



**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committee on Parks & Recreation
An Examination of the City's Parks Without Borders Initiative & Int. 1411, to Amend the
Administrative Code of the City of New York, in Relation to Pedestrian Access to Park
Facilities**

February 13, 2017

Testimony By: Sarah Neilson, Chief of Policy and Long Range Planning

Good afternoon, Chair Levine, members of the Committee on Parks & Recreation, and other Members of the City Council. I am Sarah Neilson, Chief of Policy and Long Range Planning at NYC Parks. Joining me on the panel is Nancy Prince, Deputy Chief for Design, and Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations. Thank you for inviting me to provide an update on Parks Without Borders, and the opportunity to discuss Intro. 1411.

As you may recall, Parks Without Borders is NYC Parks' innovative and exciting initiative to connect parks with their surrounding communities in stronger and more meaningful ways. When NYC Parks last testified on Parks Without Borders before this Committee in December 2015, we had just launched the program, and we are pleased to appear before the Council today to provide an update on our progress.

Parks Without Borders was first announced in April 2015 in the Mayor's comprehensive plan "*OneNYC: The Plan for a Just and Strong City*," which called for greater access to parks. Parks Without Borders is a key strategy to achieve this important goal, and \$50 million in Mayoral funding was allocated to make it a reality.

Parks Without Borders is a new approach to park design. It focuses on the accessibility and connectivity of three main areas within our parks: the entrances, edges, and adjacent park spaces. These are the places where parks and the surrounding neighborhoods interact most directly. This is not a new concept-- it harkens back to that giant of landscape architecture, Frederick Law Olmsted, who once said that, "the sidewalk next to the park should be considered the outer park."

We are applying this design approach in two ways, using the \$50 million allocation: we've dedicated \$10 million of that funding to incorporate the design principles of Parks Without Borders into existing capital projects already in process, and set aside the remaining \$40 million to construct a set of eight showcase projects receiving large-scale capital redesigns. These were specially selected by gathering direct input from New Yorkers, who know these parks best.

To select the eight projects, we carried out an intensive approach to community engagement. For the first time in NYC Parks' history, we gave New Yorkers the opportunity to directly nominate local parks for inclusion, asking them to suggest parks they thought could benefit from this new design philosophy. We built a dynamic interactive online map that allowed New Yorkers not only to suggest parks for consideration, but also to zoom in on any park and suggest specific improvements. Your constituents had the opportunity to tell us where they wanted to see new entrances, park benches, or other improvements for the parks they visit and enjoy every day.

This online map was the centerpiece of a comprehensive outreach effort that helped us connect with New Yorkers across the City, including those with limited access to the internet.

To reach those who were less comfortable using web resources or lacked Internet access, we held 37 in-person events all over the city to present the program and collect feedback. We presented at Community Board meetings and civic organizations, which helped focus

our outreach across the city. We specifically targeted these meetings in neighborhoods with low levels of home high-speed internet access, so that we could focus on reaching the people that were least likely to find our website. , For these in-person events, we developed a table-top exercise that replicated the online map. This allowed us to hear from more New Yorkers, regardless of their computer, internet access or digital savvy.

This many layered approach was a success. We received over 6,100 nominations, relating to 692 different parks, roughly one third of all city parks, spread across all 59 Community Boards. The website comments were anonymous, but the letters and emails we received and the diversity of attendees at our in-person events made it clear that New Yorkers of all walks of life participated in this process, showing that they care about their parks. We had kids, community board members, local business owners and landscape architects. The wide diversity of participants and the raw volume of feedback and nominations for parks all over the city reflected how New Yorkers really responded to Parks Without Borders. They showed that they appreciated having a, voice in shaping this initiative.

