

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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May 6, 2026

Start: 1:09 P.M.

Recess: 3:29 P.M.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - 8th Floor - Hearing
Room 1

B E F O R E: Ty Hankerson,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Shekar Krishnan
Linda Lee
Christopher Marte
Frank Morano
Mercedes Narcisse
Sandy Nurse
Yusef Salaam
Pierina Ana Sanchez
Kayla Santosuosso
Shanel Thomas-Henry
Sandra Ung

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

Margaret Nelson

Deputy Commissioner for Public Programs and
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Karina Smith

Assistant Commissioner for Strategic Community
Engagement, NYC Parks

Matt Drury

Chief of Citywide Legislative Affairs, NYC Parks

Heather Lubov

Executive Director of City Parks Foundation

Matt Malina

Director and Founder of NYC H2O

Shawnique Woolfalk

Founder and CEO of Art in the Park

Christopher Leon Johnson

Self

Adam Ganser

Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks

Kara Nowakowski

Team New York Aquatics

Shawnique Woolfalk

Art in the Park

Leona Chin

Program manager for Kissina Synergy

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

Jermaine Sean Smith
Executive Director of the Southern Queens Park
Association

Alan Mukamal
Founder of Red Hook Pool

George Sands
Friends of Mount Prospect Park

Hayley Gorenberg
Volunteer for multiple New York City
parks-oriented organizations

Kathy Matson
Brooklyn's Cultural Roadblock Association

Michael Taylor
Founder of Team Spartan Spades

Rene Scotland
Member of Friends of Commodore Barry Clark

Ethan Norville
First Vice Chair, Brooklyn Community Board 9

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Check, check. This is a microphone check for the Committee on Parks and Recreation located in Hearing Room 1 on May 6th, 2026 by Pat Kurzyna. Check.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Settle down, guys. We're gonna begin. Settle down, settle down, please. Good afternoon, good afternoon. Welcome to the New York City Council hearing on the Committee on Parks and Recreation.

At this time, please silence all electronics and do not approach the dais. At this time as well, please, um, no food or drinks are to be allowed in the hearing room. Thank you. Chair, you- you may begin.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Good morning, every- afternoon, everyone. Uh, I'm Ty Hankerson, Chair of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. It's good to see everyone here. I'd like to welcome everyone to participate in today's hearing, who has come to participate in today's hearing.

While the park system is anchored by the work done by the Parks Department and p- and the public resources devoted to it, the full range of how it operates and the benefits of our parks provide, um,

cannot be realized without the engagement of countless partner organizations and volunteers. New Yorkers love to get involved in their communities to improve the quality of life for themselves and their neighbors. Parks offer up the best opportunity for doing so, whether it be through directly maintaining and beautifying our parks, or providing cultural, recreational, and sports programming. The main entity involved in fostering greater engagement is Partnership for Parks, which is a joint program run by the nonprofit City Parks Foundation and the Parks Department. Its mission is to start, strengthen, and support neighborhood park groups and to link these groups together so that they can become active participants in caring for their respective parks.

The partnership's outreach coordinators tap into all available resources to mobilize people into Friends of the Park groups. These Friends of groups connect local people and organizations with Parks Department in order to work as partners to improve their local parks. Technical assistance is also provided to help these groups learn skills on how to manage, care for, and maintain the areas they serve. As well as providing information and access to

funding, which is necessary. The span of community engagement with parks is wide, as the Parks Department itself offers direct opportunities for volunteers, such as Green Thumb, Shape Up NYC, or to become a steward to assist with forest and wetland restoration, planting and pruning street trees, or monitoring local wildlife.

New Yorkers clearly, clearly want to engage, and the numbers prove it. For example, in June 2023, Parks launched Let's Green NYC to increase the numbers of volunteers helping to beautify their local parks, with apparently over 400,000 volunteers getting involved with their parks.

