

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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November 29, 2010

Start: 1:18pm

Recess: 3:15pm

HELD AT: Council Chambers  
City Hall

B E F O R E: JULISSA FERRERAS  
Acting Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Gale A. Brewer  
Elizabeth Crowley  
Daniel Dromm  
James Vacca

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

Larry Scott Blackman  
Commissioner for Community Outreach  
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Edy Stone  
Executive Director, Green Thumb  
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation

Eric Tomin  
Vice President  
New York City Community Garden Coalition

Aresh Jabaidi  
Member  
New York City Community Garden Coalition, Moore  
Gardens

Haja Worley  
Treasurer, Co-Founder  
New York City Community Garden Coalition, Project  
Harmony

Deborah Gregg  
On behalf of Sarita Daftary, Project Director  
Urban Agriculture Coordinator  
East New York Farms

David Vigil  
East New York Farms

Daniel Bowman Simon

Peter Kramer  
Le Petite Versailles Garden

Steven Frillman  
Green Gorillas

Amy Gavares  
Executive Vice President  
New York Restoration Project

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

Ellen Belcher

Member

Morris Shumel Community Garden, Children's Magical  
Garden

Dr. Benjamin Shepherd

Time's Up New York

Migali Regis

Member

New York City Community Garden Coalition, Creative  
Little Garden

Stephen Kidd

Community gardener

CMT Steering Committee

Anne Ellen Maddigan

Director of Social Services

Rose Hill Housing Management Corporation

Joseph Miriana

Associate Vice President, Government and Urban Affairs  
Fordham University

Carrie Laney

Vice President, Government and Community Relations  
New York Botanical Garden

Jacqueline Morrison

Dual Language Coordinator, Literacy Coach

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Good  
3 afternoon. Good afternoon and welcome to the  
4 Committee on Parks and Recreation hearing on the  
5 present and future of community gardens. I am  
6 Council Member Julissa Ferreras acting as chair in  
7 the place of my colleague Melissa Mark-Viverito  
8 who is ill and we are hoping for her speedy  
9 recovery. I would like to thank Chris Sartori,  
10 committee counsel and Patrick Mulhill and Chima  
11 Abisher an analyst to the committee.

12 Community gardens are an integral  
13 part of many of our city's neighborhoods and  
14 several multiple functions for our citizens.  
15 They're our source of fresh and healthy food for  
16 people who may not live near adequate  
17 supermarkets. They're an oasis of green within  
18 crowded urban environments and improve the quality  
19 of life of all residents. They improve local  
20 property values. They provide youth with hands on  
21 experience and cultivation of life and give all  
22 New Yorkers an opportunity of productive  
23 recreation in the soil.

24 We are meeting today to talk about  
25 protecting community gardens, which are mostly

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2 located on city owned property. New rules put in  
3 place have established protections that are  
4 applauded by supporters of the garden but we must  
5 make sure that these rules are strong enough to  
6 endure administrative changes and the demands of  
7 the neighborhood development.

8 I would like to welcome the  
9 Department of Parks and invite its testimony and  
10 the testimony of the public. Thank you. Okay,  
11 and after we're done with the community gardens  
12 portion, we're going to be hearing the street co-  
13 naming. So if anyone is here, we're going to be,  
14 the testimony is open after this part. Thank you.  
15 And testifying Larry Scott Blackman.

16 LARRY SCOTT BLACKMAN: Good  
17 morning. Good morning Council Members, Chairwoman  
18 Mark-Viverito, Council Member Ferreras, Council  
19 Member Crowley and Council Member Vacca. I am  
20 Larry Scott Blackman. I am Deputy Commissioner  
21 for Community Outreach with the New York City  
22 Department of Parks and Recreation and joining me  
23 here today to my left I have Edy Stone, who is the  
24 Executive Director of our Green Thumb program and  
25 also Alessandro Olivieri who is our General

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2 Counsel and also in the audience from the Parks  
3 Department we have Assistant Commissioner Jack T.  
4 Len.

5 Thank you for the opportunity to  
6 appear before you to discuss community gardens.  
7 First I would like to thank Speaker Quinn,  
8 Committee Chair Melissa Mark-Viverito and other  
9 Council Members for their continued support and  
10 advocacy of New York City's community gardens.  
11 The Bloomberg administration and the Parks  
12 Department remain committed to protecting and  
13 supporting our community gardens and we thank you  
14 for your partnership and for working with us to  
15 achieve those goals.

16 For decades New York City's  
17 community gardens have served as spaces of  
18 community engagement, beauty and food production.  
19 They provide an environmental benefit to our urban  
20 landscape. In September of this year, the Parks  
21 Department promulgated a new set of community  
22 garden rules designed to better preserve and  
23 protect New York City's community gardens. These  
24 rules were issued in advance of an expiring  
25 agreement between the New York State Attorney

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2 General's office and the city.

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The Bloomberg administration is extremely proud of its record of working to protect this valuable community resource. Today, I will provide an overview of our Green Thumb program, a review of the new rules, an exciting change to our licensing process and speak to our continuing engagement and partnership with the gardening community.

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The Department of Parks and Recreation primarily through its Green Thumb program is extremely proud of what has been accomplished since 2002 to benefit Green Thumb gardens. In fact, earlier this year Green Thumb received a US Environmental Protection Agency Environmental Quality Award for demonstrating an outstanding commitment to protecting and enhancing the environmental quality and public health, the highest recognition presented to the public by the EPA.

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Other notable examples of our achievements are the creation of new rules, which strengthen and codify the goals of the expired 2002 agreement between then Attorney General

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2 Elliot Spitzer and the City of New York, the  
3 elimination of the requirement that Green Thumb  
4 gardeners pay for private liability insurance, the  
5 over 45 public workshops we have held for  
6 community gardeners of which nearly 2,000 people  
7 have attended. Our stellar school garden  
8 collaboration, which currently has 49 schools  
9 participating and today's announcement, the  
10 extension of our license term from its current  
11 length of two years to a new length of four years.

12 Green Thumb was created in response  
13 to the city's fiscal crisis of the 1970s when  
14 private owners stopped paying their property taxes  
15 and surrendered their land to the city, leaving  
16 the city with more land and yet fewer dollars with  
17 which to maintain it. The majority of Green Thumb  
18 gardens were in derelict vacant lots renovated by  
19 volunteers. These community gardens, now managed  
20 by neighborhood residents, can provide important  
21 green space as well as serve as important  
22 community resources.

23 The Parks Department is committed  
24 to the preservation and continued success of our  
25 community gardens. As proof of our commitment, we



1  
2 established new rules which were designed to  
3 incorporate and expand on the protections afforded  
4 gardens by the 2002 community gardens agreement.  
5 That expired agreement, negotiated between the  
6 City and New York and the office of then State  
7 Attorney General Elliot Spitzer, did not make  
8 community gardens permanent rather it provided a  
9 transparent and public mechanism should certain  
10 gardens be needed for other uses.

11 By working with partners in the  
12 community garden community, the City Council and  
13 other civic groups such as the New York  
14 Restoration Project, we were able to craft new  
15 rules that improved and strengthened the  
16 provisions in the original agreement releasing  
17 them on September 13th. Exactly how are they  
18 better? These rules offer increased levels of  
19 transparency and more opportunities for the public  
20 to be a part of the process. In addition, based  
21 on feedback we received from the public, these new  
22 rules contain certain preservation provisions and  
23 language that was not in the original agreement.

24 Active gardens are preserved as  
25 gardens as long as they are registered and

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2 licensed by the Department and are under Parks  
3 jurisdiction. Licenses will be renewed as long as  
4 the garden satisfy the registration criteria.

5 Parks must, and I repeat, must attempt to identify  
6 successor gardening groups for failing gardens and  
7 has nine months from the time of default to return  
8 the garden to active status.

9           New gardens may be created and will  
10 have the same protections as existing gardens. A  
11 party licensed by the city to perform work that  
12 results in damage to a garden will be required by  
13 these new rules to return the garden to its pre-  
14 existing condition. The Department of Parks will  
15 attempt to provide notices required under the  
16 current rules to gardeners in other languages.

17           Again, these rules which provide  
18 much stronger protections than the expired  
19 Attorney General's agreement were established to  
20 preserve our community gardens. There were those  
21 who spread fears that these rules were written as  
22 a means to further development. That is not and  
23 has never been our intent. Moreover, no active  
24 Parks Department gardens have been developed  
25 during the past eight years. Our record speaks

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2 for itself. The Parks Department shares the  
3 passion, and I repeat we share the passion, of  
4 countless community garden activists who are  
5 committed to keeping our gardens open. These new  
6 rules go very far in securing this protection.

7 Under the provision of the 2002  
8 agreement, Parks registers and licenses gardeners  
9 every two years. We are pleased to announce that  
10 beginning in January of 2011, gardens will be  
11 licensed and registered for a period of four  
12 years. We would like to extend our gratitude to  
13 Speaker Quinn, Council Member Viverito, Council  
14 Members Mendez, Garodnick and others for  
15 partnering with us on this important extension.

16 Briefly I would like to provide a  
17 review of the registration and licensing process.  
18 Groups send a representative to a Green Thumb  
19 registration session where they are given an  
20 orientation on the program's requirements,  
21 provided with information and given assistance  
22 with filling out paperwork. The registration and  
23 licensing, the city provides support to help  
24 strengthen gardens, strengthen gardener skills and  
25 also strengthen communities. Green Thumb services

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2 take the form of materials and technical  
3 assistance including educational workshops. The  
4 garden group fills out a garden survey and  
5 provides contact information, a membership  
6 procedure and a membership list. The group must  
7 sign the Green Thumb registration agreement  
8 committing the gardeners to following Green Thumb  
9 rules, which require the posting of information  
10 signage and mandates that each garden be open for  
11 at least 20 hours per week to the public and that  
12 a key be provided to the Green Thumb office in  
13 case of an emergency.

14           Next, the group leader must attend  
15 a garden registration session, which includes  
16 opportunities to meet fellow gardeners and Green  
17 Thumb staff to learn about Green Thumb services  
18 and to submit registration materials. Lastly,  
19 licenses are issued to eligible gardens upon  
20 submission of completed registration materials.  
21 Gardens not on property under the jurisdiction of  
22 the Parks Department are not eligible for licenses  
23 but must still complete the registration process  
24 in order to receive Green Thumb materials and  
25 services.

1  
2 We maintain contact and  
3 communication with as many of our garden groups  
4 and gardeners, as frequently as possible. The  
5 Green Thumb staff, led by its director Edy Stone  
6 to my left, does an amazing job of providing  
7 technical assistance--was that a cheer Edy?

8 EDY STONE: Yeah.

9 MR. BLACKMAN: Okay, I didn't know  
10 if we were going to get many today. Of providing  
11 technical assistance and support to the gardening  
12 community. Green Thumb has provided seed, soil,  
13 lumber and has 15 full time experts dedicated to  
14 helping community gardeners. Green Thumb's annual  
15 Grow Together Conference held at Hostos Community  
16 College in the Bronx brings nearly 2,000 gardeners  
17 under one roof to share best practices, interact  
18 with other garden professionals and communicate  
19 directly with senior Parks staff.

20 Speaking of which, I would like to  
21 take a moment to publicly thank long time Parks  
22 Assistant Commissioner, who has worked with  
23 community gardeners for many, many years, Jack  
24 Len.

25 [Applause]

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MR. BLACKMAN: Jack, you can smile.

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All right. And seriously Commissioner Len goes

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out into the community, he meets with garden

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groups and he works on some of the most difficult

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issues so we definitely want to thank you.