In selecting the eight showcase sites, the first step was examining which parks received the most nominations. We evaluated the top ten vote-getting parks in each borough with three criteria in mind:

- **Community Support**, as evidenced by the nominations we received both online and in person;
- **Park Access**. A major goal of NYC Parks and the OneNYC plan is to bring 85% of New Yorkers within a walk of a park. We welcomed the opportunity to consider new entrances for a park, which can greatly increase the access for nearby residents.
- The last important factor to consider was the actual **Physical Conditions and Context** of each site. Because Parks Without Borders is primarily a design approach, it relies on certain physical conditions to be properly implemented. We wanted to make sure we selected projects where the approach would be feasible, and projects which would provide transformative benefits for the community. NYC Parks evaluated the most popular park choices, to determine locations that had the most potential to benefit from this design approach.

Using that criteria, we selected eight showcase projects, which were announced at our “Parks Without Borders” Summit last May, a first-of-its-kind conference which brought together thought leaders from a range of disciplines to discuss the future of parks and public spaces. Many of the Parks Committee members here today were able to attend the event, which we hope you enjoyed and we thank you for being there

Our eight showcase projects are:

- In the Bronx: Van Cortlandt Park and Hugh J. Grant Circle/Virginia Park
- In Queens: Flushing Meadows Corona Park
- In Brooklyn, Fort Greene Park and Prospect Park
- On Staten Island: Faber Park
- And in Manhattan: Seward Park and Jackie Robinson Park

So, catching you up to now:

Design for all eight projects is well underway. Last fall, we held robust and well-attended community input meetings for each of these eight projects to kick off design and continue the dialogue with the community about Parks Without Borders. Design on these eight will wrap up by the end of this calendar year, and we look forward to unveiling these reimaged spaces to the public by early 2020.

Beyond the eight showcase projects, the design goals and principles of Parks Without Borders are being applied to projects that are already in the Capital process pipeline, where feasible and appropriate. Thus far, approximately 40 projects have received supplementary funds, utilizing \$10 million of the Mayoral allocation, to expand the project scope and incorporate Parks Without Borders design principles.

In addition, we are already incorporating Parks Without Borders design concepts into dozens of capital projects across the five boroughs, within their existing budget and scope. So for example, when we reconstruct a playground or redesign a set of basketball courts, we are looking for opportunities to open up those parks and make them more connected to the surrounding neighborhood. We recognize that this approach won't work on every site, but we expect to impact hundreds of additional existing projects across the city.

One example is our current project to expand Brooklyn's Friends Field Playground. Today the entrances to the playground are narrow pathways both unwelcoming and hard to find. We are expanding the playground but have also included clearer, more welcoming entrances—one on the left and one on the right. You can see here that the new entrance on the right will align with Avenue L. We have worked with DOT on our plan to include crosswalks and a bump out at the Avenue L intersection. We are also installing a new sidewalk at this location, where none existed before. This design will make the entrances safer and more welcoming.

As we hope you will agree, the Parks Without Borders initiative has been a real success. This represents the efforts of NYC Parks to reimagine the role that parks and open space serve in our communities, and find innovative ways to breathe new life into older parks. We thank the Council for your partnership and advocacy for our city parks, and will be sure to keep you updated as these efforts continue.

We would like to also briefly address Intro. 1411, which would mandate that all parks with an athletic facility located within 500 feet of a public street provide paved pedestrian sidewalks and pathways linked to the street. As we think today's testimony makes clear, NYC Parks takes connectivity and accessibility very seriously when we design our park projects. We always look for opportunities to improve access and connections to park facilities. The vast majority of our properties with active recreation uses that are within proximity to City streets already have adjacent sidewalks and pathways providing connectivity to pedestrian access, public transit, and parking lots. Capital funding for planned work at a given site can often incorporate costs to bring existing sidewalks and pathways up to a state of good repair, and can be used to construct new sidewalks and pathways when deemed necessary and appropriate. Our Capital Division even employs an Accessibility Coordinator, working with our team of trained architects and landscape architects to personally review every single capital project to ensure that we are providing the best experience for all of our park visitors.

