



**March 4, 2026**

**New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation**

**Oversight: Ensuring the Long-Term Health and Growth of the City's Tree Stock**

Testimony by: Tricia Shimamura, Commissioner, NYC Parks

Good morning, Chair Hankerson, members of the Parks Committee, and other members of the City Council. I am Tricia Shimamura, Commissioner at NYC Parks. I'm pleased to be joined today by our Assistant Commissioner of Forestry and Horticulture, Ben Osborne, as well as our Chief of Citywide Legislative Affairs, Matt Drury. We're also pleased to be joined by our colleagues from the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, including the City's Chief Climate Officer Louise Yeung, and their Deputy Executive Director Paul Lozito.

I am honored to be here for my first opportunity to formally testify on behalf of the agency as Commissioner, so I'd like to take a brief moment to share a little bit about my personal history. I had the opportunity to work with many of you in my most recent role as Parks' Manhattan Borough Commissioner, as well as during some of the other governmental roles I have served in recent years, but I actually began my career in public service as a social worker in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, working with students and their families. Like many of those families, I grew up believing that the government was not something meant for people who necessarily looked like me or came from families like mine, and the problems we encountered often seemed too broken and too large for any one person to be able to fix. But through that experience, I started to see government as not only a way to deliver change, but also a way to deliver belonging in a city that so many call home, and our city parks and open spaces are a hugely important component of making that a reality. I was humbled to be appointed by Mayor Mamdani to lead this agency that I love so much, and which touches the lives of millions of New Yorkers each and every day. I deeply appreciate and understand that the agency I now have the honor of leading has a mandate to uphold and a critical role to play in the future of our city, and I look forward to working productively and cooperatively with the Council, so we can give New Yorkers the incredible city park system they deserve.

I'd like to begin my testimony today by noting our appreciation for the Council's continued advocacy for our City parks, and for the resources and support it has provided for our forestry efforts. The City's urban canopy is one of the most vital resources the city has in ensuring our



neighborhoods are healthy and thriving. It provides numerous measurable benefits to everyone living in the five boroughs, including improving human health and well-being, and I am very proud of the work our Parkies do every day to grow and protect our City's trees. Yet the importance of our urban tree canopy can often be overlooked and undervalued, even though our city's trees are essential living infrastructure, just as vital for New Yorkers as roads, subways, and telecommunications lines.

New York City has nearly 43,000 acres of tree canopy, a full 23.4% of the city's land area, which is best defined as the "cover" or shade provided by our city trees. This robust urban forest provides an incredible array of environmental, social, and economic benefits, such as reducing stormwater runoff, shading buildings and conserving energy by reducing heating and cooling costs, protecting city pavement from rain and sun, noise mitigation, increasing property values, and of course, cleaning and cooling the air, benefiting our overall health and well-being. Though a lot of the public's attention is focused on the value of planting new trees, it is important to note that the benefits from tree canopy increase exponentially when you protect and nourish the growth of the larger healthy trees that already exist.

We are proud to be known as the agency of trees - our agency logo, recognized around the world, is literally symbolized by a tree leaf - and NYC Parks is responsible for roughly half of the city's tree canopy, nearly 23,000 acres. The rest of our city's tree canopy grows on a combination of private and public land parcels, such as residential front and back yards, cemeteries, vacant land, and other public lands not managed by NYC Parks, such as NYCHA campuses, NYC Public Schools' schoolyards, or State property. The trees that make up the canopy under our care generally fall into one of three categories: they are located in one of our natural forests, in landscaped areas of a park, or along our City streets. We estimate there are nearly 5 million trees in our natural forests, and those are managed by our agency's Natural Resource Group as part of the forested ecosystem, which includes understory vegetation, soils, and wildlife. We will welcome the opportunity to further discuss the care of our natural forests and other related topics with the Council, but maintaining and growing our City's tree stock is an incredibly sweeping subject, encompassing many technical and complex nuances, so for the purposes of today's hearing, we'd like to focus on our street trees and trees in landscaped parks. These are the trees that are individually managed by our agency, nearly 823,000 trees –



over 666,000 of which are along city streets and nearly 157,000 of which are growing in landscaped areas of parks.

I'd like to provide a quick update on the tree impacts resulting from late February's Winter Storm Hernando, which produced the most significant impacts we've witnessed from a snowstorm since 2018. I'm grateful to our expert forestry crews at Parks, and to our partners on the Downed Tree Task Force including NYC Emergency Management, Department of Sanitation, FDNY, and NYPD, who worked as one team to respond to the reports we were hearing from the public and bring some normalcy back to our city. During the course of the storm, we received more than 1,800 tree-related service requests, which included a significant portion of duplicate requests related to the same concern, as often happens during storms. After performing over 1,200 inspections, all of which were completed within 48 hours of the end of the storm, our foresters confirmed a total of over 220 fallen trees due to the storm, including 47 that were blocking streets and 9 trees or large limbs that fell on buildings, all of which were addressed within 72 hours after the storm ended. We created over 1,000 work orders related to damaged or fallen trees and limbs, and are completing that work as quickly as possible, prioritizing the most severe and dangerous conditions. To be clear, this can be complex and challenging work, especially in slippery and snowy conditions, involving the use of heavy equipment and large vehicles, so we thank New Yorkers for their patience and support as this work continues.