Most recently, in July 2025, over 1 million volunteers engaged with Parks, resulting in more than 200 million volunteer hours being documented. Something to be celebrated. They support what involvement does— sorry. The trend is clear, and efforts to encourage volunteerism and civic participation in caring for our parks is needed to supplement the work of the department and is another step to achieving greater park equity. It is important to note that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of small community-based groups that would

love to take on a greater role in caring for their park. But there's a huge disparity in groups that can fundraise to support their efforts and those that cannot.

So we need to do all we can to alleviate this disparity and support these smaller groups so that they can thrive. I'd like this hearing to be used as a springboard to encourage greater participation by individuals and local community groups in the parks system by making it easier to engage with the city, and in turn making the Parks Department more responsive to concerns raised by its partners and its volunteers.

In order to do that, however, we need to obtain some greater detail on what the current processes and oversight elements that are involved in and how it functions, since it remains somewhat of a mystery to many New Yorkers. For example, how much staff is employed by the partnership? How are they distributed throughout the system? What is their funding allocation from public and private sources? What would be an ideal funding about— what would be an ideal funding about? What are the duties of outreach coordinators and how many parks do they

1 support? What involvement does it have with Parks
2 Department capital projects and how has the
3 partnership been folded into contribu- into
4 contribution, uh, to ongoing community parks
5 initiative.

6 Let me read that again because I hope that made
7 sense to you because it didn't make sense to me.
8 Hold on. Hmm. We'd like to do a deeper dive into
9 the programming, the partnership, and how
10 distribution uh, is coordinated throughout the
11 system, what the funding allocation is from both
12 public and private sources, what would be an ideal
13 funding amount, what are the duties of outreach
14 coordinators, and how many parks do they support.

15 We'd like to know how the partnership works with
16 Parks Department in terms of capital projects, in
17 terms of procurement. That's better. It is my hope
18 that this hearing will set the stage for this Council
19 and the Administration to continue work to get to- to
20 continue working together to tackle the disparities
21 that exist in our park system and recognize that
encouraging volunteerism and participation in caring
for our parks is just a crucial step. Achieving

equity is ensuring sufficient amounts of public funding for our parks.

I'm curious to explore these bills today and engage with what members of the Parks Department and the public have to say regarding this. Thank you again and welcome to everyone.

Now I'll turn it over to our Committee Counsel Kris Sartori to swear in members of the Parks Department. And also, before we do that, I'm going to turn it over to my colleague, Council Member Shanel Thomas-Henry, uh, for remarks regarding her bill.

COUNCIL MEMBER THOMAS-HENRY: Thank you, Chair Hankerson and the entire Committee on Parks and Recreation. So you will be hearing Intro 822 today, which I am proud to support, legislation that I am co-sponsoring with Council Member Maloney to honor two global icons through the co-naming of Pelé Way and Thierry Henry Way. And while this legislation recognizes greatness on the field, this is really about engagement, community, and culture.

You see, what makes soccer so powerful is that it belongs to everyone, no matter where you come from. The game creates community, and that started with

Pelé. Pelé was not just one of the greatest soccer players of all time, he helped transform soccer into a global language.

For millions of people around the world, Pelé was their introduction to the joy and possibility of soccer itself. He showed young people, especially Black and brown children, they could be part of something greater. And in doing so, he brought beauty, creativity, and humanity to the game in a way that inspired generations across continents. That mirrors the spirit of Queens, and that is why I'm honor—honoring Pelé here matters so deeply.

In just weeks, the world will arrive in New York City for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. More than 1.2 million visitors are expected to come to our region, generating billions in economic activity and creating opportunities for workers and small businesses across the city.

