both the cuts, the loss of positions, as well as the hiring freeze, and what have those conversations been like?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: You know, at this time of year, as you all know, Council Member, as the budget process moves forward, we're in continuous conversations with OMB and the Mayor's Office regarding our PEG savings targets and new needs, and that is an ongoing conversation and will be ongoing over the next few months, and I am incredibly proud of our dedicated workers and our agency staff, who, as you mentioned, are out there every day delivering on our mission to take care of the Parks Department.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But what have been the substance of those conversations with OMB about filling the 700 positions lost, lifting the hiring freeze on Parks workers? What has been the substance of those conversations with the Budget Office for City Hall?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It is continuous back and forth in conversations about new needs that we've put forward and areas where we're seeing challenges and just ongoing conversations, as is always the case at this time of year.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, in Fiscal Year 2024, what was the budgeted and actual headcount for full-time employees versus seasonal employees?

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So in FY24, the
3 total budgeted agency headcount for full-time
4 employees was 4,755, and the budgeted headcount for
5 seasonal full-time equivalents was 3,288.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Commissioner, I was
7 going to ask, do you believe that that is a
8 sufficient amount of resources to run the Parks
9 Department of New York City?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As I said, I'm
11 really proud of our staff, and they do the best job
12 they can with the resources they have available.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Well, I fail to see
14 how it's an adequate amount of resources to support
15 the staff that no doubt are working extremely hard,
16 but with a hiring freeze in place and hundreds of
17 positions lost, and many seasonal positions, and not
18 enough permanent lines, I fail to see how you all
19 have the resources you need from this Mayor to do the
20 job that you're supposed to do for our 30,000 acres
21 of park space across New York City.

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I do want to point
23 out, Council Member, that our seasonal plan of 5,000
24 seasonal employees is not subject to a two-for-one
25 hiring freeze so we do bring on, at this time of year

in mid-April, extensive seasonal park staff to help us in the busiest time of year.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Understood. Thank you.

Before turning it over to my Colleagues, I want to shift to another topic that's been the subject of much public discussion and attention recently. On November 3rd, the Parks Department issued an RFP for the management of the Wollman Rink in Central Park. This was after the Department turned down an offer by the Central Park Conservancy to replace the rink and provide additional improvements to the park with the largest private gift in its history. The RFP is now being pursued by the Trump Organization. While the Trump Organization managed the Wollman Rink for years, they were stripped of the privilege following the events of January 6th.

Commissioner, can you please provide a breakdown of the offer made by the Central Park Conservancy? Why was it rejected? What part of the operations would be funded by private donations? And what part by City dollars?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council Member, and I appreciate the question. I want to

start off by recognizing that, of course, the Central Park Conservancy is a really important partner of ours for over 40 years in the care and maintenance of Central Park, and we so appreciate their ongoing work and their incredible, incredible partnership in Central Park. In terms of Wollman Rink, for over 30 years, the concession of Wollman Rink has been awarded via an open, competitive RFP process. We feel like that is very important to continue to do it in that manner. Like any entity, the Central Park Conservancy was eligible to submit a proposal in response to our RFP, and nothing would preclude CPC from making improvements around Wollman Rink, but we really felt it was important to put that out to competitive bid, as it has been for years and years in the past.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But the Central Park Conservancy was offering 120 million dollars, which, to paraphrase the letter from the Conservancy to the Parks Department, to City Hall, they are not a corporation seeking to extract money from the government, but a non-profit partner looking to give money to the City. In fact, the largest gift ever in its history of 120 million dollars, requiring also 30

2 million in contributions from City government. But
3 120 million far outweighs the amount the City would
4 have to put in. Why was that offer rejected?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I can't comment on
6 the proposed amount that they were going to
7 contribute, but I do know that it would have also
8 required an investment from the City, absolutely,
9 just as with the Harlem Meer project, the City
10 invested 60 million in that project, and so the
11 offer, I wouldn't say, was rejected. We encouraged
12 them to bid like everyone else, because this was
13 going to go through a competitive bidding process. We
14 felt that was the fairest way to do it.

15 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And why was the
16 decision made to implement an RFP, competitive
17 bidding process, here?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm sorry?

19 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Why was the
20 decision made to issue an RFP and a competitive
21 bidding process in this situation?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Because that was
23 the manner that this has been bid out for years and
24 years in the past, and we felt that a competitive
25 public bidding process was the right way to go here.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And when was that
3 competitive bidding process announced?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I believe it was
5 in September of last year.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Or was it in
7 November? Do you have the exact time when it was
8 announced?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We can absolutely
10 get you the exact timing of it, yes, absolutely.

11 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So that was the
12 reason to do a competitive RFP. But isn't it a fact
13 that Harlem Meer, which is a part of Central Park,
14 just a bit away from Wollman Rink, was not put to a
15 competitive bidding process, but was instead given
16 over to Central Park with the same arrangement? They
17 provided funding, the City put in funding for Harlem
18 Meer. Isn't that the case? That was done by a sole
19 source, not a competitive bidding process.

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah, those are
21 very different concessions, Council Member. Very
22 different revenue-generating opportunities, very
23 different concessions. Central Park hadn't run a
24 concession before like that, and so we wanted to give
25 them an opportunity to run a concession. The Wollman

Rink is obviously a much more lucrative, high-profile. We felt that it was important to go through a public bidding process because of the difference in nature of those concessions and the revenue from those concessions.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: How much revenue did the Wollman Rink accrue for the City in FY23 and FY24?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I have that. In FY23, Wollman Rink paid more than 3.1 million in license fees to the City. In FY24, Wollman Rink paid more than 3.2 million in license fees to the City. It experienced nearly 300,000 admissions for '24 and '25 ice skating season, and importantly, 11 percent of those admissions, nearly 30,000, were either free or discounted. By comparison, Council Member, FY20 comparison Wollman Rink versus Lasker, Wollman in FY20 had 17 million in gross receipts. Lasker Rink had 1.3 million in gross receipts. So very different entities for sure.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And do you have the date that the RFP was put up? I have here as reported in The City and other public media, the RFP was

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2 announced, put up a request for proposals for Wollman
3 on November 17th. Is that correct?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As stated, we're
5 absolutely happy to get back to you with that date.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Assuming it was
7 November 17th as reported, that was a matter of days
8 after the United States presidential election. Is
9 that correct?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It absolutely is.
11 But when we put out a request for proposals is based
12 on that agreement ending, which is in 2026 and having
13 enough time to go through the negotiation process.

14 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And prior to
15 putting it out, when was the last time you all had a
16 conversation with the Central Park Conservancy about
17 its gift of 120 million dollars?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: You know, we have
19 regular conversations with the Central Park
20 Conservancy. As I said, they're an important partner
21 of ours. We talk to them all the time.

22 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: It would be good to
23 know for this Committee too, just to break down in
24 the timeline of understanding when the RFP was
25 issued. I know as well, Central Park Conservancy had

issued a letter to you all too, stating their intention to provide the gift as well and work with the Parks Department. Just the process of when those meetings happened, when was the last meeting in relation to when the RFP was announced would be helpful.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. And we're happy, Council Member, to get you that timeline. We'll provide that afterwards. Just to note that if the RFP was released November 17th, elected and Council Members were notified 30 days prior to that in October of that RFP going out so we can get you that timeline as well.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I appreciate it. Thank you.

My next question is, has the Trump Organization made a formal offer to the Parks Department regarding the RFP? And if so, can you please provide a breakdown of the offer, private dollars versus public dollars?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm unable to comment on this topic. In accordance with FCRC rules, the City does not comment on any ongoing solicitation or vendor proposal. But before finalizing any award,

the City will consider multiple factors, including the vendor's financial resources, their record of business integrity. But at this time, I can't comment on any specific proposals we've received.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And how about the number of bids that you've all received for this project?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I also cannot comment. It's an ongoing negotiation.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And my final question is, you are, in the Parks Department and City Hall, all aware that the Trump Organization has been convicted of 17 counts of criminal tax fraud and falsifying business records.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We are aware, yes.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. I'll now turn it over to my Colleague for some questions before going back to more questions. Council Member Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. Central Park is in my District. I live right across the street. So picking up on the Chair, because I know we're very upset about this. In 2021, I wrote a letter saying, why can't it sole source,

even before it went to related to Central Park Conservancy? So now I have my same question. Can we get rid of the RFP totally and do a sole source, as we're doing in the northern part of the District? They're willing to pay whatever the cost is.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council Member Brewer, for your question. I wasn't here in 2021, so I can't speak to that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I was around.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm sorry?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I was around.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I know you were. Yes, I know you were. I was not. So, we've already issued the RFP. It's already out there. So, at this point, are going to continue with our negotiations, and we're in the process of those negotiations.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We can't get rid of an RFP? You can't just say, sorry, this RFP is no longer?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: At this point, we're not planning to do that, no.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We're going to keep working on that.

I just want to know some costs. How much does it cost? We all love our street trees, and in my area, we've been doing wonderful street tree how-to-take-care-of-it sessions, and people love it, so how much does it cost to, I guess, plant one? And then I understand your new program, but I assume that those of us who have allocated funding will get the street trees allocation. I want to make sure that that's clear. So how much does it cost? And then how long will this new plan take? Because we all want street trees.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely, Council Member, and I so appreciate your support and advocacy around our street trees. In terms of the cost, the citywide cost for FY25 to plant a street tree is 3,110 dollars. This represents a 12 percent reduction in street tree planting costs from FY2022. We're really pleased about that, and it's a testament to the hard work of our Forestry Division. They've done a number of things to bring that cost down, including bringing in multiple new contractors, M/WBE contractors, looking at every aspect, so we are seeing that cost come down.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know it costs a
3 bit. That's a lot. But I understand there's some
4 union issues, and I'm very supportive of the union.

5 And then in terms of the fact that we put
6 money in, those of us who did, we will get our
7 allotment this year, and then I guess a new program
8 kicks in. Is that how it works?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm going to just
10 defer to Jennifer in terms of how that will work.
11 Yes, she needs to be sworn in.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYNUM: Please raise
14 your right hand.

15 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
16 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
17 Committee, and to respond honestly to Council Member
18 questions?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: I do.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYNUM: Thank you. You
21 may begin when you're ready.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Thank you,
23 Council Member, for that question. And, yes, we
24 absolutely will honor the spending of the funding
25 that we have right now that any Council Member has

2 already given us and committed to us. So that will be
3 honored, and it's a transition period of about two-
4 plus years until we get through that process.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. Thank
6 you very much.

7 Okay, bathrooms also, they cost a
8 fortune. I get one 5.4, another one 13 million, and
9 then everything in between for the Parks Department.
10 So, God, because you can put money in to renovate the
11 wonderful playground, and you do a great job when
12 that happens, but then the bathroom looks like hell,
13 and it's not ADA. Do you have any money for
14 bathrooms? You said in your testimony you have money
15 for bathrooms.

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We have a good
17 deal of money for bathrooms, yes, Council Member, and
18 I am...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Put them in my
20 Riverside Park and Saul Bloom Park, please.

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We absolutely
22 will. As I said in my testimony, we were pleased to
23 announce last year our focus on better bathrooms, and
24 we are building 46 new ones and renovating 36
25 additional ones, so a huge investment in bathrooms.

But in addition to the investment we're making in bathrooms, I'm so proud of our capital team has just done enormous work in looking at all different ways to bring bathrooms online cheaper, faster. That's why we're looking at modular and trailers and the Portland Loo and many different options to decrease the per-unit cost of bathrooms.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: My parks are all landmarks, so they're all landmarks, so they all have to be renovated. So, you're saying you have 36 renovations. You can get us a list of those?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. Yep, be happy to.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And then in terms of the recreation centers, I love my recreation center. I got it funded at 14 million some years ago, many years ago. But when I'm there, signing up for a membership, I know this is Margaret's issue, when you sign up for a membership, it's paper. Can I put in some kiosks or something because it takes forever. First, you've got to find the clipboard. You can't find the clipboard. Then you can't find the paper. Can't find the paper. Then you've got to find a pen.

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2 Couldn't find the pen. (TIMER CHIME) This is not how
3 to sign up. I can put in a kiosk if you like.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYNUM: Hi. Please raise
5 your right hand.

6 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
7 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
8 Committee, and to respond honestly to Council member
9 questions?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: I do.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYNUM: Thank you. You
12 may begin.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Since it's a
14 budget hearing, how much could we save by not doing
15 paper?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: That I
17 couldn't answer. We do have an online process, so
18 people can actually get their memberships online.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: At home.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: At home, yes.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But they all show
22 up at the desk.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: But they can
24 also do it in the center. We have our media lab, so
25 they could do it at the media lab if they wanted to.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. That doesn't
3 happen, just so you know.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: We'll work on
5 that.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. Okay.
7 Thank you. And then just finally, on the pools,
8 you're paying for your pools, but also I have some
9 schools that are being renovated. Is DOE paying for
10 those? They have pools. Or are you paying for those
11 pools?

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: The pools that are
13 being...

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The schools...

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: The DOE pools
16 being renovated. That's coming out of DOE's budget.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: In the schools?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yep. That's a
21 great partnership, and they've been doing terrific
22 work in getting more pools online, so that we can
23 all...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It takes five
25 years.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: But it's an expensive process, yes, we know.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Four to five years. I do not understand that.

West 96th Street has a house. It's a house. It's like a little house. Are you paying to renovate that? Can you update me on the West 96th Street Broadway house? It's a house. A little house. A little...

UNIDENTIFIED: We'll have to look into that...

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We'll need to look into that one and definitely get back to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And then just finally, lifeguards. Thank you, Iris, for the lifeguards. What's the status? I got some numbers. When are the elections taking place? And what's the status of Mr. Stein?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you. And I want to second that thank you to First Deputy Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa. She's been doing yeoman's work on lifeguard and recruitment, and it's making a difference. And as I said in my testimony,

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2 45 percent more new recruits last year, and we expect
3 to exceed that this year.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: How many do you
5 need total, to have everything open, pools and
6 everything?

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: 1,000.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And how
9 many? You had 800 last year or something?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Last year, we got
11 to 930. We expect to be at 1,000 or over this year,
12 and so we need 1,000 to be fully open.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: When are the
14 elections that lifeguards have? When do they take
15 place?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I do not have the
17 answer to that question, but we can get back to you
18 on that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It used to be in
20 the winter when nobody was there. That was the reason
21 that they didn't move. Mr. Stein, is he retired?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: He has fully
23 retired, yes.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

25 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yep.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council
3 Member Brewer.

4 Just to follow up before I turn it over
5 to my Colleague for questions, but Commissioner, for
6 lifeguards, and I do want to recognize our First
7 Deputy Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa who's done an
8 amazing job, as you all have every year, to increase
9 the number of lifeguards, recognizing that we're
10 short of where we need to be. I thought we needed, in
11 the past, from what we understand, about 1,400 to
12 1,600 lifeguards. Can you just clarify, what is the
13 number that we fully need to...

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, thank you for
15 the question, and I'm happy to clarify. We need 1,400
16 lifeguards to run a second shift at our pools. With
17 1,000, we can fully open our pools and beaches. With
18 1,400, we can run a second shift. It can do early
19 morning, late evening, a second shift. That's the
20 difference in those numbers.

21 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sorry. With 1,000,
22 what does that enable?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It enables our
24 normal hours of 11 to 7 at pools and beaches. The
25

time is different. But yes, it allows our normal shift at beaches and pools.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: From 11 a.m.?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: One shift.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, at pools.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Beaches is different.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. Since we have quorum, and we have Council Member Holden on virtual... oh, sorry, I also want to recognize, before doing that, we have Council Members Narcisse and Paladino here as well. And because we still have quorum, I'm going to turn it over to Council Member Holden, who's on virtually, to ask his questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair, for this, and thank you, Commissioner, for your testimony.

My first question is really, or my questions would be on forestry. You know, the City eliminated its usual 2.5 million allocation for forestry services, eliminating 50 critical positions that protect New York City trees and natural

resources. You know, is the Parks Department or the City prepared for the consequences of underfunding its forestry teams? What happens when storms hit and there aren't enough workers to clear dangerous fallen trees and so forth?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council Member, for the question. You're right that we did not receive that tree risk management funding. Two different things. Okay, I'm going to let our Deputy Commissioner for Environment and Planning, Jennifer Greenfeld, to answer this. Jennifer.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Thank you, Council Member Holden. I'll just note that some of the words that the budget uses doesn't always align with our programs so it's a little bit confusing. I'm pretty sure what you're referring to is the one-shot funding that was those 50 lines that you're referencing. That funding goes towards our forest management framework, not the tree risk management program. The tree risk management program was a different PEG, and those people were never hired. It was cut before in that financial plan. Those folks were never hired, so it wasn't a loss of 55 people

for our tree risk management program. I just want to clarify.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah, but we certainly don't have the personnel to care for our trees. Nobody can doubt that. If we had the money for those positions, we should have hired them, but since they weren't, we're still woefully understaffed. For instance, and this is separate and apart, but I got a constituent that asked for a tree in her area, and she got an email saying that New York City Parks has begun a cyclical block planting strategy where we no longer respond to service requests for tree planting. Instead, we have laid out a plan to plant the entire city on a cyclical basis, prioritizing the most heat-vulnerable neighborhoods first. In essence, what they were saying, so we expect to be planting in your area 2033 to 2036. You can't make this stuff up. If I'm requesting a tree, I've got to wait over a decade to get my tree planted?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, Council Member Holden, it is true. We did revamp our tree planting program, and it is mostly with a focus on efficiency. With the new program, what we're able to do is plant, as you said, whole blocks at one time

and not only deal with the planting of the tree, but with stump removal so that it will be a notable difference in those neighborhoods as we're able to plant those trees. It's not just one-off and sending contractors spread across the city, but really making sure that we're using that street tree planting money in the most efficient way and also being able to create a very visible difference in the streets where we're planting by dealing with every single item on that block. Yes, it will take longer, but it's a way that we can ensure that every single Council district will have access to newly planted trees, but also improvements to their block wholesale with removing stumps, with taking care of issues on individual blocks, and doing it hopefully more efficiently and more effectively for neighborhoods.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: It's not acceptable on any level to wait until 2036 to get a tree planted in any area of the city, so I think that needs to be revisited, certainly if we have more funding. Chair, do I have a couple of minutes or a minute left?