Even outside of emergency extreme weather conditions, our agency is dedicated to caring for our trees in a way that keeps New Yorkers safe, so we utilize a rigorous Risk Management approach to prioritize tree conditions that present the most risk to the public and address those immediately. This involves a comprehensive inspection program carried out by some of the most qualified foresters in the country, accompanied by responsive in-house crews working alongside contractors who focus on proactive tree maintenance, including neighborhood block pruning, tree-related sidewalk repair and pest and disease control. While we believe that the totality of the benefits that trees provide greatly outweigh the inconveniences that can be caused, the simple truth is that trees are living and growing entities that can come into conflict with surrounding infrastructure at times. Our Forestry team has taken steps in recent years to improve best practices in hopes of minimizing these negative impacts, such as enlarging our standard tree beds to allow more room for root growth, doing our best to avoid building damage



due to tree limbs, and being more selective about the tree species being planted in a given location to avoid conflict with above-ground or below-ground infrastructure. Though it will take significant time before the full impact of these efforts is borne out, we are committed to continue seeking the best possible outcomes while protecting and nurturing this vital living infrastructure.

Since we believe that every New York City neighborhood should get to enjoy the benefits that trees provide, we're working to expand our tree canopy with new plantings all over the city delivered in a more efficient and equitable fashion, thanks to the concentrated planting strategy adopted through our recently-launched Neighborhood Tree Planting program. For years, new street trees were often planted primarily upon request, leading to inefficient planting around the city, resulting in some neighborhoods receiving a larger percentage of new trees while other neighborhoods went without. Now, new street trees are getting planted on a data-driven basis of fairness and efficiency—prioritizing the most heat-vulnerable neighborhoods first, as a matter of environmental justice.

Over a 9-year period, NYC Parks will service the entire city with new trees in a strategic and equitable manner, ensuring that every street location that is appropriate and viable for a tree will have been planted by the end of that timeframe. Through this new approach, a significant portion of every community district in the city will receive new trees at least once every three years. Additionally, while NYC Parks will be planting new street trees through a more comprehensive approach along each city block, we will concurrently remove tree stumps and dead or dying trees, plant in all appropriate locations, and identify all unplantable tree beds, either restoring them to pavement or working with local community members that volunteer to care for it as garden space. Even in its early stages, this new strategic approach is already delivering results for New Yorkers. In the fall-winter planting season that just concluded, our agency set a 10-year high-water mark as more than 9,500 trees were planted along our streets and in our parks, in neighborhoods that were the most vulnerable to the impacts of extreme heat. We worked with nurseries to prepare a larger stock of trees well in advance of the planting season and coordinated an incredible effort among our foresters, tree procurement team, and our contractors. We look forward to building on this great success as we resume planting in the spring. We have already reached out to your Council offices and local community boards to share maps and other details about the upcoming planting season, so



NYC Parks

please let us know if there is any additional information that would be helpful for your constituents.

The health of our tree canopy would not be possible without support from the city's numerous advocacy groups and the diligent work of our numerous Parks stewards and volunteers. These volunteers generously donate their time and energy to looking after our city trees in coordination with our incredible Stewardship team to build and foster a community-based culture of caring for trees. Please encourage your constituents to sign up for stewardship events via the NYC Parks website, or care for their neighborhood trees by watering trees weekly and weeding unwanted plants from tree beds. New Yorkers can even record their tree care activities on the NYC Tree Map located on our agency website.

We're also in the midst of our decennial "Trees Count" tree census, in which volunteers are helping us survey and count all of the trees within our landscaped parks. Over 2,500 dedicated tree-lovers came out last summer to take part of this effort, which will start back up in the spring, and we welcome all of you to help us get the word out and even come out and join us in the parks. This grassroots volunteer effort in our parks will be accompanied by the use of groundbreaking technology, as we plan to count every street tree in New York City using state-of-the-art LiDAR scanners that will create 3D models of every tree, providing information about each tree's size, species, condition, and location in incredible detail.

Though we don't have time today to exhaustively outline every effort the agency is taking to ensure the long-term health and growth of the city's tree canopy, I hope this overview has helped demonstrate our commitment to growing and protecting this living infrastructure that is absolutely vital for New Yorkers. Moreover, I hope you leave this hearing with a renewed appreciation for our trees and the people who care for them, including the NYC Parks foresters, climbers, pruners, as well as the larger pool of NYC Parks horticulture professionals who care for our vast and diverse park system. Thank you for allowing us to testify before you today and for your continued advocacy and support for our city parks. We are now happy to answer any questions that you may have.



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## New York Restoration Project

Testimony before New York City Council  
Committee on Parks and Recreation Oversight  
3/4/2026

Good afternoon. My name is Lynn Bodnar Kelly, and I am the Executive Director of New York Restoration Project (NYRP). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and a hearty congratulations to Parks Committee Chair Ty Hankerson and to all the members of the Parks Committee. We look forward to working closely with the Committee to advance this critical work.

Simply put, NYRP knows trees. For more than 30 years, NYRP has planted trees, renovated community gardens, restored parks, and expanded access to green space across all five boroughs. Together, with the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, NYRP helped lead MillionTreesNYC, a historic partnership that planted one million trees citywide by 2015. This effort not only expanded canopy cover but also engaged tens of thousands of New Yorkers in stewardship and environmental education. Today, we steward thousands of these trees that are now mature and delivering measurable benefits.