This legislation is the chance to show the world who we are. It would help connect visitors not just to the game, but to the culture and communities that make this city special. When people come to Queens during the World Cup, they will experience the energy of our business corridors, the flavors from every

corner of the world, the sounds, the languages, the storefronts, and the pride that make this- this borough unlike anywhere else. Naming Pelé Way becomes part of that experience. It encourages visitors to move beyond the stadiums and into the supporting communities to experience the culture, diversity, and energy that makes Queens the world's borough. And when the final whistle blows, the legacy of this moment should still live on in the neighborhoods, corridors, and communities that welcome the world in. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Council Member. At this time, I'll turn over to our Committee Counsel, uh, to swear in, uh, our members of, uh, the agency.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair. Would the representatives of the Parks Department please raise your right hand if you're able? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this Committee today and respond honestly to Council Member questions? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. I'd like to acknowledge, uh, that we've been joined by Council

Members Morano, Narcisse, Ung, Nurse, Marte, Thomas-Henry, Krishnan, Lee, and Salaam. Thank you for joining us. Alright, we'll start with some brief questions from me, and then I'll just— I'll turn it over to my colleagues.

I'm sorry, I, I, you know, I just didn't want you— hey, that's what it was. I'm sorry, go ahead. I blame it on the weather.

MARGARET NELSON: We'll get to the questions, I'm sure. Um, Good, good afternoon, Chair Hankerson, members of the Parks Committee, and other members of the City Council. My name is Margaret Nelson, uh, the Deputy Commissioner for Public Programs and Community Engagement for NYC Parks, and I'm joined here today by Karina Smith, our Assistant Commissioner for Strategic Community Engagement, Matt Drury, our Chief of Citywide Legislative Affairs.

We are pleased to be here today alongside our incredible partners at the City Parks Foundation, to testify about one of the most critical aspects of our agency, engagement with community-based organizations and volunteers.

Robust public engagement is a central plank of our agency's strategic approach imbued within every

aspect of the agency's operations as our parks employees have direct engagement and interaction with the public in a huge variety of ways. Whether it's a shape-up class instructor at a local parks recreation center, an urban park ranger leading curious park visitors on a nature walk, a city parks worker advising visitors where the nearest bathroom is, our local borough staff attending community board meetings and Council participatory budget info sessions, or a capital team hosting a design- public design input session. Practically every member of our agency staff has the privilege of regularly engaging directly with the public, an experience we value deeply.

One major avenue for this engagement is our agency's direct relationship with countless individual volunteers and local community organizations that are working alongside us to make sure their local parks reflect their community's needs and priorities. We are very proud of the work our dedicated staff do to care for our city parks, and our efforts are bolstered and supported by engaged and empowered New Yorkers, making these

spaces even more active and vibrant and sources of community pride.

Hundreds of local groups dedicate their precious time and energy throughout the year in our city's parks and public spaces, benefiting from connection to nature and to one another, all while having—while— all while having an impact on the environment. For New Yorkers looking to get more involved in their local parks, they can visit our agency website to learn more about a wide range of potential opportunities, from becoming a member of your local Green Thumb community garden, helping plant a tree, or monitor horseshoe crabs in Coney Island through our stewardship program, or joining an It's My Park event in their community led by our incredible Partnership for Parks team.

Partnership for Parks, or PFP, is a unique public-private partnership between New York City Parks and City Parks Foundation and serves as our primary mechanism to support and champion grassroots volunteers by giving them the tools they need to advocate and care for their neighborhood parks and green spaces in a dedicated, sustained way.

PFP equips people, organizations, and government with resources and opportunities to ensure these spaces are dynamic community assets. PFP offers resources and opportunities to neighborhood organizations in all 5 boroughs while driving equity by prioritizing investment in areas that have experienced historic disinvestment.

Support includes tools and supplies, training and coaching on topics like group development, event planning, working with elected officials, and fundraising. And through our partnership with City Parks Foundation, PFP makes hundreds of thousands of dollars in programming and capacity grants each year and even provides fiscal sponsorship to enable informal groups to receive grants for their activities.

In 2025 alone, PFP distributed over \$900,000 in grant funds to grassroots groups to conduct stewardship and programming. Through our PFP community engagement coordinators and organizers, we provide direct expertise and support for park beautification, community events, strategic planning, leadership, group development, and advocacy, including ongoing help securing permits and building

stronger relationships with our New York City Parks staff. The It's My Park program offers support for community, nonprofit, and corporate partners to revitalize local green spaces through cleaning, painting, and gardening.