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure, yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Okay, one other question on capital projects. The City completed 37.5 fewer capital projects compared to the previous year. New York City Parks struggled to keep up with its projects, and instead of increasing funding, the Administration is dragging its feet. We are going to see playgrounds, pathways, and facilities deteriorate. I know this goes into certainly funding and budget, but what does the Administration think it does not need to reinvest in keeping our parks up to date and certainly usable? (TIMER CHIME) The fact that our capital projects are taking, I know you'll say they're not taking longer, but I believe they are, and I think they're way over cost and out of line with the rest of certainly contractors who are doing similar work and private work. But again, with 37.5 fewer capital projects completed, what are we doing to address that in parks?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council Member, for the question. You're right, it can take a long time, it can be difficult, but we have been really pleased to be part of Capital Process Reform Task Force that the Mayor started early on in the Administration. We have looked at all different ways

to improve our capital process, working with City agencies, working on every single aspect of where we can speed things up. You're right, too, that it is often more expensive than private contractors, but that's because of the City rules and regulations that we're following around prevailing wages and things like that that are important, and we have had an enormous increase in capital funding, not decrease in capital funding in this Administration. As I said in my testimony, we had significant increases in the most recent budget year in capital funding, the Passerelle Bridge in Queens, several significant large capital projects in our budget, for sure.

UNIDENTIFIED: And I'll just add as a technical consideration that the number I believe you're citing is a reference to the Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, which reports on completed projects in the first four months of this Fiscal Year, and that number changes from year to year, and it's frankly more of an index of the types of projects where they are, so that number will vary from year to year so it's not exactly apples to apples, I guess, is the argument. At any given time, we have close to 600 or more capital projects either

being designed into procurement, being constructed, being opened, right, so that is sort of a pipeline of projects that is consistently moving, so a snapshot, if you will, of the first four months of any given Fiscal Year. I don't think we'd see as particularly meaningful in the broader context.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Just following up on Council Member Holden's questions too, in the Forestry Division, we had a hearing recently around wildfires across the city. We know that they did immense harm to our urban forest last fall. We will see them again going forward. So, to me, and I think to many of us here too, taking care of our trees, our tree canopy from our street trees to natural areas is incredibly important. What exactly is the staffing count for the Forestry Division within the Parks Department?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.

So as Jennifer attested, there can often be confusion between our Forestry Division and our Natural Resources Division, but we have 220 full-time employees for our Tree Risk Management Division, which are the foresters, the inspectors, climbers,

pruners. And then in our Natural Resources Group, which cares for our natural areas, I know, Jennifer, you gave me that, We have 62 full-time positions, plus five agency-funded seasonal hires and 19 grant-funded seasonal staff.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, 220 managing our trees and caring for our trees, separate from the natural areas, but 220 full-time positions within our Forestry Division for our trees, right? That averages about 40 staff members per borough. For the entire borough, 40 staff members. Do you think that that is sufficient to care for our street trees and tree canopy across the city?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: There is no doubt, as a Commissioner, we always welcome more resources to do our work, certainly, and that's where we rely so heavily on volunteers and partners and other entities we've worked really closely with to ensure more assistance and more help for our tree care across the city.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But if we want to look at why it takes so long to care or plant trees or to take down trees in our city, it seems to me the first place to start is to look at how woefully

underfunded our Forestry Division is, how we simply don't have enough people to plant trees or care for them across the city. And to me, I'm shocked to, again, as I said, the three areas you can look at that are very important are PEP officers, Forestry Division, Urban Park Rangers. We have 40 full-time staff per borough to take care of all the trees in every single borough in New York City, which is unacceptable and shockingly low.

My next question is, for natural areas, we have 62 full-time employees in the Parks Department caring for our natural areas across the city. What would you say the acreage is of our natural areas across the city?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That we know. It's 10,000 natural areas.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: 62 staff to take care of 10,000 acres of natural areas. Do you feel, Commissioner, that that is an acceptable level of adequate amount of staff to care for our 10,000 acres of natural areas?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As I stated Council Member, as a Commissioner, I'd always welcome more resources for the work that we do. And we've

been very creative in bringing in partners, and we have an important partnership with entities like the Natural Areas Conservancy, great volunteers who come out and help us to help us take care of those 10,000 acres.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I think the answer is no, that's severely inadequate. I just want to paraphrase, because I think that is the correct answer there on that one.

I just wanted to clarify two programs in particular that we talked about, Council Member Holden asked about. So, the Tree Risk Management Program, as I understand it, Deputy Commissioner, from your testimony, that program never got off the ground because it was created and then because of the PEG it was cut so no hires were made, or can you clarify what that meant exactly?

UNIDENTIFIED: So the proposed budget item you're referring to was an expansion of our existing tree risk management approach, right?

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But that expansion never got off the ground, correct?

UNIDENTIFIED: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So it was funded, it was cut, so no hires were made to expand the Tree Risk Management Program.

UNIDENTIFIED: That is correct.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And the Trail Formalization Program, I know there was a lot of back and forth with the Council and City Hall, this is something that City Hall has funded in the past, they did not do so, the Council picked it up, and we expected also that City Hall would continue funding it, they did not do so. How did Parks address the fact that that funding for the Trail Formalization Program was not there in the budget? What happened to the staff, what was the impact of that?

UNIDENTIFIED: So, Council Member, you're conflating, I think, two quite slightly different topics, so I'll just quickly clarify. So the Trail Formalization, as you noted, similar to the Tree Risk Management item, was an expansion of our existing, so we have staff that are doing Trail Formalization. This was a proposed expansion that was not able to move forward so that. What I believe you're referring to is a funding item that we've also referred to as the one-shot funding, which had been funded in

various ways over the last several years, some led by Council initiatives, other times by the Administration at the behest of the Council, but was not funded by either the Council nor the Administration in this most recent Fiscal Year. That's the Forest Management Framework work.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. Trying to keep them all straight. Got it, okay. But the bottom line is, how did all of these things impact the staffing in the Forestry Division overall? How did you all adapt to this?

UNIDENTIFIED: So there was a...

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: The staffing was intended to expand programming, expand trail maintenance programming. It just meant that we weren't able to do that expansion, hire or expand that programming.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: In addition, at the time that the financial plan came out for those sort of one-shot, we had about 27 people on staff, and we were able to absorb almost all of them in our grant-funded programs through this Fiscal Year.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it, okay. And I commend you all for doing so, too. I know that's something we had talked about.

Now, look, I think a lot of these issues when it comes to our tree canopy are the result of City Hall failing to fund the Forestry Division the way that it should. These numbers are unacceptably low. One thing I will note, though, and we'll hold a hearing on the tree canopy later on this year, too, but I do think, and I know I'm not the only one that thinks this, that the Parks Department really needs to evaluate the contractors that it's working with to manage our street trees. We had gone over before a contractor that was convicted on serious charges. I appreciate the steps the Parks Department has taken to address the issues with that contractor, but there's also another one that's come to our attention, too, which is Griffin's Landscaping. They pled guilty on October 26, 2024, to one count of conspiracy to commit bribery, one count for wire fraud, and Griffin's Landscaping, the owner of the company, was recently denied his motion to withdraw his guilty plea by the district court judge. Griffin Landscaping is currently bidding on a 20-million-

2 dollars-plus of work in the New York City Parks
3 Department, of which two projects have been awarded
4 and are awaiting registration by the New York City
5 Comptroller. Is that correct?

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, that is
7 correct, yep.

8 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And so I fail to
9 understand the Parks Department's approach to working
10 with these deeply problematic contractors that are
11 multiple times now tied up in serious federal
12 criminal charges. What is the decision-making process
13 here to continue going back and doing business with
14 these actors?

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council
16 Member, for the question, and as you said earlier,
17 planting trees equitably and across all the city is
18 really important to the Parks Department, and in
19 order for us to improve and invest in our urban
20 canopy as fairly and efficiently as possible, we
21 believe it's in the best interest of New Yorkers to
22 continue working with the contractor. They're under
23 an active monitoring agreement that's overseen by the
24 Department of Investigation, and so our parks
25 contracting determinations are made prior to each

award based on a thorough review of a vendor's business experience, and ability to meet the requirements of the project, and so we are doing our best to really enhance and invest in the urban tree canopy as fairly and efficiently as possible.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But are there a set of standards, whether it's ethical standards, criminal conduct, that especially goes to the business practices of these tree contractors that you all employ in evaluating whether to give them contracts or to deny them contracts?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That is where, you know, the active monitoring agreement overseen by the Department of Investigation, that's what we rely on.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I would encourage you all to take a look in particular. As I said before, we've still got more work to do with the other contractor, Dragonetti contractor, but I know you all took steps there as well. I would strongly encourage you all to review this situation with Griffin Landscaping as well, because the charges are serious, and they go towards the business practices of these companies that are then receiving business

2 contracts in large sums, 20-million-dollars-plus,
3 from the Parks Department in the City of New York.

4 What is the current staffing level for
5 wage enforcement investigators at the Parks
6 Department?

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That is a question
8 that we'd have to get back to you on.

9 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And is there any
10 plan to rehire or hire more staff for that unit?

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That is a question
12 I will have to get back to you on.

13 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. It would be
14 helpful, because, you know, there are, of course, a
15 number of unions and union labor that are paying
16 healthy, livable, prevailing wages, and it's
17 important to make sure that the contractors that
18 we're working with, too, are held to those standards,
19 that we're using more union labor for Parks
20 Department roles, and a key piece of that is to
21 ensure that wage levels are adequate so if you can
22 all look into it, too, I'd appreciate that.

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. I
24 mean, you know, making sure that we're following
25 enforcement, all rules, City rules and regulations,

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65

2 especially around wages, is an important priority of
3 ours and of the City, and something we take very
4 seriously so we're happy to provide further
5 information to you on it.

6 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Now I'll
7 turn it over to Council Member Marte for questions.

8 He's not here? Okay. We'll go to Council
9 Member Carr.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you, Chair.
11 Commissioner, always a pleasure to see you.

12 I want to begin by thanking you and
13 everybody in the Parks Operations teams in Staten
14 Island and Southwest Brooklyn for the wonderful job
15 they do each and every year. We love our parkies in
16 District 50.

17 I want to ask something I ask at almost
18 every budget hearing, which is about the tree and
19 sidewalk program. Very important for homeowners when
20 city trees uplift their sidewalks, and unfortunately
21 we never have the resources in order to really get
22 through that backlog of folks who are waiting for
23 their sidewalks to be repaired, so could you tell us
24 in the prelim budget what level of rating you expect
25 Parks to get through in terms of the backlog, and

2 then how much would be required to be budgeted in
3 order for you to get through the backlog period?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council
5 Member Carr, for the question, and we agree with you.
6 We know it's an important program, and we know that
7 it's important to homeowners. I'm going to toss it
8 over to Jennifer to answer in terms of your specific
9 questions around budget there.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Sure.
11 Thank you for your question, Council Member Carr, and
12 we have some answers because you do ask this every
13 time. Our program right now, we're committed to all
14 the service requests that we have within a sort of a
15 certain number at a certain point of time of 85 and
16 above so it's sort of, if we were to do everything in
17 Staten Island that was 75 and up, it would be close
18 to 10 million dollars, so there's an estimate. We do
19 still have some inspections that we have not done, so
20 that doesn't count sites that we haven't looked at
21 yet or rated so that's one example just for Staten
22 Island.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: I appreciate that,
24 and it feels like, you know, you gave a number in the
25 high 80s. I feel like in prior years, even without

Council enhancements, we were doing ratings better than that so has the program financing diminished, or is there simply just a larger number of cases?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: That's an excellent question. The program is not diminished. In fact, we have baseline funding of over 12 million dollars in capital funds and 1 million dollars in expense funds for those individual sites that aren't capitably eligible so we feel very good about the funding level. Of course, as any capital program, we're like sort of catching up from COVID and other slowdowns, and we did have some issues with vendors, and right now we have six, I think, active contracts, or seven active contracts, and we've done a thousand sites since these contracts have been active so we're on the upswing. We feel pretty good about the program, and particularly the funding for it.

COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: I appreciate that, and I guess I have a similar question with respect to tree stump removals. There was a time in the not-too-distant past, there was a large backlog. I think there's been strides made to improve that, but is there a backlog, and do you have sufficient funding to address stump removals as you are aware of them?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Great.

That's a great question. We haven't for a very long time had a good estimate of stump removals, and we've actually been taking this past year to work with a consultant to get a good number, and we don't think there's more than about 30,000 stumps, I know that sounds like a lot, on the streets, but remember we remove close to 10,000 trees a year, and any trees that are done by our in-house crews, they don't take the stump out because it's not the same sort of tree risk issue, but we've improved certain things, like our smaller tree removal contracts include stumps as well, and that's in addition to the generous funding that we've received from the Council each year, and the baseline funding that the City has dedicated to stump removals, in addition as the Commissioner said earlier, now that we're switching to this new neighborhood program, where we're not kind of sort of dropping in and putting a tree in where there are opportunities, we're going block by block, we'll be getting stumps through that capital program, which is in addition to our existing expense-funded stump removals.

COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: That's great. That's wonderful to hear.

My next question is about comfort stations. Some Colleagues have talked about the expense involved in capital programming that Parks does, in particular comfort stations. You guys recently installed what we call in Staten Island the Richmond Reliever, not the Portland Loo, and I'd just love to hear about the efficiencies you think that program will bring once you're able to batch more installations together, which I think is the point of the program.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. Thank you, Council Member Carr, and you know, you've jumped ahead on the naming for Staten Island, which we appreciate. I think that the Richmond Reliever or the Portland Loo is just an example of the many different aspects that we are looking at, the many different ways that we can innovate and bring down the costs and the timeline for bathroom construction in the city, and so in addition to the Richmond Reliever or the Portland Loo, you know, looking at modular, looking at trailers, looking at every different available option out there to make sure that we're

doing all we can to reduce both price and also timeframe. With (TIMER CHIME) the Portland Loo, there are five, there's going to be one in each borough, and they are intended as a pilot. We want to see how they function, you know, putting anything in a New York City park, they're going to experience a whole lot of different situations. We want to see, really, how they function, how the maintenance is, how they work, and so we'll get them out there, see the results of this pilot, and then see how, and if we want to move forward on it. But there's no doubt that it's, you know, a lower cost option and something that we can get out there quickly.

COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: That's great. Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Council Member Menin.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Thank you so much, Chair.