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We have long held an open door

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policy when it comes to providing technical

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assistance to community gardeners and Mayor

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Bloomberg, Commissioner Benope and Assistant

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Commissioner Len deserve credit for continuing to

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provide support to ensure that community gardens

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thrive and flourish.

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In closing, the Parks Department

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shares the passion of countless community garden

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activists who are committed to keeping our

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community gardens just what they are - gardens.

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We are proud of the fact that we house the largest

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network of community gardens in the nation and

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will continue to work with the community in an

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effort to grow together. Thank you for the

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opportunity to provide this testimony and I look

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forward to answering any questions you may have.

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COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank you

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for your testimony. I'd like to acknowledge

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2 Council Member Elizabeth Crowley from Queens who  
3 has joined us and also Council Member Jimmy Vacca  
4 from the Bronx. We have some questioning left for  
5 our Chair but I'd like to give this opportunity to  
6 Council Member Vacca.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Thank you,  
8 Julissa and thank you for your presentation. I  
9 just had some basic questions. How many community  
10 gardens are there in the city and is there a  
11 borough breakdown?

12 MR. BLACKMAN: There are  
13 approximately 600. There are roughly 282, which  
14 are under the Parks jurisdiction and we can  
15 certainly provide you a breakdown by borough. The  
16 most is in Brooklyn.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: The most is  
18 in Brooklyn

19 MR. BLACKMAN: Yes and there's a  
20 large number in the lower east side as well.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: I would  
22 think that there are very few in the Bronx where I  
23 come from. There're a lot?

24 MR. BLACKMAN: No, no, there are.

25 MS. STONE: About 150.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: About 150?

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MS. STONE: I'm Edy Stone the

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Director of Green Thumb. There's about, I didn't

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bring a borough breakdown but there's about 150 in

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the Bronx, 130 in Manhattan, less than 30 in

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Queens, 4 in Staten Island and in Brooklyn there's

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more than 300.

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COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: You eluded

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to it in your testimony but I do recollect back in

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the 1970s when there was significant amount of

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city owned property that laid fallow for a long

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period of time and community gardeners came in and

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renovated those properties, basically brought them

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back to life.

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MR. BLACKMAN: Yes.

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COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Now, you

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indicated how many properties Parks has

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jurisdiction over. Who retains ownership of the

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other jurisdictions? Is it mostly HPD or is it--

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what other agency would be involved beside HPD,

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DCAS or how do we delineate who has what?

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MS. STONE: Right now the great

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majority of the gardens that are under city

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ownership are under the jurisdiction of Parks,



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2 just under 300. HPD has about 20 active gardens  
3 still in their jurisdiction and there's somewhere  
4 between 100 and 200 gardens that are on Department  
5 of Education property but they aren't stand alone  
6 gardens; they're usually something on the  
7 schoolyard or on a rooftop. There are about, I  
8 think there are six gardens under Department of  
9 Transportation city and state, Department of  
10 Transportation and that's basically DCAS doesn't  
11 have any community gardens right now. Also other  
12 gardens that were under DCAS jurisdiction were  
13 eventually transferred either to HPD or to the  
14 Parks Department.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Now, the  
16 rules that you intend to promulgate would pertain  
17 to property under the jurisdiction of the Parks  
18 Department or would this pertain to any property?  
19 How do we find out what the rules will be  
20 regarding properties owned by other city agencies?  
21 It's a significant amount. How can we just  
22 promulgate rules...?

23 MR. BLACKMAN: HPD, they issue  
24 their set of rules as it relates to those gardens  
25 as well.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: It just  
3 seems to me that we should have one uniform policy  
4 in our city regarding community gardens. Why are  
5 we having several agencies owning these properties  
6 and then we have each agency setting different  
7 rules for the issuance of an RFP or the non-  
8 issuance of an RFP> I think we should have  
9 guidelines that are clear and transparent for  
10 gardeners in the city.

11 [Applause]

12 MR. BLACKMAN: Even for gardens  
13 that are under their jurisdiction, they will fall  
14 under the Parks Department rules. The--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA:

16 [Interposing] And--

17 MR. BLACKMAN: --HPD has their own.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Do you have  
19 a copy of HPD's rules 'cause they're different  
20 than yours?

21 MR. BLACKMAN: We can provide that  
22 to you. We don't have a copy here but we can  
23 follow up with you Councilman.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Yes, I would  
25 like a copy of HPD's rules. I would then like to

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2 know how are you going to reconcile your rules  
3 with HPD's so that people are clear as to what  
4 they have to do. I don't think it's fair that we  
5 have that situation exist and I would like to know  
6 how you're going to bridge that.

7           Now, we're talking about community  
8 gardens that exist now. Let me take it a step  
9 further. What are you doing to encourage or are  
10 you encouraging additional community gardens  
11 beyond what we already have in our inventory?

12           MS. STONE: We are in fact  
13 encouraging additional community gardens. Usually  
14 what happens is the community group in the  
15 neighborhood contacts me about a lot that's in  
16 their area that they're interested in working  
17 with. If it is a city owned lot then I work with  
18 that agency, whatever agency that has  
19 jurisdiction, usually HPD, to see if it's possible  
20 to transfer that to the Parks Department for them  
21 to use as a garden. If not, they do sometimes  
22 issues interim leases for them to use as a  
23 community garden on HPD property and if it's a  
24 private owner, as long as the private owner  
25 provides permission to them to use the garden then

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2 we will go ahead and work with that group, they're  
3 eligible to register with our program.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: All right,  
5 separating ourselves from the private lots for a  
6 second. Don't you think it would be a proactive  
7 policy for the City of New York to identify  
8 locations that are suitable or desirable for  
9 community gardens and issue an RFP, or to work  
10 with community boards, to identify groups in those  
11 communities. I'm interested in this and, I mean,  
12 the mayor's policy is to advance a greener New  
13 York so why are we waiting for people to come  
14 forth and say we have a location can you look into  
15 it and let us know. Why aren't we being proactive  
16 in identifying where we think we want them to go?

17 Now, I'm saying this because I'm a  
18 long time advocate of the green streets program  
19 and I think what Commissioner Benope and people  
20 have preceded him have done with that is great.  
21 But I have to tell you the green streets program,  
22 except for funding that is sometimes provided by  
23 Council Members has come almost to a halt because  
24 of financial issues. So my question to you is why  
25 don't we embark on working with community boards

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and groups to have the city identify locations and then seek gardeners to come forth and operate them based on our guidelines?

MR. BLACKMAN: I think if there were parcels of land that were available that the community identified and they expressed an interest, we'd be more than willing to work with them if indeed those parcels of land exist.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Well, they have to know that and they have to know what your guidelines are. They have to know that Parks is interested in doing this and they have to know what your guidelines are. How can we come forth before knowing that there's an interest and that there's a desire to help? We're putting the cart before the horse here. It doesn't make sense to me.

MS. STONE: With all due respect, there are at least 15 groups a week that call me to identify the land so... The information on how to start a community garden is on our web site and is readily available. But I think that the Parks Department has done a really good job in terms of identifying what all property that they own but I

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don't think that it's necessarily an equivalent priority in other agencies. So usually what happens is I am the one who is in charge of searching the city databases when people are looking for property near their house. And we have also done extensive mapping of community gardens in their area for them to join if they wish to join an existing community garden. But it's more of a question of resources than anything else.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Well, that's why I mentioned the community boards. I'd think you have resources there and people there who would be willing to be in the vanguard with you. One last--

MR. BLACKMAN: [Interposing] And--

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Yes.

MR. BLACKMAN: Council Member, if I could I would just like to add that many of our Parks Department staff attend the community board meetings. They attend the district service cabinet meetings. They are in the community and they work with local groups. And I also want to point out the work of many of our partner

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2 organizations; we have partnerships for Parks for  
3 example that holds an event called People Make  
4 Parks. And if people are on the local level, on  
5 the grass roots community level, if they identify  
6 areas where there could potentially be a community  
7 garden, be it in the school lot or playground or  
8 something, we're more than willing to work with  
9 those individuals to help develop those lands.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: I'm  
11 concerned about this because I represent the  
12 largest park in the City of New York, Pelham Bay  
13 Park. The largest park is not Central Park, it's  
14 Pelham Bay Park and I don't have a community  
15 garden in all the almost 3,000 acres in Pelham Bay  
16 Park. Has Parks thought about using some of their  
17 property to establish community gardens with  
18 groups? I mean, of all boroughs, my borough has a  
19 need for fresh fruit and vegetables and we have an  
20 obesity issue, we have other issues. And I would  
21 think that if you have parkland that we could use  
22 for this purpose, I would think that would be a  
23 good initiative for Parks to take up.

24 MR. BLACKMAN: We have to explore  
25 it further.

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COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: All right.

Well, I thank the Chair. I mean, I just want to express to you my interest in this and I think as we go forth and then we have a 2030 plan. The mayor has articulated a 2030 plan but in the 2030 plan there's got to be a consideration to aesthetics, to beauty of our neighborhoods and our parks but there's got to be a consideration to the health and welfare of our citizens. And fruit and vegetables for people of limited means is not always available...

[Applause]

...and I want to advocate for that, I want to make my office available to you. But we in the city should have a commitment to this, proactively. We should be in the lead on these things. When it comes to fruit and vegetables and greening sites that are abandoned we in the city should be taking a lead. We can lead and we can get people behind us but rather than waiting for others to say we have one site here and one site there, I want to see a plan and I want all the agencies to buy into a plan. Thank you.

[Applause]



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2 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank  
3 you, Council Member Vacca. As you're questioning,  
4 I'm checking off questions on my list but thank  
5 you. Actually I'd like to speak on more specific  
6 of the default and also financing in the future.  
7 In particular to default, under the new rules how  
8 does DPR plan to take action against a garden for  
9 default and what are the notifications or process  
10 that is planned?

11 MR. BLACKMAN: Yeah, the new rules  
12 clearly define the default process and there are  
13 defaults and there are accelerated defaults, which  
14 are basically in the event that an abandoned  
15 property, an abandoned garden threatens the safety  
16 of an adjoining neighborhood, that would be an  
17 accelerated default.

18 MS. STONE: Some of the specific  
19 conditions that could lead to an accelerated  
20 default are listed in our license agreement but  
21 some examples would be drug dealing or drug use,  
22 storage of vehicles in a garden. I mean, things  
23 that are clearly not supposed to be happening  
24 there. A default, a non-accelerated default for a  
25 lack of a better term, would be issued to a garden

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2 that fails to register and get licensed through us  
3 or is abandoned by the community.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Can you  
5 speak to me on the timeline of a default process  
6 and then the accelerated, what's the difference  
7 between the two?

8 MS. STONE: Okay. For an  
9 accelerated default, once a notice is issued the  
10 community group working with Green Thumb has 30  
11 days to cure that default and then we have three  
12 months to work with the community to identify a  
13 successor group. And for a regular default, it's  
14 a nine month time period, correctly?

15 MR. BLACKMAN: Nine months.

16 MS. STONE: We have nine months in  
17 which to locate another community group who's  
18 interested in taking on that property if the  
19 existing group is not able to do it or willing to  
20 do it.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay.  
22 And then I'm going to speak to the financing. How  
23 does DPR intend on to fund and maintain its  
24 community gardens in the long run?

25 MR. BLACKMAN: Well, the Green

1  
2 Thumb program is well supported by the Department  
3 of Parks and Recreation. The annual budget is  
4 somewhere in excess of I believe about \$800,000.

5 MS. STONE: Yeah, it's just about  
6 \$800,000.

7 MR. BLACKMAN: And we remain  
8 committed to providing additional resources to the  
9 Green Thumb program.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Are any  
11 of these dollars federal dollars?