Further, in service of equitable community support and our commitment to underserved parks and communities, PFP employees execute focused, intensive park engagement efforts through our Catalyst program, which equips individual leaders and dedicated park groups with the tools they need to make positive changes in parks that need it most, focusing on equity and community representation in addressing quality of life and other critical local issues.

In Fiscal Year 2025, PFP supported over 490 active community groups involved in parks across the city, including over 400 groups that provided direct hands-on care through cleanup, gardening, and painting projects.

Through the It's My Park program, PFP organizes and supports—supported over 1,400 beautification projects annually with over 27,000 volunteers from community, nonprofit, civic, youth, and corporate

organizations accomplishing 102,000 hours of volunteer time.

Green Thumb is our agency's community garden program, facilitating free access to land, gardening equipment and materials, technical assistance, educational workshops, and seasonal programs to support community gardeners and urban farmers. Our Green Thumb agency staff provide programming and material support to dedicated garden groups. Green Thumb is the largest community gardening program in the nation with 567 Green Thumb gardens, 391 of which are located on property under our jurisdiction, all offering a diverse array of spaces for relaxation and community engagement located on 100 acres across our city.

Our dedicated volunteer gardeners, over 20,000 New Yorkers of all ages and backgrounds, are the backbone of the Green Thumb program, and we're grateful for their efforts that make these community gardens such special places.

Our agency stewardship program engages volunteers on projects across the city's 12,000 acres of natural landscapes, working to remove invasive plant species, care for nature trails, install protective fencing,

and plant native species to enhance biodiversity. The program promotes engagement with street trees as well as our stewardship volunteers remove litter and weeds from tree beds, cultivate the soil, and spread fresh mulch.

In calendar year 2025, the program engaged over 6,100 volunteers who donated nearly 14,000 hours of service at 450 events caring for New York City's trees and natural areas. This can take the form of a single-day stewardship event, but our stewardship team also engages, educates, and empowers volunteers through our Green Neighborhood program and works with advanced volunteers called Super Stewards. The Green Neighborhoods program is an initiative to engage local communities in the care of street trees, forests, wetlands, gardens, and other natural resources in neighborhoods around the city. This program generates connections between individual volunteers and groups that are vested in and care about nature in their neighborhoods and works to broaden public understanding of the role and place of nature in the city.

The Super Stewards program is a training and permitting program designed to support long-term

ongoing volunteerism across the city. Super Stewards work independently to care for their neighborhood parks, recruit neighbors and friends, and track and coordinate their efforts with us. We're also in the midst of our decennial trees count tree census, in which volunteers are helping us to survey and count all of the trees within our landscaped parks.

Over 2,500 dedicated tree lovers came out last summer to take part in this effort, which will start back up later this month and we welcome all of you to help get the word out and even come out and join us in our parks.

Through each of these programs and initiatives, though— sorry, though each of these programs and initiatives are being implemented by different divisions within the agency, our teams work close— in close coordination and collaboration and find every opportunity to leverage our agency's engagement efforts in a strategic manner.

For example, as part of the development of the recently released Urban Forest Plan, the City, led by the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice, with significant support from Parks, undertook a major engagement effort as more than

8,000 New Yorkers participated in public workshops and tours in all 5 boroughs, virtual focus groups, and a citywide online questionnaire. And many of these community input activities were designed and led by our City Parks Foundation and PFP Catalyst team members.

From winter 2024 through fall 2025, these efforts gathered over 20,000 unique comments reflecting a diverse range of opportunities and challenges for New York City's urban forest and how communities hope to be involved. In alignment with one of the actions detailed in the Urban Forest Plan, PFP is collaborating with our forestry and stewardship teams to plan engagement around the neighborhood tree planting program and expand tree stewardship in heat-vulnerable neighborhoods so more trees can thrive and reach maturity, and communities can directly benefit from their efforts to combat climate change.