As climate change intensifies, trees are frontline infrastructure. They reduce urban heat island effect, manage stormwater by intercepting rainfall, improve air quality, enhance biodiversity, and strengthen neighborhood resilience. In a city where extreme heat is the deadliest climate risk, expanding and maintaining tree canopy is a life-saving investment.

That is why NYRP to this day gives away thousands of free trees each year. From April 4 through May 16, 2026, we will distribute 3,750 trees across the five boroughs. With this year's Free Tree Giveaway, we will surpass 80,500 trees given directly to New Yorkers since the program began. These trees are planted in backyards and community spaces, extending canopy growth beyond streets and parks and empowering residents to become long-term stewards.

To ensure the long-term health and growth of the City's tree stock, we urge the Council to:



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1. Fully fund tree maintenance, including pruning cycles and young tree care, to protect past planting investments.
2. Prioritize equitable canopy expansion in heat-vulnerable neighborhoods.
3. Strengthen interagency coordination to protect existing mature trees during development and infrastructure projects.
4. Invest in workforce development to grow the next generation of urban foresters and arborists.

Trees are not amenities; they are essential public infrastructure.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to the long-term health of New York City's urban forest.



**New York City Council**

**Oversight: Ensuring the Long-Term Health and Growth of the City's Tree Stock  
Committee on Parks and Recreation**

**March 4, 2026**

**Testimony By: Oded Holzinger, Natural Areas Conservancy, Executive Director**

My name is Oded Holzinger, and I am the executive director of the Natural Areas Conservancy (NAC). Thank you to Chair Hankerson and the members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to provide testimony.

The NAC is the citywide conservancy that champions our 20,000 acres of forested natural areas and wetlands through targeted research, stewardship, and advocacy. We are also a proud member of the Forest for All NYC and Play Fair coalitions.

Natural areas contain 5 million of our city's 7 million trees, capture 70% of the city's carbon, and absorb almost 25% of the city's stormwater, saving the city up to \$760 million annually in water treatment costs. We've also found that our natural forests can be almost 13 degrees cooler than surrounding streetscapes during extreme heat events, offering respite and cooling benefits to neighborhoods across the five boroughs.

The NAC has also been working closely with our partners at the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice (MOCEJ) to support the development of the forthcoming Urban Forest Plan, which will outline concrete strategies for reaching the citywide 30% canopy cover target required by Local Law 148. It's important to note that achieving this target will not be possible without active preservation and management of our forested natural areas, which again contain the majority of our city's trees.

In 2018, we co-created the Forest Management Framework (FMF) with our partners at NYC Parks. This 25-year, \$385 million framework was created to provide a roadmap for the city to address the urgent ecological threats facing our city. In the last seven fiscal years, only \$16.5 million has been allocated to support the implementation of the framework, with inconsistent year-over-year funding. This has led to the loss of staff, and delayed the necessary care and management of our forested natural areas, putting our mature trees at risk.

In 2024, the NAC and NYC Parks conducted the second Ecological Assessment (EA) of our forested natural areas, and found troubling signs of declining health in the decade since our first EA was completed. We found invasive vines present in 92% of the forest plots that our researchers surveyed, and also found that our forest midstory is showing a decline in the number of native trees. Both of these data points indicate that our tree canopy is suffering and that long-term forest regeneration is at risk. The vast presence of vines is also a consequence of insufficient staffing to care for our forests; with more permanent on-the-ground staff for forest care, NYC Parks would better be able to manage this threat.

Caring for NYC's forests and wetlands is one of the most economically effective ways to combat extreme heat, flooding, and pollution, but for far too long, these spaces have been subject to ongoing cuts. Reliable access to high quality nature in our parks is also vital to both the public



and mental health of the over eight million New Yorkers who call this city home, providing free or very low-cost options for recreation and respite. However, the chronic disinvestment in natural areas shows that policy makers are not doing enough to conserve these spaces. We look forward to speaking in more detail about the budgetary and staffing needs to ensure that our forested natural areas receive the care they need at the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget hearing later this month..

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today.





**Testimony of Alia Soomro, Deputy Director for New York City Policy  
New York League of Conservation Voters  
City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation  
Oversight Hearing on Ensuring the Long-Term Health and Growth of the City's Tree Stock  
March 4, 2026**

My name is Alia Soomro and I am the Deputy Director for New York City Policy at the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). NYLCV is a statewide environmental advocacy organization representing over 30,000 members in New York City. Thank you, Chair Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to comment.

As a baseline, equitable access to parks, green spaces, and tree canopy is essential for the overall health of our city and is one of NYLCV's top priorities. Our city's parks system increases quality of life, promotes climate resilience, provides union jobs, and fosters social and economic growth in every borough.

As co-founders of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, along with New Yorkers for Parks, DC37, and over 400 organizations, we demand a City budget that gives NYC Parks the fair funding they deserve. NYLCV is also a member of Forest for All NYC (FFANYC), a coalition of nearly 140 organizations committed to protecting, maintaining, and expanding the City's urban forest and equitably achieve 30% tree canopy cover by 2035.

If we want to maintain our parks system, invest in our city's workforce, increase our tree canopy, and prepare our open spaces for climate change, first and foremost, our elected officials must increase funding for our city's parks system.