12 MR. BLACKMAN: Those are community  
13 development block grant monies so they are.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay. Do  
15 we have any kind of talks that those dollars may  
16 be not part of next year's budget or is there  
17 anything that you hear in cuts?

18 MR. BLACKMAN: No.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: No. And  
20 is there any thoughts of alternative forms of  
21 funding as we're coming through, obviously, very  
22 tough fiscal time is there any alternative funding  
23 that you've identified to support community  
24 gardens?

25 MR. BLACKMAN: We haven't

1  
2 identified it yet, that doesn't necessarily mean  
3 we haven't been looking.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay.

5 MR. BLACKMAN: But we remain  
6 committed to unturn every stone we can to find  
7 additional resources for the program.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay.  
9 Will community gardens be made part of the PlaNYC?

10 MR. BLACKMAN: Having not being  
11 directly involved in those discussions, I'd have  
12 to follow up but I would say that there is a  
13 strong recognition of the benefits that community  
14 gardens provide. And I look forward to seeing  
15 community gardens in some form or fashion in that  
16 next reiteration. But there is a recognition by  
17 the administration as evident by our track record,  
18 that community gardens provide a benefit and do  
19 have a role to play in the continuing greening of  
20 New York City.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Well,  
22 representing a borough that has 30 community  
23 gardens, Queens, I think it's important that we  
24 continue to identify opportunities and I think the  
25 opportunity mentioned in using some of our present

1  
2 park land. And, you know, I come from a community  
3 where we have Flushing Meadow Park but my  
4 neighboring district has almost no parks so even  
5 looking at playgrounds and other alternative forms  
6 of having a community garden, I think would go a  
7 very long way in a lot of our communities.

8 MR. BLACKMAN: Sure.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Do you  
10 have anything [off mic] Council Member Crowley.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Thank you  
12 Council Member Ferreras. I'm glad we're having  
13 the hearing today because I have two particular  
14 areas in mind in my district that I think would be  
15 great spaces for community gardens. One is  
16 actually owned by Long Island Railroad. Do you  
17 have a partnership with MTA on some of this?

18 MS. STONE: Yes. There are two  
19 gardens that are specifically on Long Island  
20 Railroad property and one garden in the Bronx  
21 that's on MTA property. At this point, they  
22 permit gardens to be there but we don't have a  
23 licensing agreement with them but we have actually  
24 had quite a number of people expressing interest  
25 in expanding gardens on Long Island Railroad or

1  
2 MTA property. And usually we've received a very  
3 positive response from them, from MTA I mean.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: The part  
5 that's frustrating for me is the Council Members  
6 is that I'm interested in putting funding into  
7 making this a reality happen. But it's difficult  
8 to put the money in the right funding stream  
9 'cause its Department of Parks, I already put  
10 capital dollars for you to find this location but  
11 there's difficulties there. They can't work,  
12 we're taking that money from Long Island Railroad.  
13 Have you had those types of barriers with the...?

14 MR. BLACKMAN: I don't know if  
15 we've experienced that where a member or there's  
16 been funding that's been allocated for that type  
17 of partnership but we have to take a look at it  
18 and follow up with you.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Do you  
20 always have community groups partnering with you  
21 on maintaining the--

22 MR. BLACKMAN: [Interposing] Oh,  
23 absolutely.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: But do you  
25 have any that you just maintain as the Department

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of Parks.

MS. STONE: No.

MR. BLACKMAN: No.

MS. STONE: It's really not the theme or the purpose of the program for us to be building and maintaining, that would be a different part of the division. But really, Green Thumb is really partnership with the community we want to keep it that way.

COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: So the \$800,000 that is the current funding stream for this area within the Parks Department is not going towards maintenance in any way but more your Department's salary, I imagine.

MS. STONE: No.

MR. BLACKMAN: No.

MS. STONE: It's about 50% of it is salaries and the rest of it is materials that we distribute to the gardeners directly like clean soil and plants and watering supplies, tools, things that help community groups run the gardens. Also, a lot of our time and work is spent on education and outreach and we issue this program guide once a season that has about 40 workshops in

1  
2 it that are open to the general public but are  
3 geared towards topics that community gardens are  
4 particularly interested in. And we give away  
5 supplies at these workshops.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: And if a  
7 particular piece of property is identified and  
8 owned by the city, how long would it take  
9 approximately for the community group to be given  
10 the okay, the permission to make it a community  
11 garden?

12 MS. STONE: It depends on the  
13 jurisdiction of the property. Each agency is a  
14 little bit different. With HPD, I usually get an  
15 answer within one or two weeks and then as soon as  
16 we issue the next supply then the group would be  
17 able to get it. With other agencies it's  
18 completely different. It depends. And with a  
19 private owner, securing permission from a private  
20 owner can be difficult for obvious reasons.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: But the  
22 Department, this is my final question. The  
23 Department of Parks is liable in terms of  
24 insurance purposes if some type of accident was to  
25 happen on that property?



1  
2 MS. STONE: Only if it's on city  
3 owned property and it's not really the Parks  
4 Department that's liable, the city is liable if  
5 it's a piece of city owned property.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CROWLEY: Okay,  
7 good. Thank you.

8 MR. BLACKMAN: Thank you.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Are there  
10 any HPD owned gardens that are in the pipeline to  
11 be transferred to the Department of Parks?

12 MS. STONE: Yes, there are. There  
13 is four at least at this time that are eminently  
14 going to be transferred to Department of Parks so  
15 that's 4 out of the remaining 20 active gardens  
16 that they have. They've also been very actively  
17 working with me to allow gardeners to use  
18 properties on an interim basis if the gardeners  
19 desire to do so, if there's not a development plan  
20 upcoming. And if there's not a development plan  
21 in the future, they maybe transfer it to us. We  
22 have a pretty active partnership in terms of if  
23 there's not a housing plan usually we're the first  
24 stop for them in terms of figuring out if there is  
25 a community group that's interested in gardening

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COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Can you just speak to me on the 4 out of the 20, what is this transition, why those four and how long will it take for them to finally be under your jurisdiction>

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MS. STONE: It depends on the specific situation. They haven't been transferred for different reasons in each case. It's not that there isn't a commitment that they will be transferred it's just that there is some legal thing that has to happen, either ULURP process has to be completed or some sort of an agreement with a developer has to be signed off on. In some cases, the developer of an adjacent property has committed to provide new fencing or something in which case HPD retains jurisdiction until their developer has done what their developer has said they're going to do. It's completely on a case by case basis. I can't tell you in general how long it takes.

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COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Is there any support that's given from the Parks Department to those gardens in the meantime while this

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transition period is happening.

MR. BLACKMAN: Oh, absolutely.

MS. STONE: There's no difference in the amount of support that we give to gardens that are under HPD jurisdiction and Parks jurisdiction except for that we don't spend capital money on sites that aren't in the Parks Department.

COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Okay.

Council Member Vacca.

COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: I wanted to go back to this analysis that we had about three years ago from the New York City Health Department. We have supermarket deserts in this city; the term was green deserts. But we have deserts in our city where people can not get access to supermarkets; there are none there. Now, when we talk about supermarket deserts has your agency looked at where those areas are so that we can encourage more gardening and green gardens there?

MR. BLACKMAN: We actually have.

As a matter of fact, there a number of places and one that pops to the top of my mind is around in

1  
2 central Harlem in the area of St. Nicholas and  
3 138th and St. Nicholas where you have basically  
4 what is nearly a supermarket desert, if you will.  
5 We're partnering with community based  
6 organizations through a number of initiatives and  
7 there's actually someone who I believe worked at  
8 the City Council who is running one of those  
9 initiatives and we've been in contact with them  
10 about providing green market opportunities in that  
11 neighborhood. So yes, we do that and if there's a  
12 particular area of interest, Council Member,  
13 please let us know. We'd be happy to extend it  
14 even further.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: Well, there  
16 are maps on line I think it's under the New York  
17 City.gov Health Department site.

18 MR. BLACKMAN: Right.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: But, for  
20 example, 10 of the 12 community board districts in  
21 the Bronx are identified as food deserts. That's  
22 scary; 10 out of 12 community districts are  
23 identified as food deserts in the Bronx. So I  
24 understand that in the 1970s people who started  
25 these community gardens were viewed as pioneers

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2 but I tell you the truth, we need some pioneering  
3 today because we now know the level of the obesity  
4 issue and the nutrition issue to a point where we  
5 did not know years ago how bad it was.

6

7 That's why I want you to understand  
8 my view that there should be, and I'm sure I could  
9 speak for other members of this Council, there  
10 should be a relationship with the food deserts  
11 that one agency designates and what another agency  
12 does to encourage nutrition and health and fruit  
13 and vegetable nutrition. So I just want to make  
14 sure, we have so many agencies into his city. I  
15 go to so many meetings and what I hear from  
16 everybody is that one agency does that but we  
17 don't do this and we can't give you that  
18 information because that other agency has the  
19 information; that's unacceptable. Every--

19

MS. STONE: [Interposing] We--

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COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: We're one  
21 city so I come back to that point. I want there  
22 to be a correlation between those deserts and what  
23 you do.

24

MR. BLACKMAN: We look forward to  
25 it. I mean, the Department of Parks and

1  
2 Recreation has developed a number of initiatives,  
3 not just related to food to help combat the very  
4 issues that you just articulated, one of them  
5 being on our recreation side we develop programs  
6 entitled Be Fit, Walk NYC, where New Yorkers can  
7 visit our recreation centers. Just aside from the  
8 food issue, the nutrition issue but just also the  
9 active recreation issue so we remain committed to  
10 that and we look forward to partnering with you on  
11 that.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: But I'm  
13 asking Parks specifically to look into their  
14 inventory of park land, which is so substantial in  
15 the city, to see what you can do from your end as  
16 well as looking into getting more groups involved.  
17 But I think we have to partner in that. I think  
18 we have to have a city perspective and a private  
19 perspective and I thank you.

20 MR. BLACKMAN: Thank you.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank you  
22 very much Assistant Commissioner. Thank you for  
23 your testimony today and we'll be calling up the  
24 next panel.

25 MR. BLACKMAN: Thank you Council

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2 Members, have a wonderful day.

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[Pause]

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You may begin your testimony.

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COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank you. And our next panel is Aresh Jaidi, I'm sorry I'm not pronouncing these Jabaidi, I'm sorry, Eric Tomin and Haja Worley, New York City yes, Greening Garden Coalition and Project Harmony.

ERIC TOMIN: Okay. Hello, my name is Eric Tomin, I am the Vice President of the New York City Community Garden Coalition and to my right, Aresh Jabaidi, also a New York City Community Garden member and also with Moore Gardens.

HAJA WORLEY: Haja Worley, Treasurer of the New York City Community Garden Coalition and co-founder of Project Harmony, Green Thumb, not Green Thumb, Project Harmony Garden.

MR. TOMIN: Thank you very much and good afternoon acting Chair Ferreras and Council Members Gentile, Van Bramer, Council Members Vacca and Cromley and also members of the Parks Committee, I do hope that Chair Melissa Mark-Viverito gets better as soon as possible.

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2 Today, what I'm reading from is a  
3 combined statement that has been put together by  
4 the New York City Community Garden Coalition  
5 Executive Board and we've been working on this  
6 statement for about two months now. The New York  
7 City Community Garden Coalition was at the table  
8 during the initial process of drafting the new  
9 Parks Department rules concerning community  
10 gardens and we look forward to being involved in  
11 drafting the future policies and legislation that  
12 will permanently preserve our city's vibrant  
13 community gardens and create opportunities for the  
14 development of more.