PFP will also provide community tree stewards with training and technical assistance through our Partnerships Academy program and educational materials that teach communities how to care for

trees, and the importance of trees for human and environmental health.

At Parks, we know that information is an essential resource, and we are dedicated to transparency, making sure our volunteers, park advocates, and interested New Yorkers can get access to data and information that can help them get a more involved— get, sorry, get more involved with their green and open spaces.

So we developed and launched the Vital Parks Explorer, a public-facing digital map that empowers New Yorkers with data about access to critical components of a vital park system. For the first time ever, New Yorkers can compare their community's access to park amenities and services with other neighborhoods in the city, which means they can more effectively advocate for more resources for increasing access and performance of their local parks and help ensure there is equitable investment in their community.

One important way that local organizations help activate and energize our parks is through special events and programming, as well as athletic tournaments and league play on our fields and courts,

including everything from soccer tournaments and Little League matches to movie nights and cherry blossom viewing parties. New York City Parks is pleased to work with special event organizers and sports leagues to support events beyond the 20,000 free public programs provided by the agency each year, as we feel that activating our parks with a wide range of recreational and cultural activity helps make them more robust and dynamic spaces for everyone to enjoy.

We recognize that these special events and athletic activities provide tremendous added value to our park system, and we are committed to offering fair and equitable access to these spaces for organizations and individual New Yorkers alike, while ensuring that all proposed activities are appropriate and avoid negative impacts on our shared open spaces. For example, in November 2024, we updated agency rules and permit fee schedules for athletic fields and courts to allow for more equitable access for nonprofit community organizations, increasing transparency and improving customer service for in-demand ball fields and courts.

In addition, we implemented process improvements for our athletic permits to ensure a faster, more streamlined request experience while introducing new system features designed to enhance usability and expanded access to available permitted time. We also hold preseason field and court public information sessions to help guide leagues and civic leaders through our permit process.

We heard from local community organizations that our special events permitting process could be difficult for some to navigate, so we hosted 9 public input meetings in all 5 boroughs with support from our borough offices and PFP staff and are undertaking a variety of process improvements, including updating the special events landing page to make it more user, user-friendly and easier to navigate.

We also have plans underway to update our permit application portal on our agency's website. Parks is also producing a how-to-hold special events guide for community groups in multiple languages so they can better understand the special event permit process. New Yorkers need and deserve vibrant parks that serve their local communities. While our agency invests considerable staffing, capital improvements, and

dynamic public programming across our network of green spaces. We know that bringing residents together in our parks through volunteering builds social capital in a community, fostering trust, understanding, cohesion, and unity. We are proud to be the agency responsible for building and maintaining our park system in collaboration with our partners and friends groups, ranging from larger conservancies with formal license agreements to small informal gatherings of neighbors organizing volunteer cleanups, and of course the individual New Yorkers and park visitors who use our parks every day and do their part by treating these public spaces with the respect and dignity they deserve, so we can all enjoy this vital resource that we all have to share.

Thank you for allowing us to testify before you today and for your continued advocacy and support for our parks. After we hear from our colleagues at the City Parks Foundation, we'll be happy to answer any questions that you may have. Turning it over to Heather.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: You were sworn in already. You're good.

1 HEATHER LUBOV: Okay. I'm, uh, hi, I'm Heather
2 Lubov. I'm the Executive Director of City Parks
3 Foundation. I'm really, really excited to be here to
4 talk about partnerships for parks. Uh, I hope this
5 is just the first of many conversations that we'll
6 have going forward. Um, we're the private in the
7 public-private program that is Partnerships for
8 Parks. We also serve as an administrator of the
9 45-member New York City Parks and Open Space Partners
10 Coalition of nonprofit stewardship organizations, and
11 we manage and administer the New York City Green
12 Fund, which is a pooled fund that makes grants to
13 grassroots and medium-sized, uh, organizations, uh,
14 and programming groups working in parks and open
15 spaces.