So just a couple of questions, Commissioner. You mentioned that in your testimony that there will be 5 million dollars in new baseline funding for aquatics and lifeguard staff, and I know the Chair asked you some questions about that, so I

just wanted to have a better understanding, because as you know, the Council passed and the Mayor signed my bill to mandate free swim lessons for all second graders.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: What is happening in terms of the implementation of that mandate?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. Well, so as you noted, Council Member, and thank you for the question, we were pleased to get the Swim Safety Expansion funding. You know, in terms of the bill, there needs to be funding to support training all second graders in Learn to Swim. So, with the Swim Safety Expansion funding, it allows us to expand our Swim for Life program. It's focused on swim instruction for second graders, and we're able to hire 91 new staff to support this expansion, and we're going to be doing this in coordination with DOE. They're a key factor here, and it allows us to expand our aquatics staff and our Swim for Life programming to DOE schools across the city.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: But how many children specifically is this going to cover? Is this truly a universal program?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It wouldn't be universal based on funding, but I can tell you that we're on track to serve over 5,000 Swim for Life participants in FY25, and we project we'll be able to serve an additional 4,200 Swim for Life participants in FY26 through this new Swim Safety Expansion for an anticipated total of 9,200 Swim for Life participants.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Again, I would just urge that the Administration try to do what the bill was focused on doing, which is, again, to provide the free swim lessons to every second grader. You know, a partnership that Council Member Krishnan and I launched, a really public-private partnership with Asphalt Green I think shows that you can think outside of the box, we don't need to use the City pools. We can use other pools. We mapped out, I think, close to 900 pools across the city that could be utilized, and it's one significant way that we can increase scalability of that program.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We agree, thank you, and we're partnering with Asphalt Green using our aquatics instructors for swim instruction in Brooklyn. We're just visiting the young students at

that program recently, so we agree it's a great partnership.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Okay, and just in my remaining time, I want to build upon some other questions that some Colleagues asked. What right now is the average price and timeline to construct a bathroom in a New York City park?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, I have that. Just bear with me. I have bathrooms, I know. Hold on just one sec for me. It's here, just bear with. Bathrooms. Let's see. Okay. The estimate for a public restroom reconstruction is 2.25 million for an in-house design and 3.25 million for a consultant design.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: So, in Ruppert Park in my District, the cost now is 4 million dollars. It's been over three years since we've seen really any progress. These costs are astronomical. You know, we've got to have some type of procurement reform to bring both the cost down as well as the timeline. So, I know you spoke a little bit about this, but what specifically can you commit to that is going to both bring the cost down and the timeline down?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So, as I said earlier, and in answering the earlier question, looking at innovative new designs, different opportunities for different types of bathrooms, prefab, trailers, the Portland Loo, those are all ways that we're looking to bring the cost down. And then also we've been very active in the capital process reform discussions and looking at every element of that procurement and construction timeline. We're also working with DDC and building out a group of bathrooms through design build that's intended to serve to bring down cost and timeline so many different ways that we're looking at doing that.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: And I know you mentioned to Council Member Carr a lot of these elements. What I would just say is I feel like we're at the same point we were in the budget hearing last year where we had the exact same types of conversation and yet we're not seeing a lot of progress on bringing the cost and the timeline down, and I think it's imperative to do so.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you. We agree and we're working hard on it.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much.

I just want to echo that point that Council Member Menin mentioned about finding ways to be as creative as possible to expand swim lessons, whether it's with and there are a number of organizations that are ready to do that work, whether it's the YMCA, Asphalt Green, and many others too, AND look forward to more conversations around that as well as I know we share that same goal. Council Member Avilés.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: Thank you so much, Chair. Good afternoon.

So much talk about bathrooms.

Commissioner, with all due respect, I still don't understand why it would cost the City 2.25 and it would cost an additional million dollars for a consultant for the same square footage of bathroom.

Like that price discrepancy is quite mind-blowing. I have, I guess in the notion of I am very blessed to have two public pools in my district along with a good number of green space, which receives very... does not have remotely adequate amount of staffing to actually manage the intensity and usage of those spaces. In Sunset Park in particular,

this is a park that's 24 acres and it has two bathroom stalls. Does this ratio 24 acres of park space and two bathroom stalls, does that concern the Parks Department at all?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council Member, for the question. And it absolutely does. As part of what I talked about in my testimony, as part of our Vital Parks Explorer tool, we've mapped all the bathrooms that we have in our inventory, and we were pleased over 70 percent of New Yorkers have a public bathroom within a 10-minute walk of their house. We know that that 30 percent is really important and that's why we've mapped them and that's why we're really focused on targeting our investments to where they're needed the most. The Parks Department maintains over 600 public restrooms in New York City and we are the largest provider of public restrooms in New York City. We have more public restrooms than there are Starbucks across the state. We think a lot about bathrooms. We're very, very focused on them. There's no doubt. And that's why I said in my testimony with our Better Bathrooms Initiative that we announced 150 million dollars in new investment in bathrooms. 46 new ones we're

building, 36 that we're renovating. So, I hear you, two stalls is not enough, but it's been an incredible focus of the agency.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: And I guess I'll just underscore, I'll follow up with you because on the Red Hook side we have 58 acres of park space and two bathroom stalls so I've been bemoaning bathrooms and the lack of bathrooms with all this park space that brings hundreds of kids and wonderful people and nowhere to pee. Lots of water, lots of stuff.

Something that continues to come up in our District is particularly around leagues and permits. I've recently been informed that there have been a cutting of permits, particularly for night baseball. I have a league that's been playing for the 80s, pays all these fees for their permits and were recently told that they were getting cut an hour and a half. An hour and 50 minutes for this league means many games and could potentially gut their opportunity to play in these fields. We were told it was efficiency. These are automatic lights. Can you explain this situation to me?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I would have to look into the specific league that you're

referencing. We did go through a process, a rule change with our permits. With that rule change, what we looked to do was preference non-profit and youth organizations in our permitting. There were definitely changes that went into effect that have had ramifications for some. I don't know the specific, but if you tell us the specific league, we're absolutely happy to look into it.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: The permit was cut from 8 to 11:50, which they had been for decades, from 8 to 10. An hour and 50 minutes for them is significant because they play every minute they can get. Given that they've been doing this for decades, the math doesn't work with how much they're actually paying for the permits and how they can sustain a season with so much cut of play time. I'd like to follow up with you, but this is existential for them, and the efficiency argument isn't one that seems to have been justified in a way that we could be like, okay, that's reasonable because somebody's not standing outside with the (TIMER CHIME) waiting to flip on the switch.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We're happy to take a look at it, absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVILÉS: I guess there's so many questions. I thank you, Park Staff. I absolutely agree 100 percent that we need to fully fund the care and just equity of our park staff. 700 cuts is unacceptable and we see it every day with the rodents, with the trash, and I know you're trying your best and we will continue to push for significant funding for our green spaces. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council Member. Before going to our next Colleague, just wanted to focus on another area. We've talked about forestry for a bit. Our Parks Enforcement Patrol, our PEP officers. They play a crucial role in our park system, keeping them safe on their duty, but how many PEP officers do we have for all of New York City?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council Member, for the question. The budgeted tax levy headcount for the PEP division is 369 with an active headcount of 346.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So roughly about 350 PEP officers, again, for all of New York City. That's about 70 PEP officers per borough. Can you tell me what is the schedule of the PEP officers? How are 70 PEP officers throughout an entire borough of

Queens, let's say, how do they get around to all their parks? What is their schedule? Are there parks that are not getting any PEP officers? How does the Parks Department work with 70 PEP officers for far more park space than the number of staff they have?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Just bear with me one second. Where were you? So, we work hard, Council Member, to deploy our PEP officers in a manner that's equitable across the five boroughs. In terms of schedule, deployment hours really vary based on enforcement needs, but PEP officers generally work hours ranging from 7 a.m. to midnight throughout the city. There are instances where officers may start earlier based on the needs of the boroughs, but we are looking to provide PEP coverage in the areas where they're needed most. Some of our PEP officers are mobile, so we provide coverage through mobile patrols, fixed-post patrols. Patrol methods also include by foot, by bicycle. We have mounted horses. We have vehicles. So there's a wide range of different ways that we cover our park system.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: The math isn't mathing, right? If there's 70 PEP officers per borough, I'm having a hard time seeing how they are

able to cover all the different parks in that borough. Are there parks that don't have PEP officers, or do the schedules have to be truncated and changed so they can move around to all the parks? How does that work?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Our PEP officers are deployed, as I said, strategically, equitably, as much as we can across the city. They're generally focused on parks with high usage or where there are pressing quality-of-life concerns, and we also are very reliant on partnership with PD, so we work very closely together with PD to cover areas and to work in partnership, but it's really, we're looking to spread them as best we can to high-need areas.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So, 40 forestry staff per borough in a time when we're seeing so many wildfires. 70 PEP officers per borough in this moment. Isn't it your understanding, Commissioner, that Mayor Adams' priority is public safety in our city?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And keeping New Yorkers safe when they're in their parks, safe from

2 wildfires? Wouldn't you agree those are priorities of
3 the Mayor?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Those are
5 priorities of the Mayor. They're priorities of our
6 agency as well.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I cannot understand
8 how, with so few resources, this Administration is
9 able to keep its parks and our city safe, able to
10 keep all of us as New Yorkers safe from climate
11 change. It's shocking to look at the disparity
12 between the needs of the Parks Department on each of
13 these issues and the staffing you have in place.

14 Turn it over to Council Member Restler
15 for questions.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Wonderful.
17 Commissioner Donoghue, great to see you, and thank
18 you, Chair Krishnan.

19 I'll just say for a moment, at a time
20 when there is such turmoil and tumult across the
21 building, it's really important that we have capable,
22 competent, steady leaders in our agencies, and I
23 appreciate your continued service to our city.

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you.
25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: My mother told me
3 to always lead with a compliment.

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Well done.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Vickie says my
6 mother's right. So, always. I'll give you two more
7 compliments. Recently promoted Community Board 1
8 Administrator for Parks, Mary Salig Husain, is just
9 terrific. You all know it, just a tremendous partner
10 for our office and for everybody in Williamsburg and
11 Greenpoint. Really lucky to have her. And really
12 grateful to her and your whole team for the
13 partnership on the mini-forest that we're doing in
14 Williamsburg. We're really excited about the Miyawaki
15 mini-forest that we're hoping to get planted later
16 this spring. So, thank you for everyone who's worked
17 with us on that. I think it's a great model that
18 hopefully we'll replicate in Council Districts across
19 the city. We're really thrilled to help fund it.

20 And I do want to echo Council Member
21 Avilés' concerns on the permitting issues. We have
22 the same problem in McCarran. People are pissed. We
23 would love to see that issue fixed.

24 There are two or three issues, depending
25 on time, that I would like to get through. First is

around second shifts. We know that the budget proposed an increase in about 480 Parks workers, including 230 second shift workers, but that still leaves the Parks' part-time headcount down by nearly 40 percent since the time you all took office. 38 percent. That's a massive reduction. I appreciate in your testimony that you highlighted that 200 separate locations, including 121 of our busiest parks, are going to be getting a second shift, but think about that. That's two parks per Council District. How many parks do we have in each of our Council Districts that really need a second shift? So, McCarran gets one, but not McGorrick. So, Cannon Plaza gets it, but not the Promenade. It's not enough. How many additional workers do you need to be able to provide the necessary second shifts so that our parks conditions improve? The 3-1-1 complaints were way up this summer. The number of parks in acceptable conditions were down this summer, down to 85 percent. It's not surprising. You don't have the person power. Somebody in Brooklyn Parks told me they haven't had this few staff in 40 years. So, what's the headcount that we need, the person power we need, to actually

be able to achieve second shift staffing at the level that we should expect?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council Member, for both the compliments and the questions. So, we are quite pleased with the expansion of second shift. We know it makes a difference. We know it is important. What we try and do is target that second shift to those areas that we know are heavy barbecuing areas, the busiest areas in our parks. And so, that's why the over 400 positions that will be deployed to second shift are very helpful and important for us. As I've said, as a Commissioner, I always welcome more resources. We know second shift works and is important, both for the coverage and the cleaning, but just to have the staff in the park into the evening. I can't give you an exact number.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Would you be willing to share a proposal with Chair Krishnan and OMB... (CROSS-TALK)

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Further expansion of second shift?

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Yes.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely, we can do that.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: We would welcome
3 that. That would be very helpful.

4 I'd now like to just shift to tree
5 pruning. I was at Community Board 1 last week. A lot
6 of talk about Community Board 1 today. I was at
7 Community Board 1 last week, and I was getting
8 harangued by a constituent in South Williamsburg
9 about a number of trees on their block that they want
10 to see pruning. I explained that the Parks Department
11 recently rolled out a new approach to pruning that
12 you all have said is going to make things more
13 efficient and improve things operationally for you
14 all, but I said unfortunately each area in New York
15 City is only going to receive tree pruning once every
16 nine years now.

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: The new initiative
18 we rolled out, Council Member, sorry to interrupt, is
19 around tree planting, not pruning. Our pruning cycle
20 has stayed the same. It's every seven years... (CROSS-
21 TALK)

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: (INAUDIBLE)
23 request for planting that it's every nine years.
24 That's right? So, you've broken community districts
25 down into three chunks and once every nine years

2 you'll be coming to fill gaps where you identify a
3 need for tree planting?

4 UNIDENTIFIED: Sorry, no. During the nine
5 years, the entirety of that given community board...
6 (CROSS-TALK)

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I don't know what
8 the word is. It's not a quadrant.

9 UNIDENTIFIED: Sort of waves.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: How do you
11 describe it? A third of a community board? What's a
12 third of a community board? Whatever. In that third
13 of the community board, you'll come once every nine
14 years to plant a tree. So, if you came last year,
15 it's going to be at the end of the decade nine years
16 from now that you're coming to plant a tree. That's a
17 question.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Thank you
19 again. We estimate that based on our tree planting
20 opportunities now, it will take about nine years to
21 fill all of them. When we're done, maybe it won't
22 take that long to get the next round. We don't know.
23 So, we're looking today, based on what we know about
24 opportunities, that it will take us about nine years
25 to fill every possible space in the entire city.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But think about it. None of us are going to be here in nine years. Right? I mean, even if we're all lucky enough to stick around for another term, we're gone in four years, so what am I supposed to do to look my constituents in Northern Greenpoint or South Williamsburg or wherever that area is in the eye and tell them, I'm sorry, the Parks Department isn't going to come by to plant a tree for nine years? I don't understand how that's a logical policy. That's leaving communities out in the cold for a very long time, certainly longer than any of us are going to be around.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: Thank you for the question. I understand. It's something we really try to work through when we design this program, and that's one reason we split things up into sort of waves of three, like you were saying. So every community board, we go by community boards, not Council Districts, because they're more stable...

(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: We'll stick with Williamsburg and Greenpoint. South Williamsburg, Northside Greenpoint. For the folks in Greenpoint,

they don't care that you went to plant trees in South Williamsburg last year and that you're not going to be in Greenpoint for nine years. It's three miles away. It's a different neighborhood. It's a different community. It doesn't help. So to me, this is a plan that makes sense on paper and is a good operational plan. But to tell my community members, or for you to come out and try and tell my community members that you're going to be there in nine years, they're going to scream at you, right, and they're going to be really pissed. They want to see if there's a spot on their block where they're looking for a tree, telling them that it's a nine-year wait is like, it's never going to happen, right? So I just, I really, I made this clear to your staff. I'm raising it in a hearing after I've already said it to you all privately. I don't think this policy makes any sense. I really think you should revisit it. I think it's something that works on paper and doesn't work in practice and doesn't work in our communities so I really hope that you'll rethink it and make exceptions and make different approaches so that we don't have to tell our constituents that there's a nine-year wait until the Parks Department's coming to plant a tree.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: I

appreciate that. Change is very complicated and difficult. We really believe that this is more equity driven, this is more efficient, and also it's more predictable. Today, when you make a service request, we can't really tell you when we're going to inspect it. It's at least a year, if not more or longer. We can't tell you when that tree is going to come, and we don't feel comfortable with that approach where we're really just serving communities who know how to request trees and yet still cannot provide sort of predictable responses to even those people who are asking. So, when we have a choice of serving some over serving everybody, we're choosing an equitable approach and a predictable and efficient approach. We think that's an excellent use of City resources.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I think to say that a predictable approach is coming by essentially once a decade, right? Once, you know, you have a Mayor or a Council Member, that's eight years, over the course of our whole eight years in office, we're going to have to tell constituents that the Parks Department's never coming by to plant trees during that period, right? It just is, to me, doesn't, I

understand that you don't have enough resources. We should fix that. We should put more resources into planting trees. I've certainly put a lot of resources into planting trees in District 33, and I know some of my Colleagues have as well, but to try and tell us that it's a once a decade opportunity to get a tree planted on your block, I can't look my constituent in the eye and have that conversation without being, without being screamed at, right? And so I don't think that the solution you've come up with actually works. We're happy to continue to give feedback and give input on how to do something more equitably, more fairly, but this, to me, is a bad policy. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council Member Restler. One follow-up question. I do understand the need and importance of efficiency, too, as a goal. Is it because the way it's divided up that it, you know, the areas are divided up into thirds, that it creates a nine-year cycle? Like, is there any way to do, even with the current framework, to reconfigure how it's divided up to reduce the amount of time? Have you all considered that, or how do you look at that?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: You know, I think when we talk about efficiency, it goes back to, you know, when you think about if you're, if we're responding to individual street tree requests, we're trying to deal with costs coming down, so we're sending contractors, two in Brooklyn, two in Queens, it's not the most efficient, and it impacts price. So, remember, we're trying to address concerns that have been raised here and across the city about, how do we bring price down per tree planting? So it makes sense if a contractor can do a whole block, right, or a series of blocks, or a whole community board district in one planting, and we talked about this, Council Member, you saw with our block pruning, you saw how effective that was, and your neighborhood all of a sudden, and that's standard seven-year pruning cycles nationwide, that's a standard. And so that's what we're looking to replicate here, is to have an impact that is efficient, that's equitable, and that will help us to drive costs down.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: And I'll just note, Council Member, that I understand you're not necessarily questioning the approach but the pace of it, and we really have learned over time that

there's a limit that the market can handle in terms of growing trees and contracting and all of that, and so we are trying to be really realistic in terms of what we understand the capacity of the market is. And we may learn, as we do this, that because it's more efficient, we'll attract different folks that will be able to grow the trees we need, and we ask for you to understand, and maybe we'll learn, and maybe the pace will be picked up, but we looked at what we think is possible and are trying to make really sort of appropriate, set appropriate expectations.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Right, right. And like I said, I understand the goals. I was looking specifically about the time and the pace itself, but I appreciate the further conversation with all of us on it too. Council Member Narcisse.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Good afternoon, and thank you, Sue, for being here. I have to give a shout out for my new Director for Marine Park, Eric Peterson, and of course, Marty. I love parks, so.