In his campaign for Mayor, Zohran Mamdani pledged to allocate 1% of the city budget to NYC Parks. NYLCV appreciated the Mayor's promise, but was disappointed that the NYC Parks budget decreased by \$33 million from FY26 to FY27, primarily due to a loss of Mayoral one-shot funding that was not carried over from last year. This means that parks were designated for only 0.5% of the budget. It puts parks in the same position they have been in for years. Underfunded parks are an equity and public health issue, as [Mayor Mamdani has noted](#), and we hope it will receive more support in the FY27 Adopted Budget.

As the FY27 budget cycle is underway, the Mamdani Administration has the opportunity to rebuild an agency crippled by decades of disinvestment and, more recently, four years of disproportionate budget/PEG cuts and a hiring freeze. As a co-founder of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, and a member of the Forest for All NYC Coalition, NYLCV recommends the following for the FY27 budget:

- Baseline the 274 parks positions currently funded by one-year contracts (Parks Enforcement Patrol, Rangers, Forestry, etc.) to retain staff long-term.
- End the hiring freeze and restore 600 eliminated full-time baselined union parks positions (City Parks Workers, Forestry, Capital Projects, frontline staff).
- Add 460 Parks 2nd-shift cleaners to staff 400 high-use sites and keep parks and restrooms clean.
- Add 227 forestry staff to address a backlog of 20,000+ uninspected tree conditions and 35,000+ open work orders.
- Create borough-specific mowing crews by adding 80 dedicated lawn-care positions to address the agency's documented inability to care for park lawns and playing fields.
- Restore 59 capital team positions and add 60 more so that the nearly 100 stalled capital projects can resume, unlocking ~\$450 million in neighborhood green space and resiliency investments.
- Increase trades staffing by 40% (130 tradespeople: plumbers, electricians, carpenters, masons, roofers, painters, etc.) for faster repairs and violation clearing.
- Invest \$21.2 million to expand hours/services at all 36 recreation centers so 22 centers can operate 7 days/week, providing more programming and access.
- Add 250 PEP officers to increase the uniformed presence at 120 high-need parks.
- Increase overtime funding to \$40 million so Parks can respond to storms, emergencies, and routine repairs outside regular hours.

Moreover, NYC Parks manages 53.3% of the total urban forest canopy in the city. New York City's urban forests and natural areas provide countless environmental and social benefits to city residents, including reducing urban flooding and managing stormwater runoff which keeps pollutants out of waterways and mitigating the impacts of extreme heat. Trees also play a critical role in reducing outdoor temperatures. Urban trees can cool city streets up to 2°F, while forested natural areas are on average 6°F cooler than surrounding neighborhoods.

Along with the Forest for All NYC Coalition, NYLCV was a strong supporter of the passage of Local Law 148 of 2023, which requires the City to create an Urban Forest Plan that aims to help the City expand the tree canopy from the current 23% coverage to 30% coverage. We hope to see the publication of this plan this spring, and urge the Administration and City Council to allocate \$1 million for the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to publicize and begin implementing the city's first Urban Forest Plan, along with non-NYC Parks agencies tasked with heightened maintenance and expansion of trees in their jurisdictions.

NYLCV stands with the Play Fair for Parks Coalition and the Forest For All NYC Coalition calling for increasing funding and the equitable allocation of our parks, trees, and green spaces. NYLCV looks forward to working with the City Council, Mamdani Administration, and fellow advocates to ensure our City's parks get the funding they need.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

March 09, 2026

New York City Council  
Committee on Parks and Recreation  
Oversight Hearing:  
Ensuring the Long-Term health and Growth of the City's Tree Stock

Re: Fort Greene Park Conservancy's Testimony

Greetings, my name is Rosamond Fletcher, and I'm Executive Director of the Fort Greene Park Conservancy. We are a member of the Play Fair for Parks and Forest for All coalitions, both of whom were well-represented at the hearing on March 4, 2026. We were unable to attend but want to thank the City Council Committee on Parks Chair Tyrell Hankerson for holding the hearing, and for reading our written testimony.

The urban tree canopy cools neighborhoods, reduces the heat island effect, improves air quality, captures stormwater, absorbs greenhouse gases, supports wildlife, and provides mental and physical health benefits. This health of our tree canopy is particularly critical for environmental justice areas in New York City, include the EJ area and NYS Disadvantaged Community adjacent to the northern edge of Fort Greene Park. Here, ~12,000 people live in public housing, and depend on the trees in Fort Greene Park.

While there has been controversy regarding planned capital improvements in Fort Greene Park—and related tree removals—we are supportive of the project. The modifications will improve accessibility in the park and lay the groundwork for the long-term environmental health of the park by adding native trees and removing invasive trees that prevent undergrowth and promote erosion, the number one issue in the park. NYC Parks' Forestry division has been essential to these plans and will be needed to sustain the health of the more the 200 trees that will be planted during the construction. However, the prior Mayoral administration cut the NYC Parks Forestry division, despite the pressing scope of work in Fort Greene and across the city.

NYC Parks needs 227 additional forestry staff and \$29 million in FY27 to improve response times, expand tree pruning and removals, support maintenance and restoration, and allow a 7-day-a-week operation that meets service level agreements. NYC Parks has a backlog of more than 20,000 uninspected tree conditions and 35,000 unaddressed work orders, putting New Yorkers and their property at risk. With current staffing levels, this backlog will grow as storms become more frequent and intense. During the recent blizzard alone, there were nearly 2,000 service requests.