16 And of course, although not the subject of
17 today's hearing, we directly bring hundreds of free
18 sports, arts, and environmental education programs to
19 parks across the city. The primary benefit of a
20 public-private partnership is that we, as the private
21 nonprofit organization, can bring diverse funding to
22 the table.

23 In addition to the Council's own Parks Equity
24 Initiative, we raise funds from private individuals,

corporations, and foundations. In total, we're adding \$3.6 million to support Partnerships for Parks.

Additionally, as the Administrator of the New York City Green Fund, we're adding another \$2.6 million every year in grants to grassroots and medium-sized partners that directly support free community-led arts and culture, environmental, and health and wellness programming, along with stewardship activities across the city.

Another benefit of a public-private partnership is that as a private organization that has been working with communities for 37 years, we've built up a level of trust that has strengthened the relationship between residents and their local government. Navigating city systems can sometimes be difficult, especially for volunteer-led groups, and our role is to provide the support, the structure, and the flexibility that allows communities to take action.

There are several programs within Partnerships for Parks that are supported exclusively by City Parks Foundation, the first of which is Catalyst, which is an intensive outreach effort, uh, that

1 historically and to this day focuses on disadvantaged
2 communities or those that have experienced
3 disinvestment and inequity. Catalyst embeds a
4 community engagement coordinator in just 3 to 5 parks
5 at a time, and that's a much smaller portfolio than a
6 typical community engagement coordinator. And we do
7 this in order to build deep and lasting relationships
8 and networks. We go out into a community and
9 identify local leaders. We foster connections and we
10 create the conditions, uh, for sustained engagement
11 where it does not yet exist, empowering communities
12 to become civically engaged in a way that hasn't
13 previously been possible or accessible.

14 Two examples of past Catalyst projects include
15 the creation of the Bronx River Alliance many years
16 ago, or our more recent work, uh, in Coney Island
17 Creek and Kaiser Park, where deeply rooted
18 environmental justice issues were addressed through
19 community involvement in park planning, advocacy, and
20 the restoration of critical environmental
21 infrastructure.

As you heard, our funding also supports a new
forestry outreach team that helps collect the
community input, uh, for the first urban forest plan,

um, and the team of 3 full-time staff will now develop and support street tree stewards throughout the city so that our existing trees thrive and our canopy increases.

The technical assistance team is also City Parks Foundation supported and offers skill-building workshops and seminars on everything from how to start a park group to how to host a family day. The team provides fiscal sponsorship for 200 groups that are either not registered as 501 C3's, and/or do not want the responsibility of managing funds. By us handling the administrative requirements, we're enabling community leaders to focus on the visible, on-the-ground improvements that their neighborhoods need.

Finally, the technical assistance team also includes the staff that review, distribute, and manage the New York City Green Fund's grassroots grants. They are current— they currently oversee 144 active grants worth more than \$900,000. I'll point out here that the Green Fund also distributes more than \$2 million annually. So on top of the Grassroots program, we also make grants to

medium-sized organizations. The maximum budget is \$2.5 million.

So they have some staff, but they're generally pretty small. The vast majority of all grants that we make are directed to environmental justice communities and are run by BIPOC leaders. To round out our work, we oversee the corp— uh, corporate engagement for It's My Park, uh, generating both awareness among and funding from our city's corporate community, encouraging them to be good corporate citizens and to better understand the role that parks play in the well-being of our city.

I do want to say a word about the Parks Equity Initiative, which is a City Council-directed initiative that was created in 2014 to match the administration's addition of \$1.4 million at the time so that New York City Parks could hire more community engagement coordinators to reach more parks and more people, particularly in under-resourced neighborhoods.

That investment has been critical to the program's success. This year, we are requesting an expansion of funding for the Parks Equity Initiative to increase support for Partnerships for Parks and

the groups that we serve. There are so many parks and public spaces that still lack organized stewardship and many communities that are eager to be engaged but need the support to do so.