It is true that there are some park properties, such as greenways, parkways, natural areas or parks in less pedestrian-accessible areas, which are not abutted by sidewalks. Of course, issues around pedestrian access and connectivity are not unique to Parks property, but are important considerations everywhere throughout the City, which is why we work closely with the DOT and the DEP to address safety, stormwater capture, and other issues at the park edges. If a Council Member or other stakeholder feels a given property warrants the installation or improvement of sidewalks or pathways, we welcome that feedback, and would seek to incorporate those elements into any planned Capital work at that site. We encourage Council Members with concerns about specific properties to work with our Borough Commissioners to address concerns about accessibility, connectivity or safety. Though we appreciate the goals and intent behind Intro. 1411, we think a legislative approach to compel the installation of sidewalks or pathways on specific properties is overly broad. This "one-size-fits-all" approach would prove operationally and fiscally problematic.

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today and for all your great advocacy for Parks via your work on this committee. We will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.



**New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Hearing on Parks Without Borders and Int. 1411 Relating to Pedestrian Access to Parks
Facilities
February 13, 2017
Lynn Kelly, Executive Director**

Good afternoon, my name is Lynn Kelly, and I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. I want to thank the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation for inviting us to speak on this issue today.

NY4P has supported the Parks Without Borders initiative since it was announced in 2015. We know that the value of a park to the surrounding community is greatly reduced if community members are unable to easily access the space, and proximity does not necessarily mean accessibility. One of the great benefits of this initiative is that the city now measures accessibility using the same metric we had long endorsed: that residents should be within a one-quarter mile sidewalk route to a park entrance, not just the park itself. By improving entrances and creating more access, the city will encourage usership and make each park more inviting and safer.

As an organization that seeks to support park stewards and community groups, we welcomed the process for selecting the eight parks that received \$5 million each in capital funds. By encouraging the public to submit their ideas for which parks should receive this funding, NYC Parks was able to engage community members directly in the decision-making process, which is a powerful gesture that we hope will ensure long-term community stewardship of these spaces once they are complete. We also applaud the inclusion of \$10 million for parks projects already in the capital pipeline that required more funding, and were good candidates for edge redesign. As the Council well knows, many parks projects fall short of achieving all necessary improvements because of a lack of funding, so this commitment to fill in funding gaps through Parks Without Borders is a welcome component of the program.

It is also encouraging to hear that NYC Parks is committed to including the design and access concepts of Parks Without Borders in all future capital projects as applicable. As always, New Yorkers for Parks encourages the Council and the Mayor's office to complement these visionary capital initiatives with much-needed maintenance funding. In order for capital programs like Parks Without Borders, the Community Parks Initiative, and the Anchor Parks program to have a true long-term impact, there must be more baselined permanent maintenance and operations staff, without which we the risk of undoing the important infrastructure work being completed by NYC Parks.

With regards to today's legislation, we support the idea that recreation facilities that currently lack adequate public pathways should have these vital pieces of infrastructure installed where possible and appropriate. It is our understanding that the number of parks and facilities impacted by the lack of pathways is fairly limited, but for the community members who live in parts of the city where there aren't adequate pathways installed, this can be a tremendous barrier to access and use of these spaces. We hope the Council and NYC Parks will work to identify where pathways are lacking, and move forward with a budget and plan to increase access for all New Yorkers in the neighborhoods that currently lack this infrastructure.

In closing, I want to encourage the Council and the administration to continue finding ways to fund creative initiatives, like Parks Without Borders, that improve the quality and condition of parks throughout the five boroughs. Although we know the budget may be impacted by actions at the federal level, we believe public open space remains as critical to the health of our neighborhoods, and our city, as ever. Without meaningful funding to continue these visionary capital programs, or the funding needed to ensure that there are enough staff at NYC Parks oversee critical day-to-day maintenance, our communal open spaces will suffer.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I welcome any questions you may have..

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

www.ny4p.org



**New York City Council
Committee on Parks and Recreation
Oversight Hearing – Parks Without Border Initiative update Int. No 1411
February 13, 2017**

**New York Restoration Project Testimony
By Deborah Marton
Executive Director**

NYRP applauds the work of this Committee and the Parks Department to optimize parks through *Parks Without Borders*. In fact, NYRP was founded on the idea that clean, safe, and beautiful open spaces, well-integrated within the context of a neighborhood, form the necessary foundation for stable, thriving communities. We are here today to urge this committee to consider extending the goals of *Parks Without Borders* to open spaces across the city.