Fort Greene Park lost four evergreen trees and numerous limbs in the recent blizzard. We are organizing a fundraising campaign to replace these trees, but we must rely on the Forestry division, with the equipment and specialized training, to remove the fallen trees and stumps. This partnership between the City and park partners is key to making real progress on NYC's Urban Forest Plan.

Community District 2 in Brooklyn, including Fort Greene, is slated to receive new street trees as part of NYC Parks' new planting plans. This is fantastic, but only if we can keep them in good health, and expand these benefits to other districts at a greater pace per NYC's Urban Forest Plan. Street trees play a huge role in the City's environmental health, generating about \$151 million in annual environmental benefits, including carbon sequestration, stormwater capture, and reduced energy use.

Beyond the historic walls of Fort Greene Park, New York City's natural forests cover 7,300 acres, about one quarter of parkland, and include more than 5 million trees. Chronic underfunding limits safe access to this nature in many low- and moderate-income communities and weakens our climate resilience as a whole. Without sustained investment, forests will continue to decline due to invasive species, dumping, and neglect.

The City should invest in long-term restoration and maintenance, fully implement the Urban Forest Plan, and leverage partnerships to protect public safety, strengthen climate resilience, and improve quality of life for all New Yorkers.

**We call on the Mayor and City Council to make this happen!**

Thank you for your time,



Rosamond Fletcher  
Executive Director

**Written Testimony of Leila Mougoui Bakhtiari**  
**Director, Landscape Management, Prospect Park Alliance**  
**New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation**  
**Oversight Hearing Ensuring the Long-Term Health and Growth of the City's Tree Stock**  
**Wednesday, March 4, 2026**

Dear Chair Hankerson and Members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation:

On behalf of Prospect Park Alliance, the non-profit partner that sustains and restores Prospect Park in partnership with the City, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the health of our city's urban forest. My name is Leila Mougoui Bakhtiari, and as the Director of Landscape Management, I oversee the stewardship of the 250 acres of natural areas within Prospect Park—the last remaining upland forest in Brooklyn.

While public discourse often focuses on the planting of new street trees, we must recognize that our mature forests are the true "stock" of our city's ecological wealth. Prospect Park's forest is not merely a collection of trees; it is a high-functioning ecosystem providing millions of dollars in annual environmental benefits, from cooling our borough to absorbing massive amounts of stormwater.

Data from the 2017–2021 canopy study suggests that the majority of our city's canopy gain is driven by the growth of existing trees, rather than new plantings. This confirms what we see on the ground: the most effective way to reach the city's goal of 30% canopy cover is to ensure the survival and health of the mature trees we already have.

The reality of our changing climate means that extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and severe. We saw the direct impact of this just last week during the blizzard on Sunday, February 22nd. As of today, the Alliance's Landscape Management team has identified approximately 60 damaged trees across Prospect Park. Of these, roughly 25 trees sustained such severe damage that they must be removed to restore public safety. These losses include mature trees that have anchored our canopy for decades.

While the Alliance is dedicated to these restoration efforts, the scale of this damage requires the specialized skill and heavy equipment of the NYC Parks Forestry unit. This scenario demonstrates that even in parks with dedicated non-profit partners, we rely heavily on a well-funded, well-staffed NYC Parks Department to respond to emergencies and maintain safety.

Healthy forests are sustained through consistent, expert stewardship—not just initial planting. However, our ability to maintain this vital infrastructure is severely limited by chronic underfunding. Currently, the city faces a backlog of over 35,000 unaddressed tree work orders.

It costs approximately \$3,600 to plant and establish a single new tree, yet we risk losing the invaluable benefits of our mature trees because we lack the baselined staff to care for them during both routine maintenance and acute weather crises. We cannot plant our way out of a maintenance and emergency-response crisis.

To ensure the long-term health of the urban forest, the Prospect Park Alliance joins our partners at Forest for All NYC and New Yorkers for Parks in calling for:

- **Baseline Funding for Forestry Staff:** We urge the Council to fund the \$29 million request for 227 additional forestry positions to address the maintenance backlog and ensure the city can respond to storm events like the February 22nd blizzard quickly and safely.
- **Prioritizing Natural Areas:** We ask that the forthcoming 10-year Urban Forest Plan (LL 148/2023) explicitly includes dedicated resources for the restoration and maintenance of forested natural areas like those in Prospect Park.

Prospect Park's forest is essential to the health and well-being of millions of New Yorkers. We ask the administration to hear this call to better fund the department so we can stay on top of these increasing climate emergencies.



March 9, 2026

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**Testimony of WE ACT for Environmental Justice  
to the Joint New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation  
on March 9, 2026 regarding Fiscal Year '27 Preliminary Budget for the  
Urban Forest.**

Dear Committee Chair Ty Hankerson and other esteemed members of the  
Parks and Recreation Committee,

WE ACT for Environmental Justice (WE ACT) is writing to testify on the  
need to invest in the City's future by funding environmental and climate  
policies and programs. Founded in 1988, WE ACT is a community-based  
organization in Harlem, New York City. At the city, state and federal levels  
WE ACT has been fighting environmental racism – racial discrimination in  
environmental policy-making, enforcement of regulations and laws, and  
targeting communities of color for toxic waste disposal and siting of polluting  
industries. We recognize and advocate for community-driven solutions that  
can remedy the institutionalized harms associated with unjust urban planning  
policies that have plagued communities of color for generations. Likewise,  
WE ACT stands firmly amongst over 500 organizations in our commitment  
to justly and equitably protecting, maintaining, expanding New York City's  
urban forest, and as a member of both the [Forest for All NYC](#) and [Play  
Fair for Parks Coalition](#).