15 We're glad to see the rules that  
16 state that any community garden under Parks  
17 jurisdiction will remain so if these rules are  
18 followed. However, New York City Community  
19 Gardens Coalition has several concerns about the  
20 new rules that are identified by our leadership,  
21 our members and our legal counsel. We believe our  
22 recommendations, which are detailed below would  
23 offer better support for community gardens and  
24 going forward, request there adoption into the  
25 rules, procedures and policies and legislation



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regarding community gardens.

So NYCCGC recommends the following.

In part one, we'd like to create a transparent processes for gardens "in default" and "accelerated default". NYCCGC is concerned about what criteria the Department of Parks and Recreation uses to determine that a garden is "in default" or "in accelerated default". For example, according to the rules a garden is in accelerated default if it, again "affects or poses a threat to the health or safety of the community in which the lot and garden are located". The rules do not provide any criteria as to what will determine this violation. There is no clear notification process for a gardening group to learn what DRP considers its' activities to affect the health or safety of the community.

By the time the group receives a notice of the default according to DRP rules, it only has 30 days to cure that received problem. I'm going to hand the microphone over to Aresh, who is going to identify three of the solutions in part one.

MR. JABAIDI: And actually these

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2 three actually do respond to some of the question  
3 Councilwoman Ferreras had in regards to what the  
4 default and the violations are and how exactly  
5 those are the weaknesses that we would like to  
6 strengthen as we go on. And again, we do realize  
7 that this administration is very committed to  
8 community gardens and we thank the mayor's  
9 administration. We just want to make sure that as  
10 this gets passed to the next mayor, whoever that  
11 may be, that they don't find a loophole or a  
12 specific weakness in that, that allows them to  
13 possibly hurt the community gardens on long term.

14 So one and two specifically address  
15 the weaknesses and then the third one, which was  
16 something that we differ from Commissioner  
17 Blackman is in regards to gardens being permanent  
18 and that's a big issue that we will be working  
19 with them, hopefully, to address.

20 One, to form an advisory group to  
21 clarify and correct persistent violations. We  
22 recommend that a Green Thumb advisory group will  
23 be formed with community gardenists [phonetic] as  
24 a majority of members. This group would deal with  
25 violations and could include NYCCGC and other

1  
2 community and greening groups to work directly  
3 with individual gardening groups and gardenists to  
4 correct violations that have persisted and may  
5 lead to a default. This group would need  
6 guidelines, documented criteria for default and  
7 accelerated default.

8 Two, form a review panel for  
9 transparent processes and decisions on default.  
10 Under the current rules, the final determination  
11 of a default is at the sole discretion of the  
12 DPR's Commissioner. To create a transparent  
13 process before the Commissioner's determination,  
14 we recommend a panel of three individuals be  
15 formed to hold an evidentiary hearing to arrive at  
16 a recommendation for action.

17 One of the individuals would be  
18 chosen by DPR, another chosen by community  
19 gardeners and the third person would be chosen  
20 somebody that we both agree to. The Commissioner  
21 would then accept or reject the panel's  
22 determination. In the event that the Commissioner  
23 rejects the panel's decision, a court could review  
24 if the rejection was proper. And one of our  
25 lawyers, Norman Seagull, has been successful in

1  
2 the past having these procedures instituted at New  
3 York City administration agencies.

4 Third, and this is quite a big one.  
5 It is that--oh, actually third is not the one.  
6 Part two is the one that Haja will talk about.  
7 This is a simple thing and I think from what you  
8 are hearing is that the Parks Department is going  
9 to be creating a web site for informing the  
10 community gardeners. We recommend that Green  
11 Thumb establish a dedicated public web site where  
12 notifications to community gardens are posted.  
13 Automated alerts regarding infractions can be sent  
14 via RSS web feed subscription.

15 Green Thumb would publish and post  
16 persistent violations 30 days after the infraction  
17 as well as individual community garden default  
18 notification. Notices of garden default should  
19 also be mailed and emailed to all members of the  
20 gardening group as registered with Green Thumb.  
21 And again, we think and believe that it's a web  
22 site that is being created and I will pass the  
23 next area to Haja and this is a really key part  
24 that we want to, like, underline and get support.

25 MR. WORLEY: Good afternoon. Whoa,

1  
2 good afternoon once again. I want to thank first  
3 of all the Council Members for this hearing and  
4 particularly Council Member Vacca for his  
5 suggestions and for his concern about how we  
6 proceed in the future. I'm going to read part two  
7 and 3.

8 Part two, identify all permanently  
9 protected community gardens. It is New York  
10 Community Gardens Coalitions contention that all  
11 gardens listed in the offer for preservation  
12 section of the New York State Attorney General's  
13 2002 community garden agreement are permanently  
14 protected by that document. We request a fully  
15 documented list of actions on all community  
16 gardens listed by the agreement. This includes  
17 the 198 community gardens listed in the agreement  
18 as well as those which were later transferred,  
19 swapped and added to the list after 2002.

20 Part three, collectively forge new  
21 legislation and policy. The New York City  
22 Community Garden Coalition is mindful that the DPR  
23 rules cover only community gardens that are under  
24 DPR. Other gardens fall under the jurisdiction of  
25 many other agencies, including Housing

1  
2 Preservation and Development, Department of  
3 Education, Department of Transportation and New  
4 York City Housing Authority and are not covered by  
5 these rules. We are very excited to be working in  
6 a truly shared process with Speaker Quinn, Parks  
7 Council Chair Viverito and the Mayor's office to  
8 create legislation and policies extending  
9 permanent protections to support all current and  
10 future community gardens and urban farms. Our  
11 collaboration will provide the neighborhoods in  
12 our city with all the beauty and improved quality  
13 of life that nature provides as well as access to  
14 nutritious, locally grown food, opportunities for  
15 recreation, therapy, exercise, education and inter  
16 generational and cross cultural connections.

17 Thank you.

18 MALE VOICE: Any questions.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank you  
20 very much for your testimony. In your mentioning  
21 of the default, if you could just highlight where  
22 has there been an issue where we had the 30 day  
23 window other than drugs being sold or used in the  
24 community gardens. Where have you seen or have  
25 you identified an issue where there may be

1  
2 something that you can remedy in 30 days, that you  
3 see that it's not included in the opportunity for  
4 someone to correct it, for the community garden to  
5 correct it.

6 MR. TOMIN: We are talking about is  
7 the writing the language. It can be read  
8 different ways. At this present moment and I  
9 strongly do believe that when there is a garden  
10 that anything is up, I think there's letters goes  
11 out and as Edy Stone as pointed out, 95% of them  
12 get corrected. There's some persistent ones that  
13 will continue to have formed this group that would  
14 then help those specific things. Let's say if  
15 it's a gardener that only runs it by himself or  
16 herself and is kind of being bossy and not really  
17 sharing the space, that's one of the things. So  
18 we hopefully work with that gardener or if that  
19 gardener is not willing to, replace the gardener  
20 so that's the majority of cases.

21 However, let's say another  
22 administration decides to use the language in  
23 there, which says anything that affect the health  
24 or safety of the community. So let's say somebody  
25 is keeping the sidewalk dirty or spitting, that's

1  
2 against, you can find very small kind of reasoning  
3 and so because we don't have a specific way of  
4 knowing that that's affecting the health of the  
5 community. You can basically say different  
6 criterias that may not be something that's as,  
7 let's say, drug use or something obviously as that  
8 so we want to make sure we can, like, address  
9 that.

10 MR. JABAIDI: Thank you. I think  
11 what the Coalition was addressing was the  
12 vagueness of the definitions between default and  
13 accelerated default. We are asking for a little  
14 bit more transparent guidelines. Thank you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank  
16 you. Questions? Thank you very much for your  
17 testimony today.

18 ALL: Thank you.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Deborah  
20 Gregg, David Vigil and Carey Lansey or Larry, the  
21 New York Botanical Garden.

22 [Pause]

23 Daniel Bowman Simon, this is--I'm  
24 Melissa today. Come on in and we've been joined  
25 by Council Member Danny Dromm of Queens. Since



1  
2 we're having a hearing on the street renaming, co-  
3 naming, if we do call you up please just let us  
4 know and we'll hold your testimony until after.  
5 Are you here for the street renaming? No, parks  
6 okay, good. Thank you. We have testimony.  
7 She'll pick that up for you. And you may begin.

8 DEBORAH GREGG: So my name is  
9 Deborah Gregg, I'm the Urban Agriculture  
10 Coordinator at East New York Farms and I'm  
11 speaking today on behalf of Sarita Daftary, our  
12 Project Director. So thank you for this  
13 opportunity to testify in support of our city's  
14 community gardens. East New York Farms is a  
15 network of over a dozen community gardens and over  
16 50 gardeners who work together to keep our  
17 community vibrant and healthy. Since we have  
18 formed in '98 we have grown over 100,000 pounds of  
19 fresh produce and provided internships for 140  
20 young people.

21 Community gardens are nourishing  
22 East New York in many ways. When no one else was  
23 willing to invest, when businesses were leaving,  
24 when banks would not issue loans in our community,  
25 when landlords were bringing down their one

1  
2 buildings to collect insurance money, neighbors  
3 came together to convert vacant blighted lots into  
4 community spaces for rest, learning, gathering,  
5 greening and growing. It is not enough for these  
6 gardeners to pour their time and energy and hearts  
7 into cleaning up these lots to know that they can  
8 keep gardening as long as the mayor feels  
9 favorably towards gardens or as long as no  
10 developers show an interest in their lands.  
11 Gardens are a single solution that can address  
12 many of the challenges our community faces. And  
13 we want to know that these community resources  
14 will be preserved for the long term.

15                   While we have been impressed with  
16 the city's efforts to improve health and create a  
17 greener New York, we are disappointed by the  
18 failure to make the connections that gardeners  
19 have already made, that good health is not just  
20 about not drinking soda and avoiding trans fats  
21 but heavily dependent on what you do eat and what  
22 you do eat is heavily dependent on what is  
23 available. And the reality in many of our New  
24 York City communities, especially low income  
25 communities and especially communities of color,

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is that healthy food isn't available.

Not only do gardens provide access to fresh food that is so lacking, they create food access in the greenest and most empowering way possible by allowing us to grow our own food right here. The ability to do so is so critical that it needs to be firmly guaranteed. In her Food Works plan, Council Speaker Quinn sites the intention for City Council to pursue policies to achieve long term garden conservation along with the addition of new gardens.

We urge the City Council to quickly and thoroughly fulfill this commitment with a recognition that the current Parks Department rules are subject to change with the next administration and do not provide the long term protections that are needed. We strongly urge Council Members to review the policies adopted by other cities and introduce legislation that will work in the text of our dynamic city while at the same time ensuring that our gardens and therefore our precious open space and access to healthy food are not under constant threat of development.  
Thank you.

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2                   DAVID VIGIL: My name is David  
3 Vigil. I work with Deborah at East New York Farms  
4 as well so I'll just get to the point because I  
5 think Deborah shared a lot about what we do. And  
6 I want to thank you guys for taking the  
7 opportunity to listen this afternoon to the  
8 testimony and the state of the gardens.

9                   Now that the season has coming to a  
10 close it's a good time for us to look at the work  
11 that we have done and to consider some of our  
12 goals for the future. I was happy to read the new  
13 Food Works policy recommendations and see gardens  
14 get the credit they deserve as urban food  
15 production sites. We are under no illusions that  
16 gardens will be able to feed every New Yorker. We  
17 have tried to show how working together, while  
18 coordinating gardens, can make a significant  
19 contribution to the households of many people  
20 beyond the membership of the garden.