Given the increase of fires in parks, right, I started hearing it, what specific actions Parks are taking to ensure better fire prevention?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the question, and obviously that was, you know, it was so alarming for us, Council Member, what we saw comes out of, you know, the driest October on record in history. We have, through our natural resources group, spent years focused on how we can do the best in terms of maintaining our urban forests, reducing phragmites, reducing invasive species and mugwort, things that are more likely to choke and damage forests, so it's really a continuation of our ongoing work. We are also part of a task force with FDNY and our sister agencies. Given what we all experienced with the wildfires last fall, working together, seeing how we can all make sure that our response, our interaction is the most efficient at dealing with what we know will be ongoing situations because of climate change.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you, and additional, we need the staff to actually do those actions.

How much do dog parks cost roughly, the dog parks?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: How much does a dog park?

2 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Roughly.

3 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That, I would need
4 to get back to you. It really varies on where it is,
5 what size it is.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: The smallest one
7 that we can, let's start with the smallest one.

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I don't know that
9 I have an average price.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Because I have
11 two, I have Marine Park, Garrison Beach, and of
12 course Canarsie asked me for dog parks.

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm happy to get
14 back to you and let you know, but I don't know
15 offhand what the average price is.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: All right. So,
17 you're going to get back to me with the money because
18 I have three different places that asked me.

19 UNIDENTIFIED: If I can, I'll just add
20 that it is a substantial construction project like
21 any other capital project, like a full park
22 playground renovation, but we've seen prices that
23 range from 500,000 dollars on the lower end to, in
24 some cases if it's large enough and if there are
25 connections in terms of water connections or what

have you, we've seen prices certainly higher than that depending on the footprint and the site conditions as the Commissioner noted, but on the lower end we've seen projects advance for around 500,000 dollars.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: But we'll get back to you with specifics.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay. Swimming pool. I mean, I don't have any. I have that little... I need a microscope to see the one that we have in the (INAUDIBLE) area so we need our kids to swim, right? The Speaker has been a very huge advocate, especially when it comes to Black and Brown communities, right? So now, they cannot swim in a bucket. We need to have an actual swimming pool. I don't have any, especially in my District, Canarsie and Flatlands area. That's been a problem. Any plan to actually address that equity, making sure that we have a swimming pool, especially in those areas?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely, Council Member, and as I said in my testimony, we're so pleased with the new pools that we are able to add to the system with Shirley Chisholm and Roy Wilkins and Walter Gladwin. We have gone through an effort to

identify where there are swim deserts, so we're very focused on looking to add investment, target investments where they're needed, and we have also been very active not only in Mayoral funding for pools, but taking advantage of grant money, New York State Swims money, to bring as much money as possible into the system, so absolutely we're focused on where we can expand. It's an expensive proposition, but we absolutely want to add more pools.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Please expand over there by those areas that I know of, like Canarsie, Flatlands, Sheepshead Bay area.

Gun violence is a big problem for me, especially in the Canarsie and Flatlands area. We know gun violence does not occur in silos. It's a combination of different issues, and one of the issues, the young folks don't have no place to go. So, myself, I've personally been going around with those young folks and asked them, what do they want from me? They want to have a community center. Where I'm looking at, even the Mayor agree, everyone agree, that flat area by 80s is a problem, and they're all hanging around doing nothing, absolutely nothing. So now, can we have an assessment done to help me out?

Because it's a Park land that we have I-68 between 82nd and 81st so no one play handball anymore, so can we actually look into that space, work with me to bring something that those young folks that causing problem can have a place to go? I need your help on that. (TIMER CHIME)

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, and we're happy to look at it with you, and certainly understand, and that's why we're so focused on, we participated actively in the Mayor's Gun Violence Prevention Task Force. We know that by bringing programs and activities, it makes a difference for young people. We need them to have things to do, so happy to look at a certain space with you.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: All right. So, I'm going to have your help on that one.

The question I have now in front of me, the last round of PEGs included the elimination of the Community Gardens Program, which was a program targeted at high-risk youth as well as the NYC SPARKS program, which provided girls with engagement in STEAM, science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics. These programs were never even able to begin before being cut as part of the PEGs program,

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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2 but hopefully we will see these programs restored and
3 brought back to life. Have there been discussion with
4 OMB or the Mayor regarding the restoration of this
5 program, and how much would it cost to restore these
6 programs? How much additional headcount would be
7 needed? What can the Council do to help your agency?

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, thank you,
9 Council Member, for the question. As the budget
10 process moves forward, we're in continuous
11 conversations with OMB and the Mayor's Office
12 regarding agency needs, and we definitely are
13 committed and remain committed to delivering on our
14 broader mission. In terms of, you're right, the PEGs
15 savings were enacted, and we had not hired or spent
16 for these programs when they were eliminated. In
17 terms of the New York City SPARKS Program, to
18 restore, it would cost, it's six positions and
19 350,000 dollars. And in terms of the Community
20 Gardens Programs, it's two positions and 150,000
21 dollars.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you.
23 You've been the best. You know I love Parks so much.
24 And, Chair, one more question.

25 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER GREENFELD: The leash, because the dogs, do you have signage, actually, to let people know what is the rule and regulation of the park? People complain, the dogs are running wild.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely. We have so much signage, and our Deputy Commissioner Mark Focht oversees our sign shop, and we have spent so much time on signage in our parks and making sure that it's clear where their dogs can and can't be off leash. It's on our rule sign. We try and make it really clear. There's extensive signage out there, yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Okay. The last one. Also, can we get trash bins along the marshland that we have by Marine Park? Because it's such a beautiful area, but there is no container, no trash can there to hold it.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I know you visited with me at Marine Park, and over there, so you know how beautiful it is. You are always welcome, but we need swimming pools too, so let's think about that. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council
3 Member Narcisse. I have to come visit with you too
4 and see your park. That's right.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yes, you do.
6 Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Also, just before I
8 turn it over to my next Colleague, we just wanted to
9 I forgot to mention before, but I do appreciate the
10 expansion, the Second Shift Program, the 100
11 hotspots. I think that was something that we had
12 discussed last budget too. It was very important to
13 the Council so I look forward, and I think Council
14 Member Restler raised this point too, but I look
15 forward to continued conversation about ways that we
16 can expand that program even beyond the 100 hotspots
17 that we have.

18 And I'll turn it over to Council Member
19 Paladino.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Good afternoon.
21 Am I on? I'm on. Okay, good. Good afternoon. Thank
22 you very, very much. I want to say, of course, to you
23 guys, I know how hard you work, and we're circling
24 back now, like people have said repeatedly throughout
25 this meeting, the frustration, the wait, the

understaffing, the budget that we keep giving you for capital projects, not that we're going to see it come to fruition, sadly. Those are the realities of what we are up against right now. And I've discussed many times, and since this is a budget hearing, it seems like this might be the best time to bring it up.

Again, I really would love to see if Parks could break this down into 51 different Districts, whereas the money that's allotted is allotted specifically for a borough in a very realistic manner, whereas we could then fund projects that we can see a beginning, a middle, and an end, because at this rate we are giving you, you know, in my office alone, close to, here's 11, here's 8, that's 19, and another close to a million for miscellaneous, so that's an awful lot of money to come out of one Council Member's office as well as cooperation from the Speaker and so on, but the frustration that you are going through is certainly one that I could feel for you, because there's nothing worse than telling a constituent, and you know, your auto emails hurt when a constituent hears seven to nine years. You know, seven to nine years is a ridiculously long time. And the City in its whole overall topographical hasn't really changed

all that much. We've still had these parks, because a great many of these parks are you know, 100 years old, 50 years old, 80 years old. These are realities. And our street line, you know, our tree-lined streets have become something of the past to make way for bicycles and bike lanes and all this other unrealistic stuff so the dream of tree-lined streets are kind of going to the wayside.

I do want to say that I have several things which I'm going to talk to you about offline. You know, not today. But I do want you to put some focus on Flushing Airport, if you could. It's coming to my District. And EDC is taking bids, and this is an extremely serious situation. It is a wetlands. I'm extremely disturbed by what they want to do, EDC, to make way for 80 acres of what once was a functioning small airport, and they want to use 27 acres of that to build on. Now we did the 26th Avenue breakthrough to connect the two roads. EDC had to go down 120 feet to get to stable so they could build this road. It's beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. We know how beautiful APEC is. So, what I want to try to do is work with Parks. I don't know what your limits are concerning this particular project. But if you would

talk to me about it, or we could get together and discuss this because needless to say, this is in the billions of dollars. I was in touch with APEC, I very much want to work together because if this should happen, they've tried three times to make this work. It's a flooded area. It's not feasible for building. So, I'd like to see what your intake is, what you feel about it, and I'd like to work together with Parks so that we could make this something that could be absolutely stunning. And like I said, we're not in the millions with an M. We're in the billions with a B. So, I'll talk to you about this other stuff offline. It got late. I've got to go back to Queens. But thank you all very, very much. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council Member. We appreciate the support. And we do work closely with EDC on a number of different projects so we can absolutely talk about that.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Just wanted it on your radar. The bids are due... what's today, the 20th?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Bids are due today is the final. We'll talk, okay? Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council Member.

Before we move into the second round, I just wanted to highlight another area of our Urban Park Rangers, right? We know that our park rangers, they provide an essential service in our city's parks, making sure New Yorkers of all ages understand and expand their knowledge about the history of parks, the many animals and plants that reside within them. They were just at my children's school recently, too. But the funding for many of their positions isn't actually baselined, and so every year, they have to live with the uncertainty that their jobs may not be funded or reinstated. I know that. I've spoken with many of them. I've heard their concerns about it. And they've really impacted me about the, again, the disparity between how important their roles are in our parks, yet how every year they are afraid and deeply concerned about losing their jobs, and so obviously this is no way to be funding such essential workers in our park system. It's no way, frankly, for us to be budgeting at all with these temporary positions. We call them one-shots,

budget-speak, but jobs shouldn't be every year subject to renewal, especially jobs like these where they are serving our parks every day in perpetuity. And so I just wanted to know what is the current headcount for Urban Park Rangers? How many are actually permanent or baseline funded, and how many are temporary or one-shot funded?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely, Council Member. So, of the current budgeted headcount of 89 total ranger positions, 39 are baseline and 50 are one-shot funded.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: 39 are baseline, 50 are one-shot funded. So that's about 80, 89 park rangers total, right? For the whole city?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah, almost 90 total rangers, yep.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it. So that's about 18 per borough. I mean, do you feel like that is an adequate number of park rangers for an entire borough, 18 park rangers?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As you spoke to, Council Member, you're right. They do provide such an important service in terms of education and outreach and helping us enforce park rules. Park rangers are

such a visible presence across the city. They play a really important role. We try and spread them out as equitably as we can and have them have as much exposure to kids and students and free programming as possible.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: It's just shocking to me again because I think, and with the breakdown you provided, that means most of the Urban Park Rangers are funded by the Council's temporary one-shot funding. So, of 89, 50 of them are coming from us every year putting that money into the Council, and that to me is just shocking knowing the role that they play, knowing that every year, and I know these workers I mentioned and I hear from them, but that most of their core of rangers is funded by the Council's temporary line because City Hall has not devoted the attention or the resources to actually fund their positions and support these workers. I know everyone in the Council, we are so grateful for the work that they do, but it's truly outrageous that that is the case. And again, our Urban Park Rangers, if we want to talk about public safety, play such a crucial role, keeping our parks safe in their own

2 way, keeping our natural habitats and our wildlife
3 safe. Really, it blows my mind.

4 I want to turn over now for a second
5 round of questions to Council Member Brewer and then
6 Narcisse.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I do want to thank
8 Tricia Shimamura and certainly Steve Simon from
9 Manhattan. I forgot to do that.

10 But also, on this tree issue, what would
11 be the price that could cut the timeframe in half? In
12 other words, it's the staff that the Chair talked
13 about, plus the cost of 3,110 dollars for each tree.
14 What would be the amount to cut the time in half? So
15 in other words... (CROSS-TALK)

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So it isn't as
17 long of a time period?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Four years, every
19 four years to get the entire city.

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I don't know that
21 we have that analysis right now, but we can certainly
22 look at it, Council Member. I do just want to note
23 that we are planting a record number of street trees,
24 18,000, as I said in my testimony, in a year. There
25 are so many factors with how many we can get in the

ground. It's number of contractors, it's the availability of the trees, all of that, so we're always looking to spread our street tree planting as equitably as possible in order to reduce that. I don't have the exact number of what the dollar value would be to reduce that timeframe, but it's something we can take a look at it.

UNIDENTIFIED: It's not really a funding issue per se. There are a lot of other considerations.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It's making people so upset, this notion of nine, ten years. It's getting people... I hope that the constituents are not listening. Street trees are like friends, and they're going to be so upset. I'm just wondering if we could get a number. I can't believe that it's not possible to speed up the process. Money helps. Obviously, it's not the end of the world. It doesn't help completely, but staffing and money would help, I would assume.

UNIDENTIFIED: We'll be happy to look into that further.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Give us a number for cutting the process time-wise in half.

UNIDENTIFIED: Absolutely. We'll take a look at that. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: All right. I'm coming back again. You know I love parks, right?

With increasing awareness of the needs of children with autism and other sensory sensitivities, how is the Parks Department ensuring that new playground designs incorporate sensory friendly elements? Are we making it a priority to create playgrounds that are not only inclusive, but also provide a safe and engaging environment for children with different abilities, including those with sensory processing challenges?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely, Council Member, and thank you for the question. Our Capital Division has done an incredible job ensuring not only ADA accessibility, but really being thoughtful about all kinds of different disabled children. We have incorporated in our designs as part of our renovations extensive sensory elements so that kids with autism, kids across the spectrum will feel comfortable. All of our new playground designs, if you see them, incorporate and are thoughtful about

accessibility, about how we can make them as welcoming, and as you said, not only safe for kids, but also as welcoming for differently abled children as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yes, because you know, as being a nurse hearing the parents ask me all that, because they say, how could we bring our children to the park and our children have autism, they're not responding the same way as other children. While we own that playground, thank you for the Oval in Northern Park. It's completed. Thank you, God. But now the playground. Am I going to have the sensory things addressing the children that have real challenges needs in there, and then when?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I can get back to you on the when, because I don't have that specifically, but as you know, we work so hard. The first thing that we do in any capital project is get input from the community, and so we're always going to be responding to, if people say that their primary objective, their primary thing that they want is to have play equipment for differently abled children, that's what we're going to do. We're always looking to be responsive to the needs of the community.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yeah. Because the parents are killing me, because the park, they've been looking at it, and it's been years sitting there, and now we have the Oval, they want for me to give them the date when, when, Council Member, we're going to have that playground back.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely. Understandable. Yes, we can get back to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you so much. Appreciate it. Thank you, Chair, again, for my second round. Appreciate you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Absolutely. Thank you both for your questions.

All right. We've gone through a number of topics, and there was a lot of ground that we covered. Thank you all so much. Thank you, Commissioner, for your leadership, for your testimony. Look forward to our continued work together to care for our parks and to ensure that we get the budget and resources that we need. Do you want to say any closing words, Commissioner?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No. Just thank you. We so appreciate the support of the Council and the advocacy for our parks and open spaces.

2 CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Absolutely. All
3 right.

4 We are now going to turn it over for our
5 public testimony. We appreciate your patience getting
6 through all the different topics and questions we
7 had. I'm going to read a brief statement at the
8 beginning.

9 I now open the hearing for public
10 testimony. I remind members of the public that this
11 is a formal government proceeding and that decorum
12 shall be observed at all times. As such, members of
13 the public shall remain silent at all times.

14 The witness table is reserved for people
15 who wish to testify. No video recording or
16 photography is allowed from the witness table.
17 Further, members of the public may not present audio
18 or video recordings as testimony but may submit
19 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-
20 Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

21 If you wish to speak at today's hearing,
22 please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-
23 at-Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized,
24 you will have two minutes to speak on today's hearing
25 topic, which is the Parks Budget for Fiscal Year

2026, and I just ask members of the public to observe that time limit as we do have a number of people to get to as far as testimony.

If you have a written statement or additional written testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

And we'll now call up the first panel. We may need one more chair, Sergeant, for the table. We're going to call five at a time. Will Hiron, Max Barton, Isaac Kirk Davidoff (phonetic), Dilcy Benn, and Joseph Puleo. Please come on up.

We can start from my left to right. And because it's a long hearing, I'm going to stand, but I'm listening just the same. So go ahead.

MAX BARTON: Hi. My name is Max Barton. I'm a Union Representative from Laborers Local 1010, pavers and road builders. Union representation gives a worker a voice, and it's a powerful thing to have a voice. Members of the City Council, Chair Krishnan,

thank you for giving me the opportunity to have a voice today.