And there's enormous opportunity. *Public Assets*, a recent report issued by the Municipal Arts Society, identified more than 3000 properties owned or leased by the city classified as having no current use. Totalling approximately 1,800 acres, opening these properties to public access would be like adding more than two Central Parks. The benefit of this increase would be profound.

At NYRP, we use land to drive social justice. Joining forces with the community itself, our integrated process includes community engagement, design and construction, maintenance and operations, education, and activation of open spaces through a range of programs. We strongly believe our approach optimizes use in urban open spaces and should be standardized city wide.

We recently received a letter that best illustrates this approach in action. After we built a new garden from a vacant lot in West Brighton, on Staten Island, a community member wrote this:

Thank you for your help last March in the build of the garden beds, and all the materials you provided to help us get off to a great start. This past growing season we grew, harvested, and donated over 1,000 pounds of organic and nutritionally dense veggies to our local community. We established a relationship with a Senior Center where our produce was cooked and served to the seniors in a day program. We also hosted some kid's groups who came to the garden for some great education and hands on work.

We plan to create a teen program for education and garden work, and to help teens see the garden as a safe welcoming place, a refuge.

As this committee is aware, NYRP works on our own spaces, as well as on city-owned land across jurisdictions – Parks, Transportation, Housing, Education, etc. We stand ready to partner with you to bring the *Parks Without Borders* vision of a more inclusive, accessible public realm to reality citywide – in parks and beyond.



**Fort Greene Park
Conservancy**
85 South Oxford st.
Brooklyn, NY 11217

Board of Directors:

Charles Jarden, Chair
Joseph Gutleber Jr., Treasurer
Frederick Lasker, Secretary
Susan Butler
Daly Clement
Ralph Decatrel
Neil Glaser
Danielle Levoit
Ted Johnson
Eli Malinsky
Caroline Purdy
Barbara Sheehan

Staff:

Julian Macrone
Helen Song

Testimony to be delivered to the New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

Re: Examination of the Parks Without Borders Initiative

February 13, 2016

Good afternoon Chairperson Levine and members of the Committee, and thank you for your invitation to testify today on Parks Without Borders. My name is Julian Macrone, Program and Development Manager for the Fort Greene Park Conservancy. We applaud Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Silver's visionary commitment to building a more connected, equitable park system. We hope that Parks Without Borders will see further funding for capital investment and long-term maintenance of these new improvements both in Fort Greene and across the City.

Enjoyed by children, parents, families, and commuters, the Myrtle Avenue streetscape and plazas are already well-utilized by the nearly 80,000 members of our community. Parks Without Borders will bring critical improvements to accessibility, safety, amenities, and circulation to one of the park's largest open spaces. These will provide a world-class park experience for 6,000 residents of NYCHA's Whitman and Ingersoll Houses right across the street, including future residents of a 142 unit all-affordable senior housing development at Ingersoll. Parks Without Borders will also remedy poor lighting and visibility in the plazas and corridor, creating a safer park for all users. Additionally, the program will bring vital infrastructure improvements to a park in the center of a community board that in the last four years has ranked third in permits for new authorized units and first in new certificates of occupancy issued citywide.¹ This is planning done right, and planning that our community desperately needs to preserve livability.

The funding allocated—together with historic commitments from Borough President Adams and Council Member Cumbo—anchor the single largest investment in Fort Greene Park since Robert Moses was Parks Commissioner. In stark contrast to the style of those years, we have watched Commissioner Silver's team craft an inclusive, comprehensive engagement strategy committed to incorporating the public's voice. Through both online channels and in-person meetings, our neighbors recommended specific improvements and engaged in a public process exhibiting tremendous transparency and respect for existing use. Commissioner Silver and his team were always eager to listen, and eager to learn.

(over)

¹ Furman Center. (2015). State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods in 2014. <http://furmancenter.org/files/sotc/NYUFurmanCenter_SOC2014_HighRes.pdf>.