21                   Many have testified and many will  
22 testify today to the importance of gardens and all  
23 the benefits that they provide this city. The  
24 work that we do in East New York is also being  
25 done in the South Bronx and Bed Sty and Harlem, in

1  
2 Long Island City and in many other neighborhoods.  
3 For our work to continue in earnest, we need to  
4 know that gardens will be a part of the city's  
5 future.

6 The new Parks rules governing  
7 gardens holds some promising beginnings but  
8 they're not enough. I hope that City Council will  
9 draft a legislation that provides long term  
10 protections to gardens so that urban farmers,  
11 gardeners and garden educators can focus on more  
12 important work like building food security and  
13 training future leaders.

14 I would like to see gardens as  
15 permanent fixtures in our city. In cases where a  
16 garden is threatened future legislation should  
17 provide firm proof, transparency and communication  
18 between the gardens and the city so that we may  
19 find solutions that are amenable to all parties.  
20 Protecting, promoting and supporting gardens is  
21 difficult work but it's important work. I hope  
22 that City Council will have the boldness and  
23 vision to truly support gardens and make the  
24 lasting legacy for the future.

25 DANIEL BOWMAN SIMON: Hi, my name

1  
2 is Daniel Bowman Simon. I gave this same  
3 testimony at the Parks Department hearing in  
4 August but I think it's important to have this  
5 history on the record for the legislative branch  
6 of our city's government so sorry if I'm boring  
7 anybody with repetition and I want to extend a get  
8 well greeting to Councilwoman Mark-Viverito.

9           Community gardens are essential to  
10 the vibrancy of New York City for numerous  
11 reasons. The unique educational opportunities  
12 that gardens provide for our youth are just some  
13 of these benefits. A look at the rise and fall of  
14 school gardens in New York City's past can help  
15 guide us into the future for school gardens and  
16 community gardens.

17           In 1902 Fanny Grisam Parsons  
18 started the children's school farm in Dewet  
19 Clinton Park on 54th Street and 12th Avenue in  
20 Manhattan. She wrote that, "I did not start a  
21 garden simply to grow a few vegetables and  
22 flowers". The garden was used as a means to show  
23 how willing and anxious children are to work and  
24 to teach them in their work some necessary civic  
25 virtues, private care of public property, economy,

1  
2 honesty, application, concentration, self  
3 government, civic pride, justice, the dignity of  
4 labor and the love of nature by opening to their  
5 minds the little we know of her mysteries, more  
6 wonderful than any fairy tale.

7           Mrs. Parsons became the director of  
8 the New York City Parks Department Shoulder and  
9 School Farms Bureau and by 1908 the New York Times  
10 reported 80 school farms now running here,  
11 movement which started at Dewet Clinton Park has  
12 spread rapidly. As Laura Lawson told in her book,  
13 City Bountiful, a Century of Community Gardening  
14 in America, Manhattan principal Margaret Knox  
15 wrote, "That when the signs of spring asked for by  
16 the teacher brings only the answer yes, ma'am I  
17 know when spring is here because the saloons put  
18 on their swinging doors, is it not worthwhile to  
19 lead such a child to notice other signs of spring?  
20 To me, this is what a school garden means in a  
21 crowded district."

22           In 1917 the New York City  
23 Department of Education published School Gardens  
24 for Public Schools of New York City to facilitate  
25 more school gardens because our efforts to lay out

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public parks in private gardens have proved inadequate to reach mass numbers of children who grow up in an environment from which the charm and beauty of nature absolutely barren. By 1925, 99 New York City public elementary schools reported school gardens. By 1930, 244 gardens were reported and that number jumped 24% to 302 gardens in 1931 when the New York Times reported 65 acres of school gardens under cultivation.

But over time most of these acres of gardens vanished as the general pressure of a growing population and teacher parking lots took priority over the myriad benefits that these gardens offer to their respective communities. Even the children's school farm in Dewet Clinton Park disappeared to make way for what is now know as the West Side Highway. Perhaps the school garden advocates who have worked so hard to secure these gardens never expected that they would disappear or simply are not around to fight for their survival.

Fast forward to the 21st century, era where Richard Lou starts off his book, Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from



1  
2 Nature Deficit Disorder with a quote from a San  
3 Diego fourth grader, "I like to play indoors  
4 better because that's where all the electrical  
5 outlets are." In the past few years school  
6 gardens have seen a significant resurgence in  
7 popularity starting in communities across America.  
8 And right at the White House, First Lady Michelle  
9 Obama has repeatedly attributed her experience  
10 gardening with DC public school students as the  
11 impetus for her Let's Move initiative to end  
12 childhood obesity and raise a healthier generation  
13 of kids in America and worldwide.

14 Right here in New York City of may  
15 13th of this year, in the school garden of  
16 Brooklyn PS 29, New York mayor Michael Bloomberg  
17 joined by Rachel Ray explained that school gardens  
18 encourage more young New Yorkers to eat healthier  
19 diets and help them understand where their food  
20 comes from. New York City Council Speaker  
21 Christine Quinn told New Yorkers that teaching  
22 children about healthy eating and where our food  
23 comes form is as valuable as teaching them how to  
24 read and write. New York City School Chancellor  
25 Joel Kline said that research shows that school

1  
2 gardens are excellent learning environments and  
3 students exposed to them do better on science  
4 exams. I'm hopeful that he will leave that memo  
5 for whoever succeeds him.

6           The resurgence of interest in  
7 school gardens means that many more of this city's  
8 1.1 million public school students, their 80,000  
9 teachers and of course the PTAs will want to  
10 incorporate gardening into their education and  
11 curriculum. Not every school's as fortunate as PS  
12 29 to have space available for cultivation.  
13 Therefore we will likely need to call on the  
14 talented and uniquely suited community gardeners  
15 of this city to do their part and create  
16 partnerships with nearby schools to provide such  
17 educational opportunities.

18           Some might ask if we can afford to  
19 ensure permanency of our community gardens for our  
20 children and for future generations but really the  
21 question we need to be asking is can we afford not  
22 to. Thank you.

23           COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank you  
24 very much for your testimony. Council Member do  
25 you have any questions? Okay. And we've been

1  
2 joined by Council Member Gale Brewer of Manhattan.  
3 And I'm sure that had Chair Viverito been here she  
4 would have definitely expressed her gratitude to  
5 the work that you do and a lot of the other  
6 members of community gardens so I thank you. And  
7 I definitely will get her well wished messages to  
8 her. And we'd like to call up the next panel,  
9 Peter Kramer, Le Petite Versailles Garden, Amy  
10 Gavares, the New York Restoration Project and  
11 Steven Frillman, Green Gorillas.

12 [Pause]

13 And before we begin the additional  
14 testimony, we have one more panel or two more  
15 panels and then we have the street renaming panels  
16 so just to give you an update. And you may begin.

17 PETER KRAMER: Hi, my name is Peter  
18 Kramer. I represent the community garden, Le  
19 Petite Versailles. Thank you to the Parks and  
20 Recreation Committee for holding this hearing.  
21 Dear Chair Melissa Mark-Viverito, I'm here to  
22 speak in favor of New York City's community  
23 gardens. Gardens are important and essential  
24 public spaces that provide food, recreation and  
25 culture to both New Yorkers and international

1  
2 visitors. Gardens are the lifeblood of our air  
3 and food for thought and nourishment.

4 In 1996 Allied Productions Inc, a  
5 30 year old non profit arts umbrella organization  
6 became the founders and stewards of Le Petite  
7 Versailles, a New York City Parks Green Thumb  
8 garden on the lower east side of Manhattan. We  
9 are a place for plants and people. Allied  
10 provides free public arts programming during the  
11 garden season from may to November. The garden,  
12 the community, rather and the garden we represent  
13 needs this resource as a place to organize and  
14 advocate for better neighborhoods and quality of  
15 life concerns such as the environment, LGBT use  
16 and community exchanges that strengthen the  
17 diversity of our city as well as a place to relax,  
18 meditate and appreciate nature.

19 I request that you as Chair of the  
20 Parks and Recreation Committee urge your City  
21 Council colleagues to deny any efforts of new  
22 rules and regulations that facilitate the removal  
23 of gardens and that you support all efforts to  
24 make permanent the current and future gardens of  
25 New York City. Thank you very much.

1  
2                   STEPHEN FRILLMAN: Hi, my name is  
3 Steve Frillman and I'm from a group called the  
4 Green Gorillas and we've had the great privilege  
5 and opportunity to be working with grass roots  
6 groups who have been creating community gardens  
7 for, it's been now 37 years. And we hope to be  
8 able to work with grass roots groups creating and  
9 maintaining community gardens for another 37 years  
10 and hopefully this will be the beginning of an  
11 opportunity for us all to work together to make  
12 that happen.

13                   We've actually really benefited  
14 from being able to work with City Council members  
15 to support community gardens and community  
16 gardeners in their districts. We've been lucky  
17 enough to work with Council Member Robert Jackson  
18 in upper Manhattan, Council Member Diana Reyna out  
19 in Brooklyn who've allocated discretionary funding  
20 to support community gardeners in their district  
21 to not only improve their gardens but also reach  
22 out to the community and hold events so we sort of  
23 have always really appreciated the City Council's  
24 role and support.

25                   And I don't think there's any doubt

1  
2 that this administration has been really  
3 supportive of community gardening amongst a number  
4 of greening and environmental initiatives in the  
5 city. And, you know, a lot of us who are working  
6 in this community gardening who are in New York  
7 City know that some ways when the community  
8 gardeners in this room are in this room, when  
9 people like Edy Stone and Jack Lynn are in this  
10 room instead of out in the community, that we all  
11 lose in a way. So what we want to do is make sure  
12 that the community gardens get preserved so that  
13 all the community gardeners and the folks at Green  
14 Thumb can be out doing what they're doing and not  
15 in here with us.

16                   And this is the interagency  
17 collaboration in this administration has been  
18 great. HPD and Green Thumb talking to each other,  
19 talking about pieces of land, making pieces of  
20 land available has been terrific. I also just  
21 want to, as an aside just say and I know that you  
22 all know this but if you're sort of learning of it  
23 for the first time that Green Thumb's \$800,000  
24 budget, I think, is the deal of this century. I  
25 think we'd all agree that what they're able to do

1  
2 with that budget and the support they give to  
3 community gardeners is great. And each individual  
4 community garden in New York City is also the deal  
5 of the century 'cause gardeners do so many things  
6 and they really consume such little of the city's  
7 resources so it's really a terrific thing.

8 But it's really kind of about the  
9 future. It's really about the fact that for  
10 whatever reason and we can sort of argue about the  
11 details, the process of these city rules, what's  
12 actually written down in these city rules has made  
13 community gardeners uneasy about the future of  
14 their gardens. Some of it is flashing back to a  
15 previous administration that wasn't supportive and  
16 worrying that if an administration in the future  
17 is also not supportive that they're going to have  
18 to fight for the future of their gardens all over  
19 again.

20 So it's really about looking to the  
21 future so we would hope that you would talk to  
22 gardeners, whether it's talking to the New York  
23 City Community Garden Coalition, talking to  
24 individual gardeners, garden groups in your  
25 district and to come up with solutions, whatever

1  
2 those might be, whether it's legislation or rules  
3 to firmly preserve community gardens. We would  
4 urge you to do that.

5 I also just want to say that the  
6 announcement of a four year license now for  
7 community gardens is a terrific thing and I'm sure  
8 gardeners are going to be excited to hear about  
9 that so and we would be happy to work with the  
10 City Council and be part of any and all  
11 discussions to firmly preserve community gardens  
12 for the future. Thanks.