My union is proud to advocate alongside Playfair Coalition for the full restoration of New York City Parks alongside the Fiscal Year '26 budget, and I'm excited to use the Vital Parks tool in testimony for the first time today. A tool used to empower New Yorkers with data, which then they use to empower their elected officials to make budget decisions. Well over 75 percent of our community board's parks fall below the Vital Parks high condition scores, as once clean, safe, and green and resilient parks have been replaced by budget cuts that we've been talking about today. And how do we solve this problem? We've been talking about it at Playfair, restore our budget, hire back our workers. I would also like to use my opportunity to raise concerns about the use of the budget that we both currently have and will going forward. I'm going to talk about the felony parks contractors, not Dragonetti that we usually talk about. Our union's been raising concerns about Dragonetti for years, Nicholas and Vito who pled guilty 2022 to insurance fraud and offering a false instrument for filing a

second degree. I'm going to talk about Griffins Landscaping and Glenn Griffin today in 2025. March 13, 2025, one week ago, last Thursday, Glenn Griffin motion to withdraw guilty plea is denied. He's sentencing for one count conspiracy to commit bribery and one count wire fraud will take place on April 22nd, in 33 days. Glenn Griffin is set to receive up to 10 years in federal prison and over 20 million dollars in capital projects. Nine years to plant your tree. Will he be in prison when he does that for you? This is real and relatable. Is it solvable? Proper contractor vetting and public oversight in the City's procurement process will ensure accountability and eliminate waste and inefficiency. Procurement should be better. Contractors awaiting federal sentencing and receiving awards is not an efficient use of resources. With greater transparency, oversight, and accountability, you better believe this issue can be solved. Ten seconds. Thank you for your time and consideration to improve our Parks budget to create a budget that all New Yorkers can feel proud of.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much for your testimony. Dilcy.

DILCY BENN: Good afternoon, Chair

Krishnan and fellow Members of the City Council and Parks and Recreation Committee. My name is Dilcy Benn. I'm the President of Local 1505, representing close to more than 1,000 city park workers, also known as CPWs, as well as known seasonal workers who primarily work in New York City Parks and Recreation Department in all five boroughs performing cleanup and conducting maintenance in all city parks. We are happy to see that they may include a second shift expansion in this Preliminary Budget, which includes an additional 4.6 million for the Fiscal Year '25 and 12.6 million in Fiscal Year '26 and outyears. This funding increase will add 230 additional second shift workers, bringing the total of second shift workers to 470. These new workers will cover an additional 100 hot spots in city parks. As you're aware, these are much needed positions, especially in the summer when there's a lot of activity in the parks, such as families celebrating live events, concerts in parks. The parks need to be kept clean so thousands of New Yorkers, as well as visitors, can enjoy these beautiful open spaces. These positions are a pipeline to employment and helping New Yorkers get job skills

to get back on their feet. I heard that the other day a single mother living in New York City housing went from being a park worker to becoming a CPW. That's only one of the many stories that you haven't been yet told. I am glad to hear that the Administration had fully heard us and included the much-needed funding into the budget for second shift. But there's more work to be done. I'm here today to support my fellow union brothers and sisters who work in other Park titles that need restoration and baselining of funds. Some of these positions include baselining 4.1 million for 50 Urban Park Ranger positions to manage (TIMER CHIME) wildlife and ensure engaging additional experience. I will take any questions if you have anything you need to ask. I want to say thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: First, I want to say thank you so much for your testimony, for your work, for your membership's work too. One question I have is, as a union leader as well, representing so many different Parks workers in our system, when we don't, it's my view and I think a lot of my Colleagues would agree that investing in our Parks budget, as I've said, is investing in our workers, and the cuts that you all face directly impacts

workers on the front lines. Can you describe what you hear from also your co-workers too about their concerns about when the parks budget gets cut? What is the impact? What does that have on the workforce?

DILCY BENN: Well, I've been in parks 30.2 years. And I've got to give a lot of my members credit because we don't get paid a lot of money to do what we do, but we do it every day and we do it with a lack of equipment, a lack of... I have 12 homeless people. We have homeless people that work for the City of New York. It's a lot of things that... and I'm quite sure everybody know how cold it was this winter. There's no part of Parks that's inside. We work outside. This has been a brutal winter for us where we had a short shortage of equipment and, like I said to you, to be homeless at that time and have people that don't have food to eat, it's insane, but they do it every day. This is what they come back to. But I have a lot of seasonals that come back every year that have to leave, and these jobs can help them have some kind of stability in their lives. So, we can have seasonals that come back. We can have other people that have families that don't have prominent jobs. And like I said to you, the main thing is

taking care of all the ground that we have to cover. It's a lot of ground, and there's no way for us to cover it with the amount of people that we have to work. And I appreciate all the help that we're getting from the City Council, especially from you, the Pay Fair Coalition that come out for us every year, like I said, Mark Levine, and everybody that comes out to try to help us, but it's just not enough.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So in your testimony, in your view, you don't feel that the resources that the Parks Department currently has are enough to support the workers doing the work every single day out there?

DILCY BENN: Not enough at all. Not enough at all. We need as much as we can get, and like I said, if they give us the 1 percent, that'll put us to where we used to be. Okay? We've never been over. We've always been behind, and every year we're still behind. The people that we have now are people that they're trying to get back from what we had years ago. They always want us to do more with less. I always say that, but like I said, my people do this every day, but you have a lot of New Yorkers right

now, especially the way prices are rising, food is rising, and don't try to buy no eggs, okay? We need help. Like I said, and it would help them have some kind of stability, and like I said, a lot of people came off of welfare, to PEP Worker, to CPW. Now the CPWs are being trained to be gardeners and pruners. We're trying to advance our members to do more with the help that we have, but we can use as many as we can get.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Well, thank you for your testimony, and thank you for highlighting how important and personal the issue is for so many Parks workers.

DILCY BENN: And thank you for your help always.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Absolutely.

DILCY BENN: Appreciate you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: You too. Will.

WILL HIRON: Good afternoon, everyone.

Chair Krishnan, thank you so much. Also to the Members of the Parks Committee, and also to the Council Members in attendance, my name is Will Hiron, and I'm here on behalf of Labor's Local 1010 Liuna,

and I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today.

Labor's Local 1010 is proud to advocate alongside our community members for full restoration of NYC Parks in the FY26 budget. With one of the smallest City agency budgets, every dollar allocated to our Parks matters. However, we also want to raise serious concerns about the Parks Department procurement policies that allow unscrupulous contractors to bid and win contracts, and thank you, Chair Krishnan, for uplifting that to the Parks Commissioner. We mentioned Griffin Landscaping Corporation that has a history of being awarded NYC Parks projects, specifically over 20 million dollars, as also the Chair mentioned, in tree planting contracts in the past three years, despite the company owner, Glenn Griffin, being charged in 2022 with seven counts of fraud, bribery, and bid rigging in federal courts. In 2025, Griffins Landscaping will be awarded two tree planting projects that are currently pending contract registration, and we've also included the original endowment in the folders that we've distributed. But this is not the first time that we've seen NYC Parks engage with fraudulent

contractors. In 2023, the Parks Department awarded Dragonetti Brothers with 40 million in tree service contracts, despite Nicholas and Vito Dragonetti pleading guilty in 2022 to insurance fraud and offering a false instrument for filing in the second degree. And just recently, it was reported that Champion Electric also falsified payroll records in 2016 and committed over 200,000 dollars in wage theft on a sidewalk repair project, also contracted to Parks.

These cases highlight a critical failure in the City's procurement process, and taxpayer dollars should not be handed to companies with a track record of fraud and misconduct. These contracts not only (INAUDIBLE) scarce funding, they undermine the integrity of public projects, they lead to worker exploitation, and they put all of our communities at risk. So, the City Council and the Parks Department really must take immediate action to ensure that the (TIMER CHIME) public funds are not awarded to criminal contractors, and we look forward to working with you, Chair Krishnan, and to everybody in the City Council to make sure that that doesn't happen again.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your testimony. One question. Do you believe that there would be other contractors? I mean, there's a problem of awarding contracts to problematic contractors. Do you accept the argument that these are the only ones that can do this work, or is there a pool of contractors much broader than the problematic ones that the Parks Department's using right now?

WILL HIRON: Absolutely not. We certainly do not accept Parks' argument. As a matter of fact, we have plenty of contractors, responsible contractors, who have experience in this work, specifically M/WBE contractors. I mean, we have a whole bunch of signatory contractors in our union, I'm sure other unions do as well, that can very easily take on this work, that have the experience and that also have integrity, and that also treat their workers right so we don't accept that argument at all, and again, there's plenty of contractors who bid on these contracts, but they don't get it.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Council Member Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, I asked a question I'm sure you heard. Is

there enough capacity to have a quicker turnaround?

In other words, maybe half the timeframe. And I think the answer from the Commissioner was basically there's no capacity, there aren't enough contractors, but I think you're saying something different. If we had the funding, and if there was enough staff, I think you're saying that there would be enough contractors to plant in perhaps half the time.

WILL HIRON: I mean, I don't know how the Parks Department is coming up with that statement, but I mean, we have plenty of contractors, and again, M/WBE contractors especially, that are able to do this work, that have the capacity, that have the experience, but they're just not given the opportunity, so we don't accept that argument from the Parks Department either.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

WILL HIRON: Thank you, Council Member.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Council Member.

WILL HIRON: Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Joe.

JOSEPH PULEO: All right. Thank you. Good afternoon. For those of you who don't know, my name is Joe Puleo. I am the President of Local 93. I represent the Urban Park Rangers, the PEP officers, the Associate Park Service workers, and all the City's seasonal aides in Parks. Again, thank you, Chair, for your advocacy, and Members for all your help.

As you already know, we're in a crisis situation when it comes to both cleanliness and safety in our parks. It is probably the all-time worst, and what I find most frustrating is, it's not coming from enemies. This is coming from friends. These are people that were elected and told us they were going to do things for us, like the 1 percent. Not only did we not get the 1 percent, but we got a reduction in workforce, just the exact opposite of what we were promised. So this, from my standpoint, is frustrating, and to me, it's outrageous, how we could put our people out there in harm's way. Not only the park patrons, but also our PEP officers. With a reduced force, that means that they are scattered thin. A lot of times, these people have to do these patrols by themselves, and they have to

encounter such people in parks that are less than friendly. These are people that, at times, have to be arrested. We need more PEP officers. We need to double the force that's out there, just to scratch the surface. And what a lot of people don't realize is that during the summer months, most of the people that are in the parks are no longer there, because of the pools and beaches. They're redeployed into these areas, so that leaves the parks wide open, with nobody there. For the first time in recent times, last year, I'm watching park crimes on national news. We're talking about Nightline. These are, during broad daylight, vicious crimes like rape, robbery, happening in our parks, during the daytime. And to me, for that (TIMER CHIME) not to catch somebody's attention is really a crisis.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Joe, first, thank you to you and your workers for all the work you do in our parks. So, 18 park rangers per borough.

JOSEPH PULEO: Yeah, I mean, that says it all. And thanks to you and City Council. And let's not forget, this is serious because at one point in time, they were all laid off. And who would want to take on a civil service job without security? Imagine

being told that you are hired, but you might not have a job in a year from now. Who would take on the burden of taking that role, knowing that they may not have a job, you know, and not just them. Our City, like my colleague Dilcy said, we also represent City seasonal aides, which are like CPWs, but just hired for the summer. Their headcount has been reduced dramatically. These are the people that clean alongside with Dilcy's people, clean the parks, the beaches, the pools, right? There's been a significant reduction in their numbers. And there's still a hiring freeze. Our Associate Park Service Workers cannot be hired because there's also restraints in that matter, too, as well. So, I don't still understand until today why we are at a state of point where we are, where we cannot get people into these positions and let them do what is needed for the City of New York.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your testimony. Thank you all to this panel for your testimony and for your work.

Our next panel we'll call up are all High Line Fellows. Bismarck Ghanny, Jasiah Vega, Aniyah Cameron, Evander Tomaschett, and Nachelle Johnson.

BISMARCK GHANNY: Hi. Good afternoon, Chairs of the Committee. My name is Bismark Ghanny, and I'm representing myself as part of the High Line Fellows program. I go to (INAUDIBLE) High School, and I went to High Line when I was a junior. Oh, I'm sorry. I'll restart.

Good afternoon, Chairs of the Committee. My name is Bismark Ghanny, and I'm representing myself as part of the High Line Fellows program. I go to (INAUDIBLE) High School, and I live in Manhattan in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood. I know there's a lot going on in our city. For our city to function well, we need to fund it holistically. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General declared loneliness as a public health crisis. Then in 2024, a Harvard survey found that 21 percent of adults experience loneliness, 24 percent among 18- to 29-year-olds, and 29 percent of those 30- to 44-year-olds as the loneliest group. Some of the leading causes show huge numbers of involvement, with 73 percent blaming technology, and 66 percent blaming that they have lacked time with their family. The need for connection is clear, and the solution, I believe, is parks. Three-quarters of Americans want more accessible green spaces and

community events to bring people together for their families and friends. Providing that, investing in our parks means investing in our community's well-being, which invests in our city as well. Parks aren't just scenery, they're essential for mental health and connection, and investing in them is investing in our City's well-being. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you.

JASIAH VEGA: Good afternoon, Committee Chairs. My name is Jasiah Vega. I'm a resident of Lower East Side, and I'm here representing the High Line Fellows. Parks are more than just an open space. They are essential to our community's health and safety. New York City has a chance to fund Parks that have been continuously underfunded for many years. As a resident of Lower East Side, I know how important parks are to our community and public schools. Public schools constantly have to use public spaces because not all schools have the funding or space to have their own playground. More funding allocated to the Parks budget will ensure we keep parks safe, clean, and accessible for kids and the community. Parks provide a peaceful environment that supports mental well-being, offering people a place to relax and

enjoy ourselves. Green spaces also provide better air quality and reduce pollution, making our city healthier for everyone. Investing in Parks is not just about investing in its beauty, it's about making our city healthier, safer, and stronger for everyone. Underfunding Parks has led to people losing their jobs, less maintenance on parks, and has even impacted the quality and safety of green spaces. Investing in our parks is investing in the well-being of New Yorkers. I urge the Committee to increase the Parks budget for parks to ensure we can keep our parks safe, clean, and accessible for everyone. Thank you for hearing my testimony.

ANITYAH NICOLE CAMERON: Hello, Committee Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is Aniyah Nicole Cameron. I currently attend Bard High School Early College, and I am also a fellow of the High Line. I want to say thank you for the Chair and the Members of the Committee for convening this hearing.

Parks have been the center of cultural cultivation for years, but for some reason, we have continued to deprioritize Parks in the City budget. Each year, we have the opportunity to create a new era for parks where they are well-funded, cared for,

and overall continue to serve as a backdrop for so many historical and cultural moments. They are one of the most important common goods in our city, and we should fund them as such. During the summers, one can walk around and certainly find at least one picnic or barbecue happening inside of a park. If it wasn't for the paid safety workers keeping the trouble away and the paid workers keeping it clean, these moments of peace and happiness would not have been able to occur. A cut in the budget of Parks is a cut in the cleanliness and safety in parks. This would eventually lead to the diminishment of New York City's culture. As the years go by, we have seen an increase in the conversations surrounding mental health and climate change, and I believe that the attention towards green spaces should follow. According to the National Library of Medicine, there has been a direct correlation between green spaces in neighborhoods and the decrease of an individual's mental distress, anxiety, and more. Therefore, I urge you to increase the budget of Parks with the mental health and safety of your New Yorkers in mind. Thank you for your time.

NACHELLE JOHNSON: Hello, Committee Chairs and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity for us to speak today. My name is Nachelle Johnson, and I am a High Line fellow.

Throughout the years, the parks have been put to the side for too long. The parks are supposed to be an open space to many, either after school, during free time, to let go, no matter what age, and yet it is continuously being deprioritized. Without the full restoration of Parks funding, we get a park that provides less than the basic necessities. With less funding, we get a park that is less safe, but gets more trash and risk. With less funding, we get a higher percentage of kids not enjoying the wonders of outside. With less funding, parents don't feel that their child is safe, even when it's made for them. But with more funding, that could be changed. One step, one funding cycle at a time, people will see a park that truly grows their community, where kids blossom and bloom. The lack of attention, infrastructure, and improvement for parks only cause less security for our communities. We need a place to be kids and socialize with others our age, and if the parks, the place that formed the joy and innocence of

many, looks as if it was abandoned, neglected, and isolated, it is simply not inviting or safe to anyone. That is why we need to change it. If we get the Parks section of the City budget to something better, there will be a future where kids and many others are more open to the world. Thank you for your time.

EVANDER TOMASCHETT: Good afternoon, Committee Chairs. I'm Evander Tomaschett. I'm a civic engagement fellow at the High Line. Recent budget cuts to the City's Parks have left them woefully underfunded. Although more funding will be allocated to the Parks for 2026, years of budget cuts, especially ones made during COVID, make this additional funding insufficient. With sufficient funding, parks contribute invaluable to their communities. They improve the mental and physical health of people living near them, provide jobs to people all over the city, and increase tourism. Without funding, parks deteriorate and stop providing the same utility. They cannot afford to fix the cracks in the pavement that discourage runners or hire employees and create jobs or maintain the attractive parks that draw in tourists and are

pleasant places for New Yorkers to spend their time.