Due to historic disinvestment and structural racism, such as redlining, our  
parks, green spaces, and access to the City's waterfront are not equitably  
distributed. Chronic underfunding limits safe access to nature in many low- and  
moderate-income communities and weakens climate resilience. Without sustained  
investment, urban forests will continue to decline due to invasive species,  
dumping, and neglect.

**We strongly urge this Council to execute the City's commitment to its  
resilience and climate health goals by fully funding NYC's through the  
following actions:**

**1. Fund the NYC Parks Department at 1% of the total FY25 budget.**

We are [lagging behind](#) other major cities in our budget allocation to  
parks, despite having far more acreage to maintain. San Francisco  
spends 1.6 percent of its municipal budget on parks, Los Angeles  
spends 2.9 percent, Chicago 4.3 percent and Minneapolis 5.3 percent.  
This is short sighted planning, and a disservice to New Yorkers who



rely on parks not only to improve neighborhood resilience, but as spaces of play, joy, and a connection to nature.

2. **Commit funding for a robust multi-agency planning process to implement the citywide NYC Urban Forest Plan** mandated by Local Law 148 of 2023 including sufficient funding for a rigorous community engagement effort.
3. **Increase NYC Parks staffing levels** to ensure our parks and the urban forest are safe, clean, and accessible to all New Yorkers: NYC Parks has a backlog of more than 20,000 uninspected tree conditions and 35,000 unaddressed work orders, putting New Yorkers and their property at risk. With current staffing levels, this backlog will grow as storms become more frequent and intense. During the recent blizzard alone, there were nearly 2,000 service requests. A new tree costs about \$3,600 to plant and takes years to mature, so protecting the trees we already have is critical. Increased forestry staffing would allow faster and safer responses to hazards like broken limbs and dying trees across all five boroughs. NYC Parks needs 227 additional forestry staff and \$29 million in FY27 to improve response times, expand tree pruning and removals, support maintenance and restoration, and allow a 7-day-a-week operation that meets service level agreements. The addition of employees in these roles will facilitate reducing the disparity in quality and services available to the most environmentally burdened neighborhoods.

Swift and prudent investment is pivotal to protect the most climate vulnerable New Yorkers against extreme heat. Summer 2024 was the [hottest on record](#), coinciding with the first time temperatures had exceeded 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. New York is acutely vulnerable to extreme heat events. A Climate Central [study](#) found that New York City has the worst urban heat island effect in the country - temperatures can measure up to nine degrees Fahrenheit hotter than surrounding rural areas for nearly 80% of the population. This is due in large part to 72% of New York City's built environment consisting of concrete or asphalt, materials that absorb heat and amplifies the urban heat island effect.. While all of New York City experiences the urban heat island effect caused by the density of impermeable surfaces that absorb heat, environmental justice neighborhoods like East Harlem are subject to a hyper-local urban heat island effect, exposing these residents to [temperatures as much as 10 degrees hotter than the City average](#). And while NYC's natural areas are 4-6 degrees Fahrenheit cooler than the average temperature of other land surface types during extreme heat events, low-income communities have [21% less park space](#) than higher-income neighborhoods. Failure to correct these inequities built into our urban environment results in Black residents [dying at twice the rate](#) of their white counterparts from heat stroke and heat-exacerbated illnesses.



These actions also improve the City's ability to manage stormwater from increasing frequent and strong storms. There are many neighborhoods that are vulnerable to flooding from extreme rain, sea level rise, and storm surge. East Harlem residents have been consistently vocal about flooded streets during strong rain. Large areas of the neighborhood sit directly in the 100-year flood plain, according to [flood maps](#) from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. However, East Harlem's waterfront - its first line of defense to future coastal storms - remains dilapidated, inaccessible, and poorly equipped to mitigate coastal storm surge. Likewise, NYC's forested natural areas [soak up as much stormwater as \\$580M worth](#) of new [green infrastructure](#). The proposed cuts to NYC Park's operating budget will prevent these life saving investments from taking shape and cost us more money long-term remedying more severe flood damages.

The most at-risk areas have residents that are majority Black and Latinx and represent some of the poorest communities in New York City. This is just one of the ways communities of color tangibly feel the legacy of racist policies like redlining. Such policies that have discouraged investment in communities of color have resulted in a lack of tree coverage, disparities in generational wealth, and poor building maintenance; all of which render both the inhabitants and the built environment ill-equipped to withstand extreme weather events that will only become more severe and frequent as climate change persists.