13 AMY GAVARES: Good afternoon.  
14 Thank you for all that's been said before me and  
15 we stand on the shoulders of not only those who  
16 have spoken here today but generations of  
17 community gardens who fortunately have broad  
18 shoulders 'cause gardening gives you good, strong  
19 back and shoulders so... Thank you for allowing  
20 New York Restoration Project to testify today. I  
21 am Amy Gavares NYRP's Executive Vice President.  
22 On behalf of our executive director, Amy Frietag,  
23 I want to thank Chairwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito  
24 and wish her a speedy recovery and members of the  
25 City Council, Council Members Brewer and Dromm and



1  
2 Ferreras as well as New York City Parks  
3 Commissioner Adrian Benope, Deputy Commissioner  
4 Larry Blackman and Edy Stone and the Green Thumb  
5 staff for your recent work in strengthening the  
6 protections we provide New York City's community  
7 gardens.

8                   Significant progress was made and  
9 NYRP stands ready to continue working with the  
10 City Council, the Parks Department and the  
11 gardening community to identify further options  
12 for providing our gardens with more permanent  
13 protections as well as new opportunities to grow  
14 and enhance New York City's community garden  
15 programs.

16                   As you may know NYRP is the proud  
17 steward of 55 of our city's community gardens. 52  
18 of our gardens are owned by NYRP and their title's  
19 protected in perpetuity in a land trust, while  
20 three of our gardens are operated and maintained  
21 through license agreements with the Parks  
22 Department. Since 1999, NYRP has invested more  
23 than \$10 million in privately fund raised monies  
24 in day to day maintenance, restoration and  
25 programming. We have worked hard to provide all

1  
2 of our gardens with the resources and support they  
3 need to grow and thrive as vibrant community  
4 meeting places and green pocket parks.

5 We are now making an enormous  
6 investment in expanding our community outreach and  
7 gardener engagement program as we firmly believe  
8 it is the participation and leadership of  
9 community members that sustain these gardens.

10 This year we re-organized NYRP's community  
11 outreach department in an effort to renew our  
12 commitment to partnering with and supporting the  
13 communities and gardeners we serve. This past  
14 summer we piloted a new garden angels program that  
15 allowed us to employ a community member at each of  
16 three gardens, who is responsible for expanding  
17 access to the garden while growing the number of  
18 residents using the garden space. Our hope is to  
19 secure the necessary funding that will allow us to  
20 expand our garden angels program next summer to  
21 NYRP managed community gardens in all five  
22 boroughs.

23 We are also working to establish  
24 new partnerships with community organizations and  
25 city agencies in order to leverage more resources

1  
2 through collaborative programming. And we are  
3 working hard to find creative approaches to making  
4 our garden design process more community based,  
5 investing more resources on community programming  
6 and engagement then design and construction. As  
7 all of us face the grim realities of recent  
8 economic downturn, it has never been more  
9 important for us to leverage our partnerships and  
10 find new and innovative ways, organizations  
11 working on behalf of New York City's community  
12 gardens and gardeners to collaborate and maximize  
13 those resources.

14 We believe much can be achieved by  
15 the Parks Department and Green Thumb bringing  
16 together organizations like NYRP, the Trust for  
17 Public Land, Green Gorillas, Grow NYC and other  
18 citywide and local non profits as well as other  
19 agencies like New York City Housing Authority,  
20 Department of Education to realize a long term  
21 vision for our city's entire catalog of community  
22 gardens. Working as a coalition, NYRP believes we  
23 can increase the potential to secure additional  
24 funds to support all gardens, expand gardeners'  
25 access to educational programming, identify new

1  
2 opportunities to share resources, increase the  
3 public's access to our gardens and further promote  
4 urban agriculture and local food production.

5           With so much public attention and  
6 policy maker interest focus on community garden  
7 and urban agriculture, we must leverage this  
8 moment to increase our efforts to collaborate and  
9 together we can continue to build an innovative  
10 and sustainable model for urban gardening that  
11 greens our city, strengthens our neighborhoods,  
12 enriches the lives of our residents.

13           We also believe it is critically  
14 important that the Mayor's update to PlaNYC  
15 highlight the role community gardens play in  
16 ensuring our city's long term sustainability and  
17 our citizen's access to open green space. PlaNYC  
18 must recognize community gardens as necessary  
19 components of our city's green infrastructure and  
20 recommend they be a protected expanded and  
21 appropriately funded and maintained.

22           By working in partnership with the  
23 communities we serve and growing the collaboration  
24 between community gardening organizations, we can  
25 maximize the many benefits gardens bring to our

1  
2 city and residents and ensure a diverse community  
3 based community gardening program that is meeting  
4 the needs of the 21st century garden and family.  
5 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank you  
7 very much for your testimony and we'll be calling  
8 up the next panel. Thanks. Ellen Belcher, Morris  
9 Shumel Community Garden and Children's Magical  
10 Garden, Dr. Bill Shepherd, Time's Up New York, oh  
11 Ben, it says Ben. Okay, Ben and Migali Regis,  
12 Creative Little Garden New York.

13 [Pause]

14 You may begin.

15 ELLEN BELCHER: Hi, my name is  
16 Ellen Belcher and I'm a gardener and a garden  
17 activist. I'm a member of the Morris Shumell  
18 community garden on West 162nd Street in  
19 Washington Heights. We are registered with Green  
20 Thumb and for the past 25 years or so community  
21 members have been gardening on that same spot. I  
22 am also a member of the Children's Magical Garden  
23 de Carmen Rubio on Staten and Norfolk in the lower  
24 east side. This garden and the children that play  
25 there have also grown on the same spot for over 25

1  
2 years. This garden sits on HPD land and has been  
3 designated as subject to development. I am also a  
4 member of the New York City Community Garden  
5 Coalition.

6           The most beautiful thing about the  
7 300 plus, I guess it's 600, gardens in New York  
8 City is that they belong to the community, to the  
9 children and elders who live nearby who want a  
10 place to play, grow, to meet their neighbors and  
11 to share food and beauty. In the last few years  
12 the world has moved toward locally organically  
13 grown food, which is something that you can find  
14 in most of the city's gardens and everyone wants  
15 to get involved. For example, at this moment the  
16 Morris Shumel garden has a two year waiting list  
17 while next door to our garden an empty lot owned  
18 by private land speculators has sat fallow for  
19 many, many years.

20           We need a plan to expand the number  
21 of community gardens and urban farms. Some ideas  
22 I have heard is offering tax breaks to private  
23 land holders or even requiring land holders of  
24 empty lots to make them available to community  
25 gardeners. There are also good ideas that have

1  
2 been suggested for swaps of public and private  
3 lands for places that it makes more sense to  
4 cultivate than build upon. There're examples of  
5 gardening and farming along highways and railroad  
6 easements and more community gardens in existing  
7 parks is another idea.

8           The city definitely needs to  
9 develop innovative policies and procedures to  
10 expand the city's community gardens and urban  
11 farms. I suggest a start be that the many vacant  
12 lots adjacent to existing gardens from which on  
13 our side of the fence seems like speculation  
14 waiting for another Guiliani style land give away.  
15 As a matter of fact, all existing lots in the city  
16 should be considered first for community gardens  
17 and urban farms.

18           While the Parks rules for community  
19 gardens are pretty good at maintaining the status  
20 quo of community gardens under Parks jurisdictions  
21 and I look forward to the legislation that will  
22 make them more permanent, they do nothing for the  
23 many gardens under the jurisdiction of HPD, DOT,  
24 NYCHA and other agencies. It seems most egregious  
25 that HPD has issued their own rules for a few of

1  
2 the community gardens, which we have just learned  
3 will soon be number 16 gardens growing under their  
4 jurisdiction on land they have not been able to  
5 give away to developers for a decade or more. The  
6 HPD rules for community gardens are all about  
7 processes for closing down gardens, which I  
8 suppose includes the Children's Magical Garden de  
9 Carmen Rubio. It's high time to put this garden's  
10 land under Parks and get HPD out of the business  
11 of administering gardens, which as documented by  
12 their rules, they're definitely not good at.

13 We have heard that legislation to  
14 give community gardens permanent protections and  
15 to create more gardens is in the works and I hope  
16 our testimony here today will contribute to the  
17 final results. I encourage those working on  
18 legislation to recognize the many present and  
19 future gardens will continue to grow on land that  
20 is not administered by Parks and to be sure that  
21 the legislation will extend and support  
22 protections to all community gardens not just  
23 those under DPR, DRP, sorry.

24 Gardens need the language and  
25 protections in the agreement of 2002. Community



1  
2 gardens should be celebrated and supported in  
3 legislation. Not only should they be made  
4 permanent, they should also have permanent fences  
5 and gates and water hook ups and electricity. It  
6 should be illegal for private property owners to  
7 continue to speculate on land directly adjacent to  
8 a community garden without allowing its  
9 cultivation. Gardens should no longer be mapped  
10 on city maps as vacant land; they should be mapped  
11 as community gardens.

12 DR. BENJAMIN SHEPHERD: Thank you,  
13 Ellen. My kids have also played in the Children's  
14 Magical Garden for years and I will tell you guys,  
15 there's a qualitative difference between kids  
16 running around in a community garden and getting  
17 muddy than kids running in a city park and having  
18 their knee scraped on the concrete. It really,  
19 there's a huge difference and I hope that when I  
20 get older and my kids are older, they have  
21 community gardens they can play in but I'm frankly  
22 concerned that we're going to widdle them away, a  
23 few a decade, a few a decade, a few a decade. I  
24 mean, the pro-growth urban regime of New York  
25 City, it's threatening these green spaces.

1  
2 As we saw this summer, people love  
3 the community gardens. We held rallies--yes  
4 ma'am.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: I'm  
6 sorry. Can you just say your name for the record?

7 DR. SHEPHERD: I'm sorry. Benjamin  
8 Shepherd, Time's Up New York. We held rallies for  
9 the community gardens, we rode bicycles to  
10 Bloomberg's house to ask him to save the community  
11 gardens. We had members climb up in trees in City  
12 Hall parks to save the community gardens. We had  
13 press conferences, we had speak outs. People love  
14 the community gardens. They're passionate about  
15 the community gardens and then people in this room  
16 have all been part of that mobilization because  
17 this is something we're asking for. We're not  
18 asking for penny more. We're asking just to  
19 preserve these spaces.

20 And frankly we've appreciate the  
21 city's response to the outcry of support of the  
22 community gardens but until there's legislation on  
23 the table that we can all vote for we're all going  
24 to be suspect. We really need leadership, too.  
25 That's what we're asking for you guys; please show

1  
2 some leadership. We really need this. It's been  
3 decades that these gardens have been in limbo and  
4 I hope it doesn't continue. I'm 41. When I first  
5 moved to the city the gardens were under threat.  
6 I'm getting gray hair watching the gardens under  
7 threat so guys, please.

8 In 1980 there were 1,400 community  
9 gardens. Today, the 282 gardens in the Parks  
10 Department that are basically safe but the other  
11 300 are completely in limbo. They are not safe.  
12 The city's continued a policy of swapping gardens  
13 out of the Parks Department into HPD and vice  
14 versa so it says they haven't bulldozed any Parks  
15 Department gardens but 350 HPD gardens have been  
16 bulldozed in the last ten years so there's a real  
17 concern right here that there wont be any gardens.  
18 There's only 282 left. So we're asking you to  
19 show a little bit of leadership.

20 The practice of swapping must stop.  
21 Many of the swapped gardens are still green spaces  
22 and they can be preserved. We oppose the loss of  
23 these spaces and Astroturf and cement parks really  
24 don't count guys. We need more than Astroturf -  
25 it still hurts. We're also concerned about the

1  
2 lack of commitment to support, preserve or create  
3 new gardens. The social rate of return for  
4 community gardens in terms of quality of life,  
5 property values, reduced crime, social cohesion,  
6 reduced global warming. These all should make  
7 this a no-brainer. These are spaces that increase  
8 quality of life for every single New Yorker so we  
9 ask you to really support these spaces.