If you were to restore the Parks' budget, they would be able to provide all these services and more to our communities. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much to all of you for your testimony and for how much you care. (APPLAUSE) You all did an amazing job. And just appreciate for all of you in school, too, being so dedicated to our parks, to making sure that they have the resources they need. And really, besides all you're doing in school, showing by action, too, how you can get involved in your community and how you can care for our parks, so thank you all so much. You give us a lot of hope for the future, too.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I love the T-shirts, the sweatshirts.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: That's right. It's a good touch. Thank you all very much.

All right. For our next panel, Adam Ganser, Deborah Kirschner, Tamar Renaud, and Alia Soomro.

ADAM GANSER: Testing. Thank you, Chairperson Krishnan and the Members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Adam

Ganser. I'm the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. We're the co-founders of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition and the only independent not-for-profit focusing solely on New York City's parks.

I want to make something very clear. The Preliminary Budget has not restored the Parks Department. We've been hearing a lot about that today, but the Administration is saying otherwise. Parks has not been restored. Over the last three-plus years, the agency's budget has been cut repeatedly since Fiscal Year '23, lost more than 700 positions. While libraries and cultural arts have had their budgets restored, Parks did not in June. The Mayor's Preliminary Budget for the next fiscal year does not address these lost positions, leaves the agency short-staffed and unable to do the work that New Yorkers and our Parks Department depend on. A few examples. The agency is critically low on Parks Enforcement Patrol officers, which keep our parks safe for families and communities. The Forestry and Natural Areas divisions have been gutted, notable given that we've had more than 400 brush fires in our city's parks last summer. Fifty of the agency's small team of urban rangers are in one-shots, as we

discussed. Those positions are going to expire at the end of the fiscal year. Administrative staff, trade people, programming staff, project managers, the list goes on. You heard a lot about operational efficiency from the Parks Department itself. I think that's a euphemism for doing whatever they can with the little that they have. How does this impact New Yorkers? They're visiting parks and playgrounds that are less safe and poorly maintained. They're frustrated because bathrooms are closed. There are less parks programming. Parks repairs are taking longer. New Yorkers for Parks and the Play Fair for Parks Coalition are (TIMER CHIME) demanding 79.8 million dollars in Fiscal Year '26 to restore these essential positions. This is a public safety and a quality-of-life issue. Speaker Adams recognized as much when she called for full restoration of Parks during her State of the City. We thank her and we thank you for your support.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you.

DEBORAH KIRSCHNER: Thank you, Chair Krishnan and Council Member Brewer and the full Committee for having us here today. I'm Deborah Kirshner. I'm Vice President of External Relations at

Prospect Park Alliance, the non-profit organization that operates Prospect Park in partnership with the City. I'm also on the Advocacy Committee of Parks and Open Space Partners, a citywide network of more than 50 non-profit organizations dedicated to stewarding and programming New York City's green and open spaces. Together, we have a shared vision of an equitable and resilient park system for all New Yorkers. I would like to thank you for holding today's budget hearing and giving members of the open space community a chance to share our perspective on how budget cuts impact our work and the public at large.

I am here today to support the efforts of the Play Fair campaign to restore cuts to the Park's budget, one of the only agencies not to see restoration of cuts made in the previous fiscal year, and to prioritize funding that recognizes how our parks and open spaces are critical infrastructure for all New Yorkers. This includes an additional 65 million investment to strengthen our park system and restore 795 lost positions. These roles are critical to ensuring that our parks remain clean, safe, and welcoming spaces for our communities. We also are

urging the City to baseline this funding to prevent the yearly budget cuts that undermine our park system. Prospect Park is truly a public-private partnership. We rely on the City to help with the day-to-day trash pickup and facility maintenance that keeps the park clean and safe. This essential service is core to making Prospect Park a welcoming and accessible space for the diverse communities of Brooklyn. Since the pandemic, visitorship to our parks has increased significantly. In Prospect Park, we have seen a record number of visitors throughout the year, which has created significant wear and tear. At the same time, the City has not kept up with this record use in its funding of parks in the City budget. Now is the time where we need more, not less, funding for our parks.

TAMAR RENAUD: Thank you, Chairperson Krishnan and Members of the Committee. I'm Tamar Renaud, the New York State Director of Trust for Public Land, a non-profit dedicated to ensuring that everyone has access to the benefits and joys of the outdoors. Parks, as you have heard many times today, make cities healthier, more livable, less lonely, and economically stronger. Our 2022 report found New York

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City parks save the City 1 billion dollars in healthcare costs and 2 billion in stormwater management, while significantly boosting tax revenue. And as you have heard, they should be employing 700 more staff if only the City invested properly. In partnership with the Department of Environmental Protection and many of you Council members, the Trust for Public Land has transformed over 230 playgrounds in all five boroughs, once barren asphalt, now vibrant green, shade-producing, and storm-absorbing. These spaces are open to the community members after school hours and on the weekends. Please note that we still need funding to keep those 45 of the newest playgrounds open to the community. We're also working with EDC and New York City Parks to convert a 3.5-mile abandoned rail known as the Queensway, a much-needed park and trail connecting six communities in Queens. Despite the clear benefits of parks, New York City's park system remains underfunded and understaffed, with thousands fewer workers than decades ago. As a result, New York's National Park Ranking, called the Park Score (TIMER CHIME) has dropped from 7th, New York City has dropped from 7th out of 100 to 12th last year while other cities

continue to invest more in their parks. As part of the Playfair Coalition, we urge the City to restore those budget cuts and fully fund our parks. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Alia.

ALIA SOOMRO: Good afternoon. My name is Alia Soomro, and I'm the Deputy Director for New York City Policy at the New York League of Conservation Voters. Thank you, Chair Krishnan and Members of the Committee on Parks and Rec, for the opportunity to testify today.

Despite the fact that Mayor Adams committed to funding Parks at 1 percent of the City budget three years ago, he's basically done the opposite. Our City's Parks Department was the only agency that did not receive its full budget restorations last year. On top of this, the Mayor's Preliminary Budget once again under-resources the staff and stewards that maintain our city's parks. This lack of investment in our city's park system directly contradicts the Mayor's campaign pledge and also contradicts all the climate goals outlined in the Administration's Plan NYC, Getting Sustainability Done. That's why we stand with Council Members and

fellow advocates and Parks workers calling for 79.7 million to restore and strengthen the city's parks workforce and programs. This, to be clear, is not enough, but this is what we're asking for at the bare minimum. New York City Parks has lost almost 800 critical positions due to budget cuts and attrition, and the City's Parks workforce is operating at a historic low. While we appreciate that the Mayor's Preliminary Plan included additional funding for second shift workers to cover more parks hotspots, fully restoring these lost DPR positions will create stable, good-paying union jobs. So, as members of Play Fair and Forest for All NYC coalitions, NYLCV urges the City to restore the almost 80 million to DPR, commit 1 million in funding for a robust multi-agency planning process for Local Law 148, that's the City's Urban Forest Plan, and I outline more in my written testimony. But I just want to emphasize that the climate crisis is here, we get air quality emergencies a lot, extreme heat waves impact the most vulnerable residents of our city, we have to invest in our Parks workers. It's here, we're waiting for the Mayor to make (TIMER CHIME) good on his campaign pledge. We really appreciate the Council and Speaker

Adams' support, and we look forward to working with y'all. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your testimony. Just one question for you all, too. I mean, you all do some of the leading work around green space and green space advocacy in our city. You know, you talked a bit about the impact these cuts have had over building on each other over the last few years too, but I will say compared to other cities around the country too, how do we compare in terms of the investments that we make in our parks and workers?

TAMAR RENAUD: So, as I mentioned, we're coming down in the ranking, we used to be one of the top ten, we're now 12th. A report is coming out next year, we'll see how we fared. Other cities are investing more, they're increasing their acreage and they're maintaining their parks. They also have amenities in their parks, like bathrooms, much discussed. So, the issue is really like the funding for the caretaking of the parks is increasing in other cities, and you see in D.C., there's been a huge growth in Minnesota, also in Minneapolis, there's been a huge growth in investment in parks,

and so their parks are improving, and that is improving the outcomes for the residents in those cities.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And my last question also is just can you talk about, any of you, the practical impact of funding long-term positions for Parks workers and these temporary one-shot funding streams that we keep fighting for, what impact does that have on park services? Is that a way that we should be budgeting and running a Parks Department?

ADAM GANSER: I think what you've seen, since the days when the Parks Department had fully-baselined staff, is a loss of institutional knowledge, which might be an overused expression, but we're relying on seasonal workers, many of whom try to come back every year, but they're having to rehire these workers every year, and you're not building a baselined workforce to build institutional knowledge, to build for the future of the agency and for its assets. And you referred previously to the Ranger Program. The Ranger Program has been around for 30 years. Many of the last Commissioners came out of that Ranger Program, and now having the vast majority

of those positions being reliant on one-shot funding every year, you really can't build out what has been an exceptionally important and productive program for building professionals within the agency so this is happening at every level of the Parks Department. Reliance on seasonal workers really defeats the overall goals of building institutional knowledge.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Please.

DEBORAH KIRSCHNER: I can add one thing from Prospect Park. I think with the one-shot funding, too, it really doesn't help park managers plan for their season. The way the budget lines up where you don't have a budget resolved until July 1st, the busy season starts by May 31st. We don't know how many turf crew workers we're going to have. We don't know how many Parks maintenance. So I know it's really hard for park managers to be able to plan for the high season when they don't even know what their headcount is going to be.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony.

Our next panel is Roxanne Delgado, Lynn Kelly, Emily Walker, and Victoria Dearborn.

All right. You can begin.

ROXANNE DELGADO: Afternoon, Chair. Thank you for identifying all the needs and problems within the Parks Department. I really think you have a full understanding of what's needed so I won't repeat what you have said. But I'm with Friends of Pelham Park. I founded it over seven years ago to address needs for Pelham Park Greenway in the Bronx. And mind you, our group is not funded nor do we work very closely with the Parks Department for many issues. Why? One thing I will say is that for democracy's sake, I recall over three years ago, Mayor Adams made a promise to fund the DPR agency 1 percent. That was one of the factors why I voted for him despite my concerns. And I think this is the last opportunity to keep his word and leave a legacy that he's a person of his word. Because it undermines democracy when we have candidates making promises that they have no intention of keeping. So if our Mayor is listening, I hope he understands if he's a man of his word, or a person of his word.

Secondly, regarding trash cans at Pelham Parkway, the number of trash cans they remove from Pelham Parkway is unbelievable. And unfortunately, we have spent seven years educating and encouraging our

community to use trash bins, and now they undermine our efforts by removing most of the trash bins. And now that it's nicer, unfortunately, the trash canister is now trash accumulating there.

Secondly, barbecuing. The Greenway does not permit barbecuing. Unfortunately, due to lack of enforcement, barbecuing happens. So Parks says, you're a Greenway, so we don't have to provide you with Parks enforcement, but yet at the same time, you're allowing barbecuing. So it's a double-edged sword where we're not getting the maintenance and enforcement that we need because we're a Greenway, but yet despite that fact, the Greenway is being used as a full-scale park. So I ask Parks, make up your mind. Allow barbecuing, provide us with the maintenance and enforcement, or enforce the current rules where you don't need the maintenance where you would have a full-scale park. Because when people barbecue and they stay there all day drinking, eating, unfortunately, there (TIMER CHIME) is people defecating in the parkway. To make this short, I really would like to make one big, big point. Sorry, since I came over. Sorry, Chair. I wanted to mention something very important. The trees. You're right.

They said, I did do my request. They said it takes over a year to prune it. But what they did was they removed the branch maintenance and now there's a big hole in the tree. So instead of pruning the tree, they just pulled the branch out and there's a big gap, a hole. And the lack of care, if you look at their website, the lack of care for the trees in Pelham Park is C-minus. And we're a very marginalized, hot-temperature community where we need our trees. Our aging trees are being neglected. So, their intent should be removed. And no new trees are being planted. If they are planted, it's ornamental. It doesn't provide anything for urban wildlife. It doesn't provide anything for us or for all the current mission throughout the Greenway. And I do complain. You can Google Friends of Pelham Park. We do get retaliation from Parks Agency where we actually have to lose our fiscal sponsor and lose our funding because we made complaints about parks.

(TIMER CHIME) Thank you so much for your time. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your testimony.

ROXANNE DELGADO: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Lynn.

LYNN KELLY: Hi, Council Member. I'm Lynn Kelly. I'm the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks and also a Co-Chair... I'm sorry, did you hear me? Boy, I'm off. It's been a long day. It's been a long day. I'm the Executive Director of New York Restoration Project but proudly here as a Co-Chair of Parks and Open Space Partners and a founder of the Play Fair Coalition. Council Member, today is the first day of spring. Right? Yay, spring. However, it feels like Groundhog Day to me because I have sat in this chair for the better part of a decade with New Yorkers for Parks, with my colleagues behind me advocating for a budget that really reflects parks as critical city infrastructure. Listening to the facts from the Commissioner, you know, 18 Rangers per borough, 3,100 dollars to plant a tree in a wait of nine years. If I wasn't here in person, I would think I'm watching a bad episode of Parks and Recreation. And here's the thing. This is what happens when you have disinvestment for 40 years in the City's parks system. We can change that. I know you believe in that. Our world feels upside down right now. The values that our city holds near and dear are under

attack. Right? Where do people go when they need a respite? Where do people go when they need to clear their head? They spend time and they commune inside our parks. For me, the safety, the security, and the maintenance of the parks is something I will continue to fight for for another decade, but we need your help. Bismarck, the young man from the High Line Leaders, if he doesn't know it, he has my vote for Mayor. Yes? And I would ask you, Council Member, and your Colleagues, that when the going gets tough and you're across the budget negotiation table and you're talking about it, think about Bismarck. Think about what he said. Think about the facts he spoke about, about mental health, and think about how we have the (TIMER CHIME) opportunity to really turn the tide. Thank you. And thank you for listening to my mess-ups here at this table.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Emily.

EMILY WALKER: All right. Good afternoon. My name is Emily Walker, and I'm the Senior Manager of External Affairs at the Natural Areas Conservancy. Thank you to the Chair and the Members of the Committee for the opportunity to speak today.

Despite the strong support of the Council last year, NYC Parks lost nearly 80 percent of the staff lines that care for our 12,000 acres of natural forests, wetlands, and trails. The timing, as it turned out, could not have been worse. Last fall, we experienced a drought that resulted in hundreds of brush fires throughout our forested natural areas citywide. The unprecedented scale of these fires caused a strain on our Parks staff, Conservancy partners, and the FDNY when managing the spread of these dangerous blazes and assessing the damage. We are here today to state in the strongest terms possible that the Mayor's Office must restore and baseline 5 million dollars to make permanent 76 staff lines for forest and trails management. These positions would add urgently needed capacity for the Parks Department's Natural Resources Group to ensure that our forested natural areas are better managed and restored and that our public nature trails are better maintained for safe public access. We urge the City Council to throw their full weight behind this investment in NYC Parks and its natural areas. This is both a watershed and vulnerable moment for our urban forest. Under the new federal administration,

it's clear that cities will need to take strong leadership on climate and resiliency issues. There are currently 22 natural area staff whose positions are being covered through federal funding that's currently imperiled, now at risk due to the budget cuts and the grant freezes coming from D.C. We are also now working closely with our partners, including the Mayor's Office for Climate and Environmental Justice, on the creation of New York City's first ever urban forest plan. Disappointingly, the level of funding allocated to our forests in the FY26 Preliminary Budget makes clear that City Hall is not meeting the moment with the urgency and investment it requires. Despite the immeasurable benefits they provide, our forested natural areas are at an ecological tipping point. Our forests contain 5 million of our city's 7 million trees, absorb 70 percent of our carbon, absorb 22 percent of our (TIMER CHIME) city's stormwater, and provide critical ecosystem services for the thousands of unique flora and fauna that, despite all odds, call New York City home. But they require more on-the-ground management to remain healthy in the long term. This year, the Mayor and the Council have the opportunity to be true

climate leaders by investing in our forests. It's not a large investment to make and would result in outsized positive benefits for our urban forests and the public. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you.

VICTORIA DEARBORN: Always a tough act to follow. Good afternoon. My name is Victoria Dearborn. I'm here today representing Tami Lin-Moges, who is the Director of the Nature Conservancy's Cities Program in New York. Thank you, Chair Krishnan, for allowing us the opportunity to speak about the need to fund Parks, and in particular the New York City Urban Forest.

I'll be brief today, but I've submitted longer written testimony. The Nature Conservancy is the world's largest conservation organization. We have 90,000 members across New York State, 35,000 of whom are in New York City, and we also convene the Forest for All NYC Coalition, which is now a coalition of over 170 organizations, and we are also a proud member of the Play Fair Coalition. I'm here today to express support for fully restoring, baselining, and expanding the Parks budget, particularly for urban forestry. Tree canopy,

vegetation cover, and green space are crucial for the health and safety and livability of New York City.