Despite the critical functions the urban forest serves to our communities and acknowledgments of its importance by the administration, we continue to see contradictory funding decisions. Mayor Mamdani's campaign pledge to increase NYC Parks funding to 1% of the City's total budget and Local Law 148's mandate to reach 30% canopy cover, while positive steps, are not enough without fiscal action to match. The proposed FY27 budget would severely impede all of these commitments and eliminate hundreds of essential jobs. The City should invest in long-term restoration and maintenance, fully implement the Urban Forest Plan, and leverage partnerships to protect public safety, strengthen climate resilience, and improve quality of life for all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

**Caleb Smith**  
NYC Policy Manager  
646.983.7288  
[caleb.smith@weact.org](mailto:caleb.smith@weact.org)  
WE ACT for Environmental Justice

**Max Barton**  
**Strategic Research, Laborers Local 1010**  
**Committee on Parks and Recreation**  
**Wednesday March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2026 – 10am**

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony today and for holding this hearing to the members of the City Council Parks Committee. My name is Max Barton, and I am a union representative for Laborers Local 1010, a proud member of the Play Fair Coalition. I'm sure that if you are on this committee, you have heard the 1% that is necessary for Parks to have a fair shot in this city. Without it I fear that there will continue to be a steady decline in quality of life for all NYC residents.

Tree canopies are an excellent example of one of the many Parks features that continue to be damaged from this long-standing underinvestment in Parks. The urban tree canopy cools neighborhoods, reduces the heat island effect, improves air quality, captures stormwater, absorbs greenhouse gases, supports wildlife, and provides mental and physical health benefits. NYC Parks needs 227 additional forestry staff and \$29 million in FY27 to improve response times, expand tree pruning and removals, support maintenance, and restoration, and allow a 7-day-a-week operation that meets service level agreements.

The Parks Department needed to be properly funded to maintain. As everyone on this City Council Parks Committee has heard for years, planting trees in NYC is time consuming and expensive. Doubling down on that problem by failing to maintain them with understaffing exacerbates that problem, and it could easily be fixed by simply providing NYC residents with jobs. NYC Parks has a backlog of more than 20,000 uninspected tree conditions and 35,000 unaddressed work orders, putting New Yorkers and their property at risk. These jobs are vital for the quality of life in NYC and should be strongly considered as a commonsense way to improve NYC.

As a member of Laborers Local 1010, we have been pointing out that there has been too much funding being given to Contractors whose owners were prosecuted and sentenced for crimes that were work related. I'm talking about Griffins Landscaping and Dragonetti Brothers, contractors that continue to dominate NYC Street Tree Planting. **I would like to also point out that these are non-MWBE contractors that average around 2% of their work going to MWBE Subcontractors for Forestry related work. There are many other non-MWBE Contractors in Forestry that constantly utilize zero MWBE subcontractors.** I personally feel that to ensure the long-term health and growth of the city's tree stock we put more effort in allowing subcontractors to participate in Capital Forestry Projects, especially MWBEs. If you do not allow MWBE's to subcontract properly they will have little chance of growing, until you just end up with one or two contractors that assume most of the work and feel emboldened to break the law to line their pockets with taxpayer's dollars.

I would also like to bring attention to a feasibility analysis by researchers at Cornell University's ILR School which found that implementing Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) for street tree planting contracts is both feasible and beneficial. The study found that standardizing crews and utilizing the Green Infrastructure labor rate could reduce contract costs by approximately 7.9% on average, while also improving productivity and project outcomes.

The research also found that union contractors complete planting work faster than non-union contractors, with statistically significant differences in project timelines that can range from over a week to more than a month faster on average. Faster project completion means less disruption in neighborhoods and more efficient use of taxpayer dollars. PLAs also raise safety and quality standards on job sites. Higher safety standards not only protect workers but can also reduce workers' compensation costs and limit the number of injury claims related to defective sidewalks or poorly maintained trees. We will attach the preliminary research to this study with our testimony.

In closing, the city should invest in long-term restoration and maintenance, fully implement the Urban Forest Plan, and leverage partnerships to protect public safety, strengthen climate resilience, and improve quality of life for all New Yorkers. Thank You.

Lucy Koteen

[lucy.koteen@gmail.com](mailto:lucy.koteen@gmail.com)

718-938-3935

Good day. I am here as a member of Friends of Fort Greene Park, supporting the continuation of the Urban Forest in Fort Greene Park. The capital project, which originated in 2015 is non compliant with the City's stated goal to increase tree canopy 30% by 2035. It includes removing 78 mature healthy trees with large canopies, 58 of them in an environmental justice area that will result in reduced carbon sequestration, worsen air pollution, increased storm water runoff and increase the already high asthma rates. This North West sector of the park sits directly across from a large NYCHA complex and is used as the back yard by the residents who live there. The targetted project area includes 13,000 square feet of green space which would be replaced with a 43-foot hardscape plaza. An entire generation will be harmed by worsened air quality and increased heat island effect during the 20 to 30 years it takes for new trees to reach their full potential to mitigate air pollution. The entire lower quadrant is covered in shade in the summer.

Our organization has needed to file many FOIL requests and several lawsuits against the City in order to receive information that should have been readily available to the tax paying public. This has been costly to the community and to the City.

It is time to scrap this detrimental \$24 million project. Friends of Fort Greene Park has designed a practical counter-proposal that delivers the objectives of making the needed repairs to the deteriorated walkways, sidewalk, drainage systems, recreational facilities and creating new accessibility without destroying trees or remodeling this historic Olmstead park. This will create a positive way to save money and provide the necessary maintenance needed in the park which has been lacking for decades. The money saved can be used for improvements in other parks.

You can see this proposal on the website here <https://www.friendsoffortgreenepark.org/> and here for much more information <https://sites.google.com/view/fortgreeneparkrenovation/home>.