10                   And finally, gardens aren't  
11 standing in the way of housing. Garden activists  
12 support the need for both more gardens and  
13 affordable housing. The city could easily reach  
14 its benchmarks for truly affordable housing if all  
15 properties that went into tax arrears and were  
16 taken over by the city were preserved as low  
17 income housing. The city could also review all  
18 such properties to identify land and create  
19 community gardens.

20                   In sum, ensure community gardens  
21 are here for our children. Gardens are a crucial  
22 part of the solution for our global city's  
23 sustainable future. We ask for your leadership.  
24 Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak.

25                   MIGALI REGIS: Hello, my name is

1  
2 Migali Regis and I'm a member of the New York City  
3 Community Garden Coalition and also a member of  
4 the Creative Little Garden in the East Village.

5 I've had a nasty cold for the past three days and  
6 I have made a supreme effort to get out of bed and  
7 I was really scolded by my husband to come here  
8 and testify but I wanted to make sure my voice was  
9 heard so here I am.

10 I have been a member of the  
11 Creative Little Garden located at 530 East 6th  
12 Street in the East Village, New York City for the  
13 past 15 years and our garden has been in existence  
14 for probably around 25. Our garden is striving  
15 and is an invaluable asset in our community and I  
16 invite every City Council member to stop by and  
17 visit. We are in fact more than a garden, we are  
18 a neighborhood park and local residents actively  
19 use it every day to admire nature at work, rest,  
20 read, eat their lunch, mingle with friends, teach  
21 their kids about plants, listen to the many birds  
22 that call it home, play music, gather with family  
23 and friends, etc, etc. We also have a lot of  
24 weddings in our garden.

25 During three seasons we have

1  
2 extensive daily open hours from 11:00 am to  
3 sunset. We are an oasis of green in the middle of  
4 this concrete city. Feel free to visit our web  
5 site. It's [www.creativelittlegarden.org](http://www.creativelittlegarden.org), which  
6 will tell you a bit more about the garden and what  
7 it has to offer. Our garden is not just for  
8 neighborhood residents. Since we are listed in  
9 many international guidebooks about New York we  
10 also have many visitors from Europe, Australia and  
11 elsewhere in the world. Community gardens in New  
12 York City offer invaluable benefits to the city  
13 and its residents. The following is a list of  
14 some of these benefits and why they should become  
15 permanently protected.

16           Community organizing, gardens  
17 increase the sense of community ownership and  
18 stewardship. They foster the development of a  
19 community identity and spirit. They bring people  
20 together from a variety of background, age, race,  
21 culture and social class. They build community  
22 leaders. They offer a focal point for community  
23 organizing and can lead to community based effort  
24 to deal with other social concerns.

25           Crime prevention, gardens provide

1  
2 opportunities to meet neighbors, they increase  
3 eyes on the street, they are recognized by many  
4 police departments as an effective community crime  
5 prevention strategy. Cultural opportunities,  
6 gardens offer unique opportunities for new  
7 immigrants to produce traditional crops that  
8 otherwise would be unavailable locally, to take  
9 advantage of the experience of elders to produce a  
10 significant amount of food for the household, to  
11 provide inter generational exposure to cultural  
12 traditions, to offer a cultural exchange with  
13 other gardeners, to offer neighborhoods an access  
14 point to non English speaking communities, to  
15 allow people from diverse backgrounds to work side  
16 by side on common goals without speaking the same  
17 language.

18 Youth, community gardens offer  
19 unique opportunities to teach youth about where  
20 their food come from, practical math skills, basic  
21 business principles, the importance of community  
22 and stewardship, issues of environmental  
23 sustainability, job and life skills and healthy  
24 inexpensive activity for youth that can bring them  
25 closer to nature and allow them to interact with

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each other.

Food production, many community gardeners, especially those from immigrant communities take advantage of food production in community gardens to provide a significant food source and/or income. Gardens allow families and individuals without land of their own the opportunity to produce food. Gardens provide access to nutritionally rich food that may otherwise be unavailable to low income families. Gardens donate thousands of pounds of fresh produce to food pantries and involve people in processes that provide food security and alleviate hunger.

Health, studies have shown that community gardeners and their children eat healthier diet than non-gardening families. Exposure to green space reduces stress and increase a sense of well being and belonging. And last but not least, green space. Community gardens add beauty to the community and heighten people's awareness and appreciation of living things. They filter rain water, helping to keep lakes, rivers and ground water clean. They



1  
2 restore oxygen to the air and help to reduce air  
3 pollution. They recycle huge numbers of tree  
4 trimmings, leaves, grass, clippings and other  
5 organic waste back into the soil. They provide a  
6 place to retreat from the noise and commotion of  
7 urban environments. They provide much needed  
8 green space in lower income neighborhood, which  
9 typically have access to less green space than  
10 other parts of the community.

11 Development and maintenance of  
12 garden space is less expensive than that of park  
13 land. Scientific studies show that crime  
14 decreases in neighborhoods as the amount of green  
15 space increases. And community gardens have been  
16 shown to actually increase property values in the  
17 immediate vicinity where they are located. Thank  
18 you.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank you  
20 for your testimony and we will be calling up the  
21 next panel. This is actually the panel before the  
22 street renaming and it is a panel of one, Stephen  
23 Kidd, CMT Steering Committee.

24 [Pause]

25 STEPHEN KIDD: Good afternoon. My

1  
2 name is Stephen Kidd. I'm a community gardener at  
3 the Carrie McCracken Choose Community Garden,  
4 which is located on St. Nicholas Avenue between  
5 118th and 117th Streets. We were one of two  
6 gardens that was under HPD that was transferred.  
7 And our garden and the community is very happy for  
8 that event.

9           The Parks Department--there should  
10 have been more. The Parks Department ruled  
11 changes on community gardens represent a measured  
12 improvement to the eight years of benign neglect  
13 on the issue of making permanent citizens manage  
14 greening efforts. What remains is for the Council  
15 to ensure that a legal foundation for urban  
16 gardening and urban farming is embedded in the  
17 tapestry of laws and regulations governing land  
18 use. The passage of urban farming legislation in  
19 Seattle clearly points out what a municipal  
20 legislature can do. If you leave this matter to  
21 the whims of a future administration, you will  
22 have failed us to be a check and a balance on  
23 executive discretion.

24           Whether you believe your friend or  
25 your foe will occupy the throne next, it is your

1  
2 challenge to help set the legal parameters of  
3 executive expression with respect to the  
4 permanence of community gardening in this city.

5 While some of this is not the direct province of  
6 this Committee, you can have the matter researched  
7 with Seattle's recent farming legislation as a  
8 guide post and express an advisory opinion to the  
9 entire Council. If you need an offset for the  
10 cost, I would suggest that you fund hard research  
11 over advocacy. You are two friends of the citizen  
12 gardening effort, when you do all you can to help  
13 us gardeners be all we can.

14 As to your oversight of the Parks  
15 Department's administration of community gardens,  
16 I have several additional concerns. These include  
17 the need to address the retrenchment of the  
18 Sanitation Department on composting. Why are we  
19 buying compost from New jersey when the Department  
20 of Parks and its network of gardens can produce  
21 more cheaper. Copious compost is the best agent  
22 for mending our city soils. With enough compost,  
23 we can farm directly on concrete, most more on our  
24 post demolition lots.

25 Two, there's an opportunity to use

1  
2 community gardens to promote green technologies  
3 for increased local food production, particularly,  
4 there are solar, biofuel production and water  
5 reuse options that should be implemented to make  
6 our gardens more sustainable for the future.

7           Three, also the use of city owned  
8 watershed lands for nursery production should be  
9 studied. Local nurseries and farms are land  
10 locked; give them access to land in return for a  
11 cornucopia of plant starts each season. Let our  
12 gardeners and the Parks Department, guided by our  
13 botanical gardens and the state's extension  
14 service, harvest hearty, field grown starts each  
15 year to grow out in local gardens. New York City  
16 can be more self reliant in supporting its  
17 volunteer labor force for food production. In  
18 order for the Parks Department to optimize  
19 community gardening, there needs to be  
20 collaborations with other city entities. Your  
21 committee can be the spur to make it happen.  
22 Respectfully submitted. Thank you.

23                           [Applause]

24                           COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank you  
25 for your testimony, Mr. Kidd and now we're going

1  
2 to be transitioning into the street renamings.  
3 Thank you all for coming to testify on behalf of  
4 the community gardens. Anne Ellen Maddigan of  
5 Rose Hill Apartments, Joseph Miriana, Fordham  
6 University, Carrie Laney the New York Botanical  
7 Garden and Jacqueline Morrison, PS 84 Sydney  
8 Morrison Way.

9 [Pause]

10 Okay, we're going to begin the  
11 testimony and you may begin, thank you.

12 ANNE ELLEN MADDIGAN: Thank you.  
13 Good afternoon, my name is Anne Ellen Maddigan and  
14 I'm here to represent the residents of Rose Hill  
15 Apartments in the Bronx. I've been the Director  
16 of Social Services for Rose Hill Housing  
17 Management Corporation since 1997. I appreciate  
18 the opportunity to testify and thank the  
19 Chairwoman and Committee members for the  
20 opportunity for our residents and staff to be  
21 heard on this matter.

22 Rose Hill Apartments is a 119-unit  
23 nine-story building for low income senior citizens  
24 and younger disabled persons. We are located  
25 across the street from Botanical Gardens, just

1  
2 south of Bedford Park Boulevard. At present, we  
3 have 136 residents and there are in many more in  
4 staff, home care and health care workers, visitors  
5 and relatives who travel to our building each day.

6 Here are some of the varied  
7 problems with our address. Our building was in  
8 planning and construction just about the time the  
9 naming of the street was changes to Casameeroff  
10 [phonetic] Boulevard. Our postal address,  
11 however, has remained 2855 Southern Boulevard.  
12 There are constant problems with this duality.  
13 First of all police and fire responders have a  
14 difficult time finding our building. Since we  
15 work with an older and often more frail  
16 population, this is a big problem. Many of our  
17 residents also use ambulette services and access-  
18 a-ride and have received complaints from their  
19 drivers about finding our building.

20 Second, persons trying to visit or  
21 deliver goods can not find us. There is confusion  
22 with many GPS systems. Recently we had  
23 considerable trouble getting a new computer  
24 component as FedEx could not find the building.  
25 We get many calls from delivery truck drivers and

1  
2 other people who have business to do in the  
3 building who are lost. People often get confused  
4 because the Southern Boulevard signs end at  
5 Fordham Road.

6 In short, we would be most pleased  
7 if the Southern Boulevard name was restored and  
8 support any efforts to make this happen. I have  
9 some petitions here that we had signed last year  
10 and again this past weekend when we became aware  
11 of this hearing. We mean no disrespect to the  
12 memory of Dr. Casameeroff who loved the Bronx and  
13 whose work on the history of the borough is most  
14 valued or to his family. The dual name change  
15 solution would be an excellent compromise as  
16 opposed to a complete name change and would also  
17 relieve and further confusion the complete name  
18 change may possible effect. Thank you for this  
19 opportunity to speak from our residents.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank you  
21 very much for your testimony.