In addition to our work with Partnerships for Parks, City Parks Foundation co-founded and now serves as the administrator for the New York City Parks and Open Space Partners Coalition, which is a network of just under 50 conservancies and other small nonprofit park stewards. Originally set up as a way for all of us to share information during COVID it's turned into an association that provides a support system for the many nonprofits that work in the field.

The median annual budget for our members is just \$2 million. So while these groups are incorporated and may have staff, they are small, and just about half do not have license agreements, but they're a little bit too large to work with Partnerships for Parks. We've been working very closely with the team at New York City Parks to help address some of the issues that these organized nonprofits face, especially when they're small and have modest funding. And that could be anything from shared

services like training or HR or finance consulting or other kinds of traditional management concerns.

Finally, through the New York City Green Fund and a special set-aside specifically for systems change, we've been able to support research, convenings, and stakeholder engagement to better understand challenges that open space stewards face and to help advance solutions across the public realm. With grant support, the Trust for Public Land was able to document the economic impact of parks in New York City. The Center for an Urban Future was able to identify multiple ways to secure alternative funding for parks. And the Design Trust was able to research how permitting is handled in other cities and make recommendations that would make the process easier in New York City. We have a convening scheduled for next week, at which time we will identify action steps for the next year.

Thank you for shining a light on the critical community engagement work that Partnerships for Parks supports. While we can all get caught up in the day-to-day minutia of our work, in the end, I am regularly reminded that what Partnerships for Parks is doing is building civic engagement across our

city. Numerous studies have demonstrated that volunteering in parks has a spillover effect. Civic engagement is meaningfully associated with park volunteering, and environmental identity is a key mediating factor. In a city like New York, where parks serve as our backyards and our living rooms, the work we are doing at the hyperlocal level is critical for addressing many quality of life issues and building and supporting our democracy.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much, Heather. Alright, uh, I'm gonna do something a little different. I'm going to start with my colleague Council Member Narcisse, uh, because I know that she has to run, um, to the nurses event. We love our nurses.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you, and I'm so appreciative of you, Chair, to— for your understanding, because yes, nurses matter, and this is the Nurses Week. They are powerful and I have to be present, and we need them to, um, to keep our healthcare structure going for us. So to the panel, you know why I'm here, because you mean so much for me— I mean, to me too. And I wanna say thank you to

all the amazing work we've been doing in South Side Brooklyn, in my district.

CityParks Foundation happened to be really my partner, my greatest partner I can ask for and I have to say thank you. Um, to Maria Garrett from Fresh Creek for Jamaica Bay Rockaway Parkway- I mean, Parks Conservancy. Thank you for NYCHA, that's in the house. Matt, thank you for Marine Park Alliance. Scott Middleton- I always forget Scott's last name.

So why I'm saying all this thanks, because Saturday we had a- a big, uh, um, like war on trash in our community. So Parks Step Up, all the parks were just like- by the time we got there, it was so clean. So I want to say thank you. We didn't have much to do around parks, so thank you for your presence here. But I have a few questions since, you know, I'm running, but if you can answer them for me, that would be nice. The increase your ask, so can you repeat that? How much that you asking for? Because you're so important. What over I wanna ask you, what oversight mechanism exists to ensure that volunteer, um, labor is not being used to substitute for paid parks staff in ways that reduce headcount or undermine union agreement? And when a volunteer is

1 injured, um, while performing work in the city park,
2 who bears the liability? And are volunteers
3 adequately - sorry, I'm running and I'm like, er, um,
4 have enough information, uh, before they showed up.
5 And most volunteers, right, recruitment and CBOs
6 communication runs through online portals. What is
7 the department doing to reach community members who
8 are not digitally connected? We know the seniors are
9 not. Um, I, I, I, I'm trying to get you all the
10 question and you can answer for me. Um, at the last
11 hearing I asked about the salaries for park gardeners
12 and raising them to attract more talented and fill
13 on-field position. Has any progress has been made on
14 this issue? What is the protocol for community-based
15 organization to apply for a license agreement so that
16 they can raise funds and perform maintenance and
17 capital improvement in parks? What are the criteria
18 for CBOs to qualify for a license agreement? Who
19 currently at the Park Department is responsible for
20 establishing agreements with the CBOs?