Trees and parks cool neighborhoods, clean air, and improve our quality of life. Our urban forest and its care directly impacts the well-being of New Yorkers.

I commend Council, as well as the Administration, for establishing a goal of 30 percent tree canopy cover

citywide to address extreme heat, both through

commitments in PlaNYC and also codified in Local Law

148 of 2023. Unfortunately, the continued budget cuts

critically threaten our urban forest. I'm asking

Council and the Mayor to fund, baseline, the Parks

and Recreation Forestry staff positions, as well as

fund the implementation of the first-ever citywide

urban forest plan by the Mayor's office, fund updated

citywide LiDAR data to monitor the urban forest, and

fully fund the 2025 Street Tree Census. Additionally,

I call for a full restoration and baselining of the

700-plus other park staff positions and tree programs

that were cut in the past few years. Parks workers

perform critical services, and they're necessary for

the public safety, workforce development, community

health and wellness, and climate resilience goals of

our city. Thank you again, Committee Chair Krishnan

and members of the Parks Committee, for considering our request for DPR's urban forest budget. It needs to be fully restored and protected, and (TIMER CHIME) I ask that you help us in that fight. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you all for your testimony and for your work every day for our park system.

Our next panel is Tessa Huxley, Karen Horvat, Allie Ryan, and Sally Burns.

TESSA HUXLEY: Let me start. Hi. My name is Tessa Huxley, and I came here today as a citizen. I'm a volunteer for the Sarah Roosevelt Park in the Lower East Side, but the longer I've listened to everybody here, I thought I'd give you a little of my experience, because I have worked in greening public gardens, public community gardens, public parks since 1975, and we are a broken record. All we do is say there's not enough funding, and we never have had enough funding. In 1989, I was part of a group of every environmental organization in the City of New York, that was a hard thing to do, but one of the things we were advocating for was 1 percent of the budget. Here we are. It seems a bit much that 50

years after I started my career in greening, we're still asking for 1 percent of the City budget. So most of all, I say take off your gloves and let's get serious, because it's really, really bad. As a volunteer, I did, since no one else here is just working as a volunteer, I'm 72, so I retired. It's just so sad to be in my park every day, where I should be doing horticulture, that's what I thought I would do, but really what I'm doing is garbage collection, and it's endless. It never ends. It's not through the fault of the Parks Department. They just don't have enough people. A couple of weeks ago, I did a major winter cleanup of the area I care for, and it was three days before those 15 trash bags were collected. So we are really in trouble, folks. Thank you very much. I know you're trying.

ALLIE RYAN: Thank you. Hello. My name's Allie Ryan, and I am a long-term resident of the East Village, and because of my children, I spend a little part of every day in a New York City park or a playground in Lower Manhattan, and I biked by Sarah D. Roosevelt Park on the way here, and I see the trash as well. I appreciate the City Council Committee on Parks for hosting this meeting every

year. This is not my first time, and I also want to commend you, Chairman Krishnan, because, or Shekar Krishnan, because I know last year you negotiated the highest percentage for the Parks Department, the Parks Department budget that we've seen yet, and I want to commend you for that. But I know you're a parent too, and you're in the parks as much as I am, because our children are close in age. But what I want to share is that I found it, like, we talk about the Parks Department being understaffed. When I first started coming to this meeting, I wanted to talk about one thing, but then I realized, no, I need to talk about the workers and their union jobs. We're asking to help people earn a living, but also to take pride in their communities. And not all parks have a conservancy attached to provide essential funding to ensure that the park is maintained and safe for all. So I'm here today to call for the Council Members to hold the line and to dedicate 1 percent of the City budget to Parks. Fully fund Green Thumb, which symbolizes protection of the community gardens that enable families to grow food, as well as outdoor community spaces. Year-round staffing. Restore the funding for 700 union jobs. (TIMER CHIME) I'm going

to just quickly wrap it up. PEP, we need more PEP officers. It's not just for public safety, but like in my neighborhood, it's because we have gang-related gun violence and drug dealing. Closing parks at midnight so parks can rest. And then the biggest issue I think that's going to be coming up is pest control. Especially dealing with rats, because in like Tompkins Square Park, there are 197 rat burrows right now. And the restaurant sheds are about to, we're going to get new restaurant sheds opening April 1st, so we do need to add more into the budget to deal with rats and pests.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. And unfortunately, we got the highest budget ever for Parks, and that was supposed to be a starting point to get more and, instead, it's been backsliding since, but we will keep fighting. Thank you.

KAREN HORVAT: Thank you, Speaker Krishnan and the Members of the Council who have been deeply committed to our parks and open spaces. My name is Karen Horvat, and I'm President of NYC Tree Pit Services. We're a for-profit social enterprise contractor and a member of the Forest for All NYC

Coalition. NYC Tree Pit Services plants street trees. We expand tree beds, we install tree guards, and we perform other services that help our street trees live to their fullest potential so we've been fighting for years to increase our city's tree canopy coverage. We were very pleased in 2023 with Local Law 148, which codified that goal of 30 percent canopy coverage equitably and citywide. I think the thing is, goal setting is really just the very first step. So I'm calling on the Council and the Mayor to provide the funding so that our urban forest plan has a chance to succeed. We need to get past this issue of persistently underfunding the Parks Department, specifically in the areas of urban forestry. We need forestry staff just to care for the canopy that we have that's existing, which has taken us decades to establish. We need funding for the urban forest plan, including the LiDAR data set so that we can track the change in canopy coverage over time. We need funding for the updated street tree census, which lets us put a monetary value on our urban forest, and it also helps us to more efficiently support our urban forest. And finally, we need restoration of the Parks programs and staff, which have been severely cut

since 2023 to levels that are far below our international peers. Our street trees are the gateways to our communities. They're a gathering place, a source of pride, silently standing guard over our busy New York lives, but they cannot speak for themselves. I know that the budget must address many important priorities of this city, but what good are many of these things if we don't have clean air and water? Our planet is warming rapidly, and trees are a (TIMER CHIME) long-term investment. So please, fight for us. Invest now in the future of this city and its people. Thank you.

SALLY BURNS: Good afternoon, Chair Krishnan and Committee Members. My name is Sally Burns, and I'm the Planning Associate for Union Square Partnership, the non-profit business improvement district stewarding Union Square. Union Square is a key transit hub, a powerful job center, an extraordinary residential community, a center for culture, for recreation, a home for institutions, a burgeoning tech campus, and a favored shopping destination. However, its park is outdated, and its infrastructure needs repair. The Union Square District Vision Plan, USQNEP, sets out to address

these issues by transforming the continuous public realm in Union Square and 14th Street, comprising parkland, plazas, and sidewalks. Union Square Park is a critical open space amenity and neighborhood anchor serving as a green oasis, site for free expression, and venue for demonstrations, performances, and public events, but this intense use has caused the infrastructure beneath it to age and fail. The park was last redesigned in 1985, and its dated design fails to live up to modern expectations for public space. Also, the adjacent 14th Street is home to a critical crosstown busway, but it lacks any permanent streetscape improvements needed for a world-class pedestrian experience. As a down payment on the implementation of the entire Vision Plan, Union Square Partnership is requesting 10 million dollars to be allocated to the New York City Department of Transportation, including 9 million from New York City Council and 1 million from Manhattan Borough President for an initial capital commitment towards construction. 14th Street is a key gateway to Union Square Park, and investments in pedestrian-forward accessible streetscapes will further support Union Square Park as a neighborhood amenity, improving the

experience for all park users. We are asking the Members of the Committee to support a City Council allocation for this project, which will signal long-term support, help finance its implementation, and (TIMER CHIME) sustain future phases. We would like to thank Manhattan Community Board 5 for their letter of support, and Council Members Rivera, Bottcher, Powers, Chair Krishnan, and Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine's staff for taking the time to meet about this important project. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you all for your testimony. The next panel, which is Heather Lubov, Merritt Birnbaum, Christina Taylor, and Rosamond Fletcher.

HEATHER LUBOV: Good afternoon, Chairman Krishnan. I'm Heather Lubov from City Parks Foundation, and I'm here to express my severe dismay over the FY26 budget for Parks, which will result in the loss of almost 800 jobs, leaving our parks critically understaffed and struggling to maintain even the most basic services. Particularly at a time when federal funding for the City is highly precarious, I urge the Council to restore baseline and renew initiatives within NYC Parks through an

allocation of 79.7 million in the FY26 budget. Our parks are not luxuries. They are the backbone of our communities, but they are failing even the agency's own standards. More than 60 percent of Parks' properties have a vital park score lower than 95, and that's the Department's own standard. This is not a minor issue. This is a crisis. At City Parks Foundation, we're doing everything we can to address some of those gaps by providing free programming like Summer State and the Puppet Mobile, sports and fitness classes, environmental education programs. We're staffing and funding the NYC Parks and Open Space Partners Coalition, which some people have spoken about, to build the capacity of the non-profit park stewards that help support the parks and contribute nearly 200 million dollars in private budget relief for the agency. Perhaps most relevant, as half of the public-private partnership collaboration that is Partnerships for Parks, we mobilize more than 32,000 volunteers and offer them training, coaching, event planning, permit support, and other hand-holding services to ensure that those volunteers are able to care for local green spaces each year with the least amount of friction. We also

fundraise and administer the New York City Green Fund to distribute more than 2 million dollars in private funds annually to volunteer groups around the city.

And while we would encourage volunteerism no matter what, it's essential now when the agency is severely underfunded. (TIMER CHIME) Eleven Partnerships for Parks team members do this work and are funded

directly by the Council's Parks Equity Initiative, so we're asking that this highly cost-effective

initiative be expanded to 1 million dollars to ensure that we can continue. The Commissioner mentioned the hiring slowdown, but part of that is that there's

currently a freeze on the hiring of external

candidates. We have lost countless Partnerships for

Parks staff recently to other agency departments and vice versa, so it's a merry-go-round of staff moving

between programs with absolutely no growth. In

practice, this means that our volunteers are

continually working with different staff and there's

no stability to build relationships. The ban on

external hiring must be lifted. And finally, as

you've heard, we took on the role of fiscal sponsor

for the private funds that are supporting the

development of the first-ever Urban Forest Plan, and

we're conducting the public engagement for the plan's development. And the hope, of course, is that we can use the plan to increase our tree canopy to 30 percent. But with the loss of all those Forestry and Natural Areas positions, there is no way that the Mayor's Office can prepare a plan with such lofty goals and keep those cuts in place. The plan is doomed to fail before it's even been published. Restoring the Parks' workforce and its vital programs is the only way to ensure that every (TIMER CHIME) New Yorker has access to clean, safe, and thriving parks. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, and thank you for the work of City Parks Foundation every day, despite the limited resources of the Parks Department. Merritt.

MERRITT BIRNBAUM: Thank you, Council Member Krishnan. Thank you for your advocacy and for calling this hearing. My name is Merritt Birnbaum. I'm the President and CEO of Riverside Park Conservancy. We work in partnership with NYC Parks to help care for 400 acres of public parkland spread across six miles from West 59th up to the George Washington Bridge. You heard today about our

coalition's asks for this budget. We are asking for people. We are asking for parkies. We are not asking for overhead or equipment or even for pay raises. We are just asking that you put back the funding for the jobs that the City funded in the past so that our parks can be clean and green and safe. We want 795 good union jobs back, and we want to baseline them so that we can stop fighting for these jobs every year and so that these hardworking New Yorkers will know that they are not expendable and that they can support themselves and their families this year and next year and the year after that. I want to share a few real stories from one of the largest public parks in the system, a district that serves millions of New Yorkers. Each year from Midtown to West Harlem to Washington Heights, our district is fortunate that we have a conservancy that contributes several million dollars every year towards its maintenance and operations through our agreement with NYC Parks. Our struggles are real but they are nothing compared to the emergencies faced by smaller parks with even fewer resources. In each example you will see a system that is at the breaking point being propped up by extraordinary workers, advocates, and partners

like the Play Fair members who are all doing our best to keep our parks alive, and we are all tired, we are all frustrated, and we are all here because we know that this kind of short-sighted budget austerity cannot continue.

A Riverside City Parks worker in West Harlem was moved to tears recently describing what it was like to (TIMER CHIME) be the only City worker responsible for snow removal in her section on Sunday morning at 5 a.m. as dozens of staircases and pathways remained to be cleared and we had conservancy staff and volunteers there to support her and rally and get the job done, but that doesn't always happen and it's possible only in a few parks and in many cases it's never available. Later that same Sunday as families were sledding and building snowmen, they tried to access the bathroom at one of our parks, I know I was there at 2:45 in the afternoon, and it was closed. This is what happens, this is what we see every day. People can't get the most basic services because there are not enough workers in our parks. This is what happens when you don't fund the Parks Department. Last summer, all of the New York City Parks Department's mowers in our

park failed at the same time. Now it's not unusual for mowers to stop working, but there were not enough mowers to go around so the conservancy had to authorize emergency funding because it would have taken weeks, if not months, for the Parks Department to fix them. These are just three examples, one park of how the City is failing to provide the bare minimum of what it takes to keep the parks clean, green and safe. So I'll just close with a question. At a time when our city is losing population at the highest rate in decades, at a time when we should be focused on making our city more livable, at a time when we need stable union jobs to support working families, and at a time when our very existence is threatened by environmental degradation and climate change, why are we not providing the bare minimum of funding for our city parks? It's easy. So Parks power New York City. It's time to invest in our City's budget by powering our parks.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much, Merritt, for your powerful testimony.

ROSAMOND FLETCHER: Good afternoon. My name is Rosamond Fletcher, and I'm Executive Director of the Fort Greene Park Conservancy. Thank you, Chair

Krishnan, for this hearing. At 30 acres, Fort Greene Park is neither large nor small, but it is incredibly well used. The park is located in the heart of Fort Greene and right where everything is expanding in downtown Brooklyn. Just north of the park, over 12,000 residents live in public housing. The density and growth of the area over the last decade has dramatically increased use of the park by people and dogs. We welcome this use, but we have to contend with its impacts, like the erosion of the park's hills, which requires intensive seasonal lawn rotation and restoration, and the overflowing garbage cans which require numerous day and evening pickups. The park's heavy use demands adequate park staffing. We filled the staffing gap during the pandemic but our role as a Conservancy is not to relieve the City of its responsibility to fund park staff. Our role is to provide complementary services. I want to repeat that. Our role is not to relieve the City of its responsibility to fund park staff. As an example of a complementary service, our Green Team program is a paid environmental education and job pathways program for local teens, now in its third year. The majority of participants live next to the park at Whitman,

Ingersoll, and Farragut Houses. One of our recent graduates shared this with us. Quote, I just finished my second day of training with the National Park Service. Kayaking on the Jamaica Bay, we went to a small island and watched a massive swarm of horseshoe crabs molting. It was amazing and so rare to see and that's just my second day of work. I feel so lucky. I don't think I would be here without my work with the Green Team and the Conservancy. It has made such a difference. (TIMER CHIME) So Resident Association President of Whitman Houses, Ms. Sharpton, has asked that we expand the program to meet the demand for teen opportunities in the neighborhood. But how can we expand it? How can we expand this fourth cohort when we're being asked to fill the gap on park staffing? So I'm here to say that it's not fair, not fair to deprive our young people of programming that has an impact like this. So, we need the City to step up and restore the 65 million and the 795 lost staff positions. Parks are vital public infrastructure. Do not make us take funds from the teens. Please. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much for your testimony and for all your work.

Our next panel is Michael Davis,
Constance Lesold, Herbert Brooks, and Giulietta
Fiore.

You may begin.

MICHAEL DAVIS: Hello, Chair Krishnan and
Members of the Committee. My name is Michael Davis,
and I'm a community garden member at East Harlem
Rodale Community Garden. There's no better time than
summer to embrace the magic and beauty of nature.
Unfortunately, we gardeners haven't recovered from
the recent budget cuts of New York City Parks. People
come to us with food scraps to be composted, only to
be rejected because the program has been suspended.
Green spaces are currently underfunded and at risk of
displacement. They provide a good experience as
opposed to generating profit. Basically, when you
hand over a public utility to private investors, they
consistently cut costs as much as possible to
generate profits. This usually leads to a worse
experience for our people. We've seen this in
industry after industry, and we've even seen that
happen with the threat to the Elizabeth Street
Community Garden. Basically, the New York City
Housing Authority took over the land in 2012. The

plan is to erect residential housing there. What's happened to Elizabeth Street Community Garden should set alarms and shock throughout the community. A lot of people have already commented on my other points, but in conclusion, I just say that Rodale is one of over 550 community gardens across the city. If community gardens were private business, it would have closed decades ago. But they're not, so we don't have to think like private business, and it's a gamble, but it's worth the risk so I land my plane.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you.