We look forward to meeting with you, Chair Hankerson, to give you more details than two minutes allows.

**From:** [Pam Katz](#)  
**To:** [Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] March 4th hearing: ""Ensuring the Long-Term Health and Growth of the City's Tree Stock." -written testimony  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 4, 2026 2:52:52 PM

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[REDACTED]

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Pamela Katz and I have lived on Berkeley Place, between 6th and 7th avenue, for 27 years. During that time, I have only witnessed one full block tree trimming. Other people who live here can attest that this block has been neglected for at least 15 years.

We have dead branches extending over sidewalks and the full width of the street. Twice in my time here, and just last week, this neglect resulted in large trees falling over completely, cutting the car beneath in half and upending the sidewalk.

On a street near an elementary school, and as a block with many children, it is a miracle no one was hurt or killed. I understand that the city is understaffed, but it doesn't increase efficiency to piecemeal the tree cutting. Two examples just this week: the forestry service came with all their equipment to clear up the large tree that fell as it was blocking the street. They cut up the tree, carted it away and left.

Several days later, a large branch on a tree in front of our house cracked more than halfway through. I called 311, but realized nothing would come of that. I then called my Councilwoman's office, sent a photo, and the Forestry service came to cut the dangerous large branch. But they were not given "authorization" to even properly prune the entire tree (let alone other trees). There are two large dead branches, one hanging over the front courtyards of two houses and the sidewalk; on extending across the street. How is it an efficient use of manpower and equipment to cut one branch of a tree desperately in need of pruning and then drive off? They will have to come back when the next branch cracks and the next.

My complaints, along with those of my neighbors and now, my Councilwoman, have been met with the answer that we are not "due: for trimming until 2026 or 2027. But that may have to be pushed off due to manpower problems and the storm. Therefore, even the highly dangerous practice of pruning every ten years seems impossible to achieve. Instead, the Forestry Dept will continue sending a team of five men, and two trucks and pruning equipment to deal with disasters after they happen.

Properly maintained trees are not only good for the trees, for the beauty of the city, and the health of the planet: pruning large, often dead, branches also save lives, property and streets. As taxpaying Brooklyn residents, we call on Council and the Mayor to restore, expand, and baseline NYC Parks forestry staff positions, as well as fund the implementation of the forthcoming 10-year Urban Forest Plan by the Mayor's Office.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Pamela Katz

**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: 3/4/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: TRICIA SHIMAMURA

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: The Av

**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: 3/4/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Louise Young

Address: 253 Broadway

I represent: Mayor's office of Climate and Enviro. Justice

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paul Onyx Letzite

Address: 253 Broadway NY NY 10007

I represent: Mayor's Office of Climate + EJ

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**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: 3/4/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Benjamin Osborne

Address: [Redacted] Astoria NY

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: 5th Avenue NYC NY

**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: 3/4/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PAUL LOZZIO

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: MDCAT

Address: 253 BROADWAY

**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: 3/4/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paul Lozzio

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: MDCAT

Address: 253 BROADWAY

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

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Parks Res. No. 146  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tami Lin-Moges

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: The Nature Conservancy

Address: 322 8<sup>th</sup> Ave. 14<sup>th</sup> Fl., NYC, NY 10001

**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: 3/4/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Merritt Birabauer

Address: 475 Riverside Dr, NYC 10115

I represent: Riverside Park Conservancy

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ODED HOLZINGER

Address: ASTORIA, NY

I represent: NATURAL AREAS CONSERVANCY

Address: 1234 5th AVE New York, NY

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

**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: 3/4/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marit Larson

Address: [REDACTED] 5th Ave

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: ''

**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: 3/4/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ben Osborne

Address: [REDACTED] 5th Ave

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: ''

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matt Drury

Address: [REDACTED] Fifth Ave

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: ''

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

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LYNN KELLY, EXEC - DIRECTOR

Address: NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: 254 W 31<sup>st</sup> NYC

**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: 3/7/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SARAH BALISTRERI

Address: [REDACTED] NY NY

I represent: City Parks Foundation

Address: 830 5th Ave NY NY

**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: 3/4/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kathryn Mercier

Address: [REDACTED] 153<sup>rd</sup> St NY, NY

I represent: Ch 7, Local 375, DC37

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lury Koteen  
Address: 138 Lafayette AV  
I represent: Friends of Fort Greene Park  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**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: 4 MARCH 2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ANNELIESE ZAUSNER - MANNES  
Address: 1 12<sup>TH</sup> BROOKLYN 11215  
I represent: BIG REUSE  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**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: 3/4/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marc Kusnitz  
Address: 1 12<sup>TH</sup> street BLK NY 11215  
I represent: Big Reuse  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Taiqe Rambaran

Address: [REDACTED] Bk, NY 11225

I represent: Trees New York

Address: 100 Gold St, NY, NY 10003

**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: 3/4/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alia Scowin

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NY League of Conservation

Address: Voters

**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: March 4 2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joan Reutershan

Address: [REDACTED] Portland Ave

I represent: myself

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**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: 3/4/26

Name: Nasiah Price (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Pl Bk 11213

I represent: City Parks / Partnerships for Parks

Address: 100 Gold Street 10038

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

**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: 3/4/2026

Name: Louis Cox (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Brooklyn, NY 11201

I represent: Myself (citizen)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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