22 JOE MIRIANA: Good afternoon. My  
23 name is Joe Miriana and I'm the Associate Vice  
24 President for Government and Urban Affairs at  
25 Fordham University. First, I would like to thank

1  
2 Chairwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito, who is not here  
3 today, the acting Chair Julissa Ferreras,  
4 Councilwoman Gale Brewer and Council Member Daniel  
5 Dromm, I guess Mr. Dromm is gone, as well as the  
6 other Committee members for giving Fordham the  
7 opportunity to offer testimony today regarding the  
8 proposal to revert the street name, Dr. Theodore  
9 Casameeroff Boulevard that runs from the  
10 intersection of East Fordham Road to the Maslew  
11 Parkway entrance to the Bronx River Parkway in the  
12 Bronx back to its original designation as Southern  
13 Boulevard, while simultaneously making Dr.  
14 Theodore Casameeroff Way a secondary street name  
15 in accord with the current practice of the Council  
16 to pay homage to distinguished, departed members  
17 of the community.

18 Dr. Casameeroff was most assuredly  
19 a distinguished Bronx resident and a prominent  
20 civic leader across the entire borough of the  
21 Bronx as a co-founder of the Bronx County  
22 Historical Society and a most notable 20th century  
23 Bronx voice in and for the community. Fordham  
24 thus supports a dual name compromise that was  
25 suggested and proposed by Bronx community board



1  
2 number 7 and is seeded to by the Casameeroff  
3 family, for which we are grateful.

4           The reasons for our supporting this  
5 secondary street naming are diverse and wide  
6 ranging. Primary among them is our concern about  
7 the confusion initially generated by the fact that  
8 the United States Postal Service has, for the  
9 better part of three decades since the original  
10 change, refuse to officially recognize the street  
11 name change and the existing Casameeroff  
12 designation. More recently, many mapping tools  
13 and global position systems only recognize the  
14 original Southern Boulevard's designation or  
15 recognize both of them, causing great confusion.

16           Even though the physical signs  
17 designate the same section of road as Dr. Theodore  
18 Casameeroff Boulevard, this current duality has  
19 over the years resulted in confusion and result in  
20 difficulty for emergency responders such as police  
21 and fire fighters to promptly identify locations  
22 where assistance is needed, especially with  
23 respect to the senior citizens living at 2855  
24 Southern Boulevard, Southern Casameeroff Boulevard  
25 known as the Rose Hill Apartments, 119 unit, nine

1  
2 story building for low income senior citizens and  
3 younger disabled persons sponsored by Fordham  
4 University and located across from the New York  
5 Botanical Garden just south of Bedford Park  
6 Boulevard. These residents must use Southern  
7 Boulevard as their mailing address but then must  
8 remember to use Casameeroff when calling for  
9 police and EMS fire response, a tough situation  
10 for elderly residents.

11                   Additionally, as the use of GPS has  
12 increased, the delivery of goods, mail and the  
13 ability for visitors and deliveries to locate  
14 Fordham and other institutions has been  
15 increasingly hindered. For example, when  
16 potential visitors and delivery drivers conduct a  
17 search with the aid of Google map, they find over  
18 a half dozen separate addresses that incorrectly  
19 identify the street and Fordham University's  
20 location, which has its main vehicle entrance on  
21 Casameeroff Southern. The New York Botanical  
22 Garden has struggled with similar problems. These  
23 various addresses can give the prospective  
24 delivery person or visitor the general vicinity  
25 but none of them are very clear with respect to

1  
2 the location of the institutions and prospective  
3 delivery drivers end up confused and frequently  
4 lost. Many end up turning around and leaving the  
5 Bronx with frustration, without making deliveries.  
6 It is this we also seek to remedy.

7 Fordham recognizes the value and  
8 both contributions of Dr. Casameeroff has made to  
9 the Bronx and to the City of New York. It has  
10 always been our intention to honor his legacy and  
11 pay homage to his valuable work while resolving  
12 any directional and locational [phonetic]  
13 challenges that continue to be experienced as a  
14 result of the name confusion.

15 Therefore, we fully support  
16 returning the legal street name to Southern  
17 Boulevard and making Dr. Casameeroff Way the  
18 secondary street name as this will maintain the  
19 public honor originally intended and will  
20 eliminate the health and safety, post office  
21 delivery and transportation issues that are  
22 currently problems for us and our neighbors,  
23 including the New York Botanical Garden, Rose Hill  
24 Apartments and the Fordham Preparatory School.  
25 Thank you again for this opportunity to testify

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today.

CARRIE LANEY: Good afternoon. My name is Carrie Laney, Vice President for Government and Community Relations at the New York Botanical Garden. First I would like to thank the Committee and the distinguished committee members for giving us this opportunity to testify regarding Intro 417 sponsored by Council Member Oliver Koppell, which proposes to revert the name, Dr. Theodore Casameeroff Boulevard, from East Fordham Road to Maslew Parkway in the Bronx to its original designation of Southern Boulevard and make Dr. Theodore Casameeroff Way a secondary honorary street name, as is currently practiced to pay homage to distinguished members of the community.

Now my written testimony, which you have in front of you repeats a lot was said by my colleagues and I'm not going to do that to you but what I'm going to do is just quickly explain it maybe in a little more conversational speak. Southern Boulevard is this and in the sort of one end of it there's a piece that changes from Southern to Dr. Theodore Casameeroff, back to

1  
2 Southern too, that sort of gets lost in all of our  
3 formal speak. And it was done in the 80s, early  
4 80s right after he passed away very much in the  
5 spirit that we agree with today, to honor him.  
6 He's well regarded in the community, Bronx  
7 Historical Society holds him in high regard as his  
8 family's still in the community.

9           It is no disrespect that we are  
10 asking for this. And if it was done today, it  
11 would have been done as a secondary honorary  
12 street naming. But, as my colleagues have  
13 described, I am a self professed addict to GPS and  
14 you have to think to type D-R period T-H-E-O-D-O-  
15 R-E and no one thinks of it. Locally, it's sort  
16 of understood as Casameeroff or Southern Cas, as  
17 Joe said sort of off the cuff earlier. And it  
18 does cause real hardship.

19           Visitors from around the city, very  
20 locally people sort of figured it out but it does  
21 impact tourism, it does impact who can come to the  
22 New York Botanical Garden. It does impact parents  
23 coming to see their kids at Fordham. It does  
24 impact Rose Hill, that has to teach its employees  
25 to say one address when calling EMS or another to

1  
2 get a Fed Ex. You know, it just was not done the  
3 way we would do it today and we're just asking, as  
4 Council Member Koppell has introduced, that we  
5 just clean it up. It's a clean up and again, the  
6 New York Botanical Garden holds the Dr. Theodore  
7 Casameeroff in the highest regard and we just  
8 would like to kind of clean this issue up. So  
9 thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

10 JACQUELINE MORRISON: Good  
11 afternoon. My name is Jacqueline Idaldo Morrison,  
12 I am a dual language coordinator and a literacy  
13 coach for the Department of Education. So thank  
14 you Councilman, person, Gale Brewer for giving me  
15 this permission to come today for this public  
16 hearing and for all the rest of the Council  
17 persons that have left or were here.

18 I am requesting that the secondary  
19 name of West 92nd Street Southeast between  
20 Columbus Avenue and Central Park West be named in  
21 honor of Sydney H. Morrison, who was the principal  
22 at PS 84, the Lillian Webber School, for 26 years.  
23 Not because he was a math teacher at the Joan of  
24 Ark Junior High in 93rd Street, or the math  
25 chairman, or the math coordinator for district 3

1  
2 in the upper west side, not because he was a  
3 graduate from Columbia University who lived at the  
4 corner of 93rd Street and Amsterdam Avenue for  
5 over 30 years, nor an individual who just lived on  
6 the upper west side for over 50 years of his life  
7 but because he was the principal of PS 84, the  
8 Lillian Webber School for 26 years and believed in  
9 public education for all children. He had the  
10 ability to influence parents, community, staff,  
11 colleagues and children to acquire enough  
12 knowledge so that they're education was the key to  
13 freedom. He was the pioneer in bringing so many  
14 programs to the school and the neighborhood.

15 In 1983 PS 84 won the Rockefeller  
16 Brother Fund, natural war foot [phonetic]  
17 integrated our program. In 1989 Sid Morrison was  
18 awarded the New York City School and Culture  
19 Award. He established in 1985 the first Spanish-  
20 English two way immersion program committed to  
21 producing bilingual, bilateral students in New  
22 York City. The program was nominated in 1991 for  
23 a National Academic Excellence Award. From the  
24 beginning, he was different and the parents wanted  
25 him.

1  
2 In 1971 the New York Times stated  
3 the following about Sid Morrison, "One young  
4 principal in New York City upper west side who  
5 helped institute a new, informal classroom  
6 organization is still under court challenge  
7 because he was selected outside the regular civil  
8 service process. This was because he was elected  
9 by the parents to become a community principal."  
10 When we had so many budget cuts during the 1979,  
11 he wouldn't believe what's happening now, the  
12 Times quoted him again, "We have commitment to  
13 kids and we make it work. It's a tremendous  
14 strain but I don't want to produce non-readers and  
15 non-learners just to prove the cuts hurt."

16 Sydney once said, "I have helped  
17 people understand one another, which has helped  
18 put the focus on children and make this school a  
19 place for children. The child is central here and  
20 everything we do evolves from that point of view.  
21 We try to include aspects of the child's cultural  
22 background. We connect that we're supposed to  
23 teach with where the child comes from." This is  
24 why the Sydney H. Morrison name should be the  
25 secondary name at 92nd Street. It should say PS



1  
2 84, Sid Morrison Way. He was the renaissance of  
3 education for more than two decades on the upper  
4 west side. Thank you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I just want  
6 to second that. 'Cause over Thanksgiving I saw  
7 Adam Messinger.

8 MS. MORRISON: Adam Messinger?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Mm-hmm.  
10 And he said he has a PhD now and he said Sid  
11 Morrison is the reason why. But it's pretty  
12 special. I think it was very few white kids in  
13 that school but he said Gale, there were more than  
14 when I went to Joan of Ark, 'cause Ruth believed  
15 in Sid Morrison so congratulations. Your husband  
16 was great.

17 MS. MORRISON: Thank you.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You should  
19 be Chancellor compared to what we're dealing with.  
20 Thank you very much.

21 MS. MORRISON: I thought of that,  
22 too, but...thank you. Thank you all.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS: Thank you  
24 all for your testimony and your clarification on  
25 the portion of Southern Boulevard or Southern.

1  
2 Now, I'm saying it wrong I think. But thank you  
3 very much for your testimony and for taking the  
4 time to come before the Council.

5 I just wanted to, there's several  
6 street renamings but I just wanted to read one in  
7 particular of Staff Sergeant Louis Manuel Gonzalez  
8 Street and that's the one I've introduced. Louise  
9 Manuel Gonzalez was a loving son, caring father  
10 and great husband who joined the United States  
11 Army in 2002. He was assigned to the first  
12 battalion, 17 infantry regiment fifth, striker  
13 brigade, combat team second infantry division at  
14 Fort Louis, Washington.

15 He was killed in combat in  
16 Afghanistan when enemy forces attacked his vehicle  
17 with an explosive device. He was awarded the  
18 bronze star and the United States Army  
19 commendation over his eight years of military  
20 career. He was a resident of Corona and my  
21 district and I want to also take time and paying  
22 homage to him by introducing this street renaming  
23 in our district. So I thank you all for your  
24 testimony and we will be calling this hearing to a  
25 close. Thank you. [Bangs Gavel]

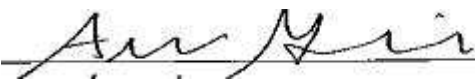
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MS. MORRISON: Thank you.

MR. MIRIANI: Thank you.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Amber Gibson, certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature  \_\_\_\_\_

Date December 14, 2010