GIULIETTA FIORE: Good afternoon. Thank you so much, Chair Krishnan, for calling this. I've testified at this hearing a few years in a row now, and I will submit a formal testimony as well, but I kind of just wanted to speak off the cuff since I have this opportunity. I'm here representing the Historic House Trust of New York City. We help preserve and promote 23 historic houses that operate as public house museums. They're located across all five boroughs of New York City, from the southernmost tip of Staten Island to the easternmost reaches of Queens and the northernmost reaches of the Bronx, and even under the GW Bridge, the Little Red Lighthouse.

I just want to kind of... these places mean a lot to a lot of people. We have over one million people visiting these houses annually, and that number is growing. Half of those are school children who utilize these places in the five boroughs, in their own backyards, to learn about New York City history. All of these places are publicly owned, and they're on public park land. They're park-zoned. We, as historic preservationists, are playing the long game, and we are not looking to just preserve these historic houses for another five years. We're looking to preserve them for 50, 100, 200 years. When I say that we want these resources to be around for another 200 years, that shouldn't be a radical prospect. We should have the investment now that we need to ensure that something like that is possible. If these historic sites in public parks go away, you're depriving people of something that's really special, and it's one of those resources that you can't find anywhere else in the world, anywhere else, any other city in America. This is really unique to New York City, and it's also not the only infrastructure that needs to be supported. I love my historic houses. It's a mission that's very close to my heart, but

there are a lot of other resources that the Parks Department maintains. Rec centers, handball courts, I know people love pickleball courts, and if those things aren't invested in today through maintenance and staff positions, there's just no way that we'll have a livable city in the future. I really hope that you all are able to push for additional funding for the Parks Department, (TIMER CHIME) and I appreciate your time.

HERBERT BROOKS: Thank you, Chair Krishnan and the Committee. Thank you for staying to the end. My name is Herbert Brooks, and I'm a ropes course facilitator at Alley Pond Park in Queens. It's a seasonal position. I'm also a trail steward for Riverdale Parks where I live, and a state-licensed wilderness guide for the Catskills. I'm still actually waiting to find out whether the budget supports me going back to Alley Pond so that's where I am right now today. Being in parks, I get to see the inner workings of the park. I got there three years ago, and I noticed it's a heavily used location for barbecues, sports, birding, and dog-owner communities, not to mention the ropes course where we engage thousands of children, businesses, and members

of the public in the outdoors, and challenge them to build community and reach beyond their comfort zone.

I also noticed the skeleton crew that we have of M and O workers, maintenance and operations, that has subsisted with 10 workers for the entire 632 acres.

We don't have our own PEP officers or Rangers, so we have to call in Rangers from other parks for animal rescue, unhoused encampments, or other emergencies like last year's forest fires. Sometimes we would have to add parks cleaning or opening bathrooms to our own duties. Aside from daily use, larger projects can be affected by your budget reconsideration.

Wetlands replenishment is an ongoing necessity to stave off the devastation of storms such as Sandy, which we still all remember. (TIMER CHIME) Continued greenway projects connect our boroughs with ecologically friendly routes. Parks contribute to lowering the heat index, both in terms of temperature and crime, but only if they are maintained well. I ask that you help us to not just, 1 percent doesn't seem like a lot, but also if we could just not cut, that would help. Parks are the biggest, most invaluable pieces of real estate in the city. And to close, to quote the Lorax, one of my favorite

environmental texts, unless someone cares a whole awful lot, nothing's going to get better, it's not.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Well, thank you for your testimony, thank you for your work in Alley Pond Park, and we will keep fighting for the budget that you all deserve.

HERBERT BROOKS: Thank you.

CONSTANCE LESOLD: Good afternoon, Chairman Krishnan. My name is Constance Lesold. I have lived in Brooklyn most of over 50 years now, and I have worked on Parks issues during that entire time. I am here first and foremost to represent the interest of those people on Eastern Parkway and the friends of Mount Prospect Park who are desperately trying to protect that park and prevent any funding for a skateboard park in that small park which is used for vast numbers of purposes, including Easter egg hunts where they want to cement over a part of the park. There is one skateboard park already in Community Board 8 where I used to be chair of the Parks and Recreation and Cultural Affairs Committee, and there are no skateboard parks in many other parts of Brooklyn, and we are doing our share. I am founder of the Community Garden over the Franklin Avenue

Shuttle, and in that capacity was also chair of the Transportation Committee, and why we founded that garden was so that children from East New York and other neighborhoods who would not be able to get to all the parks of Brooklyn without the shuttle would have a transportation that would take them everywhere to all the gardens. I could go on and on, that area I'm talking (TIMER CHIME) about along Eastern Parkway, everybody works together, the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, Mount Prospect Park, the Community Garden down the block, and we need you to protect our gardens, not to cement them over, to stop any cementing over, to stop, I started working on this thing over trees, and founded the Eastern Parkway Coalition, which saved many trees and led to the landmarking of Eastern Parkway's scenic landmark. So, thank you for trying to help, and I only want to say that I am sorry, Chairman, to hear that your neighborhood is being visited by ICE heavily. My in-laws came from Hitler's Berlin, and they were supported by, emotionally, by being able to go to the parks of Brooklyn, Prospect Park and others, while they were waiting to hear what happened to their relatives. Please remember, as I know you do, the

immigrants all over the city still need all these parks, and I'm going to hand you this, which is a scene where a family that looked like an ordinary middle-class family was being divided on the streets. I don't know whether... the father was taken off in a Fire Department ambulance for no good reason, the mother was taken off in a police car, and the two little children were taken off in a separate police car. I don't know whether ICE was involved with this or it was strictly the 71st Precinct, and nobody wants to tell anything about why this extraordinary thing happened. Please remember the immigrants and their need for the gardens. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you very much for your testimony.

Now we have a few virtual panelists as well who have been waiting. First up will be Isabel Friedman.

ISABEL FRIEDMAN: Good afternoon, Chair Kishan and Members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Isabel Friedman. I'm an Environmental Health Advocate at the Natural Resources Defense Council. NRDC has long advocated for expansion of the city's tree canopy and the

deepened investment in environmental programs. For many years, the city's incredible park system has been significantly underfunded and understaffed, with the City (INAUDIBLE) a fraction of the budget on parks compared to other major cities. While running for office, Mayor Adams repeatedly pledged that 1 percent of the budget would go to Parks, saying that parks were not a luxury, but a necessity. Needless to say, this commitment has not been met. Chair Krishnan, himself, has argued in the past that urban forests are directly connected to public health, housing, and racial and immigrant justice. On top of all the key benefits outlined by others today, trees mitigate the urban heat island effect by lowering air temperatures. As temperatures continue to rise and heat waves are prolonged, ensuring equitable access to cooling must be a priority (INAUDIBLE) by neighborhoods who are already minimally overburdened have the lowest access to green spaces, and experience temperatures an average of 5 degrees hotter than the rest of the city. The proposed budget is insufficient to support the necessary expansion and maintenance of our urban forests, especially given the obligation under Local Law 148 to reach 30

percent treaty canopy cover. In order to achieve a commitment to climate resiliency and community protection, the City needs to provide the Parks Department with sufficient resources for the staff and (INAUDIBLE) do this. We are calling on the Mayor and the City Council to dedicate 1 percent of the (INAUDIBLE) budget to the Parks Department, with a focus on expanding access to green spaces for the farmland community, and continue the (INAUDIBLE) to achieve 30 percent treaty canopy cover by 2035. Thank you for the opportunity to comment today. My colleague Eric Goldstein and I look forward to working with you all.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so much for your testimony.

Next up we have Romke Hoogwaerts.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

ROMKE HOOGWARTS: Hi. I hope you can hear me. Thanks for this distinguished Council for offering me the opportunity to speak today. Thank you, Chair Krishnan.

I know that you're a Mets fan, so I apologize in advance for what I'm about to propose. New York is set to host the World Cup in 2026, and

yet constituents are constantly challenged to find spaces to play. Of course, New York City has limited space, but I would like to argue that we should reconsider the usage of a few sites that we already have. Soccer is unique in that you can play with just two people, bring a ball to a pitch, and people will come together to play. It's magnetic. Our city is full of soccer fanatics. Soccer pitches are remarkably amenable to other sports like American football, lacrosse, cricket, ultimate frisbee, and various cultural events. Soccer fields are basically giant multipurpose playgrounds. Now, of course, baseball is a vital historic American sport, but as our city grows, becomes more international, and critically is hosting the upcoming World Cup, it may be time to reconsider the allocation of our sports fields in our city parks. Let's look at Central Park. It has 25 baseball fields, and not one soccer pitch. I would like to propose converting the six fields within the Great Lawn to multipurpose soccer pitches, keeping two ball fields just above the rink. I would also like to propose that half of the ball fields in North Meadows be converted. However, for those, I would suggest urban farms, inspired by the efforts of

Amber Tam. As for Heckscher Ballfields in the south, those are historic and should absolutely be preserved. I am a first-generation American. I've lived here for 16 years, and I love this city's soccer community. I've played in paid leagues, free pickup games, and tournaments across Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn. I've even had the pleasure to play alongside Newcomer's Football Club, a crew of players mostly consisting of asylum seekers passing through the shelter system. It's a reminder that public access to soccer is a fantastic way to bring citizens together. Let me close out by mentioning financial opportunities. This proposal would allow the Parks Department to make use of the 20-million-dollar budget EDC has allocated for fan events related to the World Cup. Central Park is an ideal (TIMER CHIME) location for such events, considering all the tourists that will be there between games. And finally, this would also create opportunities for lucrative sponsorships, potentially offsetting any costs this conversion would accrue. Had he been alive today, I would like to think that Charles B. Stover would have loved this proposal. Thank you for your time and consideration. And lastly, for the record,

let's go Mets. If I still have a second, I just want to shout out Hattie Carthen and her tree planting initiatives in the late '60s, the work that she was able to do with Mayor Lindsay. She was able to plant 1,500 trees in a matter of like two years or three years or something like that. It's a testament to what we can do if we work together with the Mayoral's office. It's absolutely possible. The idea that it would take nine years to plant trees is absolutely ridiculous. I just want to throw that out there as well. Thank you to everybody today.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your testimony. And indeed, let's go Mets.

Next up we have Roberto Sosa.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

ROBERTO SOSA: Hello, my name is Roberto Sosa. (SPEAKING SPANISH)

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: (SPEAKING SPANISH)

Next we have Alejandra Ng.

ALEJANDRA NG: Hey, I hope you can hear me. Thank you, Chair Krishnan and Members of the Parks Committee. My name is Alejandra Ng, and I am the Assistant Director of NYJTL's Community Tennis Programs. I'm speaking because we are seeking a

million dollars under the Council's Physical Education and Fitness Initiative, which would be our first increase in over 16 years. During the past 16 years, everything has gone up. Labor permits, minimum wage, and we are struggling to maintain the quality of programming that we are used to at our current level of funding. So, please, increased funding to NYJTL's community programs is vitally needed. It is our belief that talent is universal, but access and opportunity are not, and that is why we have strived for over 50 years to introduce the sport of tennis to all children. And with the Council as our partner, NYJTL has become the largest tennis and education organization in the country. I'm going to kind of just take a little tangent. I'm a product of this organization. I grew up, you know, doing programming in New York City parks and playgrounds, and I wouldn't be where I am without this organization. I wouldn't be able to help the over 10,000 kids that we help bring tennis to annually every year. We're in over, I think, 25 parks across the city. You know, all five boroughs, including Staten Island, (INAUDIBLE). The majority of our participants, I think over 70 percent, are ages 10 and under, and

that's, you know, we need to be able to combat, you know, the obesity crisis, get these kids young, get them active while we still can. Over 75 percent of the youth that we serve identify as Black, African American, Latino, and/or Asian. Over 80 percent of our families report with being low income based on New York City's area median income. And let's not just think about the young ones that we serve, but also our older kids. We employ over 100 coaches every year. 50 percent of these coaches are in high school or college. For a lot of them, we are their first job. And we just want to be able to continue providing training the way we are. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your testimony. And going back to in person, our next witness is Christopher Leon Johnson.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hello, Chair Shekar Krishnan. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson. I know it's kind of last person. But I'm here to ask for support for the parks. Yeah, the parks need 1 percent. I know what's going on here is that the Speaker, Adrienne Adams, is weaponizing this budget to make sure all these non-profits support her campaign for Mayor. And if they don't, then she won't

fund the non-profits. At the same time, we have to save all these parks in this budget. Eric Adams is out the door. So while Eric Adams is out the door, he needs to do the right thing for all these non-profits and fund their non-profits through the executive budget. The Speaker needs to be watched by all these non-profits that serve the parks because she is going to weaponize this budget to make all these non-profits support her campaign for Mayor and, if they don't support her campaign for Mayor, then she won't give them the money that they need to sustain their services. While that happens, guys, you guys, all you non-profits need to call the FBI on Adrienne Adams. You need to call the DOI on Adrienne Adams. Record all her conversations. Anytime she gives you a call, record them. Get a copy of everything that she does because she's going to weaponize the budget with the help of Justin Brannan, a.k.a. Fester, to make sure you guys support her campaign for Mayor. We need to fund the parks, fund all these non-profits that support the parks. Save Bushwick Inlet Park. Save Bushwick Inlet Park in Brooklyn, New York, Lincoln Restler's District. Lincoln Restler, to support... save Bushwick Inlet Park. Lincoln Restler, please do it.

At the same time, last 20 seconds, we need to make sure these bike dock stations be inside the parks. I know Marte introduced a bill to your Committee to put the bike charge lanes in the parks. This needs to happen under this budget. We need to put that deliverista hub outside City Hall. Protect our deliverances. Protect our migrants. But all you non-profits, if Adrienne Adams (TIMER CHIME) threatens you guys and gals, call the FBI. Go to 26 Federal Plaza and report her to the federal government, and let's get her arrested. Take care.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks for your testimony.

We now have Dr. George Sands.

DR. GEORGE SANDS: Thank you for your persistence and perseverance. I want to compliment all the Council Members and the Chairman for having a rigorous review of Parks and asking really good questions.

My name is George Sands, and I'm speaking for the Friends of Mount Prospect Park, which is a member of the Forest for All New York City Coalition. And I'm going to go through my testimony, which I did submit, and then I have a comment from just sitting

here and watching everything happen over the last few hours. One of the themes clearly is concern about the environment, that New York City is getting hotter.

And, you know, as we consider the New York City parks, the future and the protection of green space and the tree canopies, it's very clear that the weather continues to get hotter, and that it's an increasing problem for New York. And we've already talked about it today several times, about the Fire in Prospect Park. That was inconceivable a year ago, right, and so it's happening more and more. So as we all deal with the hotter temperatures, the parks are an important resource for New Yorkers. The green space helps. (phone ringing Eric Merrill-Sands, FaceTime video) I can't believe this. The green space helps cool the environment and allows New York respite from the heat. Many within the New York City government have talked about keeping things green.

Paving over green space in parks for any reason is inconsistent with that vision and puts New Yorkers at greater risk for the heat (TIMER CHIME) to come. The proposal to pave historic Mount Prospect Park in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, will remove an important resource for the neighborhood to survive the heat.

Paving is a bad precedent to start in this city. The call for another skateboard facility in Brooklyn is better served by paving a previously paved space. We should keep all the green space we have. It will only get more important with time. How will you all feel in 10 to 15 years as the planet and New York City continues to get hotter and hotter if you support paving Mount Prospect Park? Will you regret it?

And then, separate from that testimony which was submitted, it's very clear we've been talking about the trees and the environment and I think people are all concerned on some level about exactly what we're talking about, the climate and how parks fits into that. And then we're talking about how to manage the finite resources. I only heard one allusion to what parks brings to this city. You think about the number of people that use our parks, tourists who come from outside New York. When you walk into Central Park, almost ever, and there's tons of tourists everywhere, the High Line, Prospect Park, if there's some way to quantify the revenue or how that impacts the city on the plus side, because we're always talking about the cost and everybody's thinking about the parks as a cost. But the parks is

a major source of bringing people in. And if you use Prospect Park on the weekends, it's challenging to bike because people are out there totally not aware of what's happening. Same thing in Central Park and they're redoing the roadway in Central Park to finally account for the tourists and the bikes and everything. That's because the tourists come, and they bring revenue. So, if someone can figure out a way for us to quantify that and share that with the executive or whoever that will be in coming years, maybe we can create some of the more positive energy in the parks and make it not a cost but an important service for those coming to visit us and for the New Yorkers who've lived here for however many years. Thank you for your continued attention and thank you for allowing me to be the last person to testify.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you for your testimony. Thank you for closing us out with a very good suggestion, too, that I think is a very helpful idea of a way to quantify the benefits of parks. Thank you so much.

GEORGE SANDS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Well, we are at the end here.

If we inadvertently missed anyone who registered to testify today and has yet to be called, please use the Zoom raise hand function if you are testifying remotely, and you will be called in the order that your hand has been raised.

If you are testifying in person, please come to the dais.

Seeing none, I will now close the hearing.

Thank you to the members of the Administration and the members of the public who have joined us today. Thank you to the Parks Department, this hearing. Thank you to all our Council Staff, our Sergeants here. We appreciate it all. Thanks very much.

This hearing is now closed. [GAVEL]

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 15, 2025