21 I know it's a lot, if- and I can repeat them.

MARGARET NELSON: Hi. I'm gonna- I'm gonna take a
stab at a few of those questions and turn them over
to my colleagues for some of the other questions. So

1 first of all, um, to your question about, uh, the
2 issue of volunteers versus our paid staff, um, I just
3 want to be clear that we have, you know, a huge
4 infrastructure of our paid parks workers who are out
5 there maintaining our parks every day. We have
6 schedules of maintenance for each of our parks at
7 different levels depending on kind of what we see as
8 the demand. Um, and we maintain a high level of
9 cleanliness. We rate ourselves, we have independent
10 inspectors, a different part of the agency coming out
and checking our parks.

11 So I, I would say that- that base level, um, we
12 take responsibility for making sure we have
13 uniformity across, uh, the city in terms of
14 maintaining basic levels of service and cleanliness.
15 It is so important though when volunteers come in and
16 they supplement the work we do, and they can help
17 beautify, they can help add- add value, um, to that
18 existing park system. So we don't see it as
19 replacing it all. We see it as an added value, and
20 we appreciate the work. And I think, as you also
21 heard, it's not only helping that park, but it's
really creating that civic infrastructure and
bringing communities together. And that is the other

reason why it's so important to support these
volunteer your activities. Um, so that's number one.

In terms of outreach, in terms of live, you know,
website versus, uh, er, in-person, you know, I hear
you. I think we try to provide a lot of information
online so that it's easily accessible, but a lot of
people don't necessarily have access or are not
online. Our Partnership for Parks staff are always
out there in communities. They're tabling when we're
doing in-person scoping sessions for our capital
projects, we're setting up a table and getting, you
know, letting people know about volunteer activities.
Our, our, um, community engagement coordinators who
are, um, you know, they each have their own
geographic areas throughout the city and they're
constantly on the phone and calling, uh, visiting
sites in person. They're- they attend a lot of the
It's My Park events. Um, so we are trying to be out
there in person in addition to the, ah, online and
digital outreach that we do. Um, in terms of
salaries for parks gardeners, um, you know, salaries
for all of our, um, agency staff are, are not
negotiated by parks. They're part of collective
bargaining. They have union representation that goes

1 through OLR. So certainly seeking to increase, uh,
2 salaries, you know, we certainly appreciate that, but
3 that's not something that parks is in charge of, um,
4 and you'd probably have to take that up with OLR as
5 the, as the agency responsible. Um, in terms of
6 license agreements, um, we do have, I think it's
7 about, uh, you know, a couple dozen license
8 agreements now with partners. Um, and we are in the
9 process of discussing with other, uh, organizations
10 that are interested in having license agreements with
us.

11 Um, I would say that where the, the, the
12 preconditions for a license agreement is that a group
13 is, is bringing some value that, that needs to be
14 captured in a license agreement. Obviously, if
15 somebody- if a group wants to help maintain a park or
16 help advocate for a park, that doesn't require a
17 license agreement, right? So I think there's a
18 certain threshold that has to be made where they're
19 bringing such substantial funding into a park that we
20 have to kind of have that covered in a formal
21 agreement so that both sides are protected. But
we're happy to have more conversations with you about
that process. I think, um, under Assistant

Commissioner Karina Smith, she has another division that works strategic partnerships that works very closely with our licensed partners and our prospective licensed partners. So she can speak more to that if you have time.

CHAIRPERSON NARCISSE: You can make it short because that's not my hearing. Okay, that's my Chair that's being nice to me since I love parks. I always have a lot of questions.

MARGARET NELSON: Yes, and I just