Through the public outreach campaign we coordinated with the Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn Partnership, which won the second most votes of any park in Brooklyn, we were also able to build relationships with community groups and stakeholders on every side of the park. Parks Without Borders has enabled our group to build a coalition around bridging the gap between socioeconomically disparate populations on Fort Greene Park's north and south sides, as the proposed improvements will directly address community concerns that the northern plazas feel physically disconnected from the rest of the park.

Further, improvements will steward the shared use of the park by different user groups as new spaces are reenvisioned to promote activity and interaction. We look forward to the opportunity to work with DPR and our community to design programming for these new spaces that will meet the needs of and celebrate the people of different cultures, abilities, and identities that use Fort Greene Park.

We believe, as Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Silver do, that connected communities are stronger communities. In every respect, Parks Without Borders is laying the literal and figurative groundwork for a stronger Fort Greene. Without this program, these improvements may have been decades away. It is our sincere hope that moving forward, the Council will lead the way in obtaining continued budgetary support for the initiative, and ensure that DPR has the funding necessary to maintain and program the transformative improvements Parks Without Borders is bringing to communities citywide.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I would be happy to answer any further questions.

Julian Macrone
Program and Development Manager
Fort Greene Park Conservancy
jmacrone@fortgreenepark.org
973.563.5212

FOR THE RECORD

To: New York City Parks and Recreation Committee

Chairperson: Mark Levine, District 07;

Members: Alan N. Maisel, District 46; Andrew Cohen, District 11; Darlene Mealy, District 41; Fernando Cabrera, District 14; James G. Van Bramer, District 26; Mark Treyger, District 47.

From: Michelle D. Winfield, *100 Committee to Commemorate the Children's Court*

Date: February 13, 2017

Re: Street co-naming "Children's Court," 22nd Street and Third Avenue, Manhattan

Dear Committee:

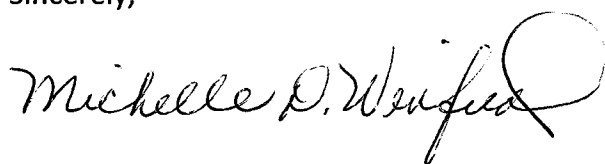
On behalf of many community members in the Gramercy Park area in Manhattan, I am in support of co-naming the street at 22nd Street and Third Avenue, "Children's Court."

From 1915 –1957, families received support and guidance from judges and other social services in the newly designed Children's Courts. In a letter, one hundred years ago, Mayor John Purroy Mitchel writes "...in cooperation with other judges, we now have in the City of New York one of the most effective Children's Courts in the world."

With the co-naming of the Children's Court, the important work that was accomplished will be illuminated forever.

Thank you for your support of the Children's Court co-naming resolution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michelle D. Winfield". The signature is fluid and includes a large loop at the end.

Michelle D. Winfield Chairperson

Contact information: 320 East 25th Street, 8 DD New York, NY 10010, 212-779-0657

shelleywinf@aol.com

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/13/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deborah Marton

Address: 254 W. 31 St. NY, NY 10001

I represent: New York Restoration Project

Address: →

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in favor in opposition

Date: 2/13/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MATT DRUBY

Address: Dir. of Gov't Relations

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: 2/13/17

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Name: NANCY PRINCE

Address: DEPT CHIEF FOR DESIGN DESIGN

I represent: NYC PARKS

Address: _____

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Date: 2/13/17

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Name: SARAH NEILSON

Address: CHIEF OF POLICY : LONG-RANGE

I represent: PLANNING at NYC Parks

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: 2/13/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lynn Kelly

Address: 55 Broad St.

I represent: New Yorkers for Parks

Address: 55 Broad St

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in favor in opposition

Date: 2/13/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Julian Macrone

Address: 85 S. Oxford St

I represent: Fort Greene Park Conservancy

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2-13-17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: CAROL ANASTASIO

Address: 268 E. BROADWAY A1106

I represent: The Seward Park Conservancy

Address: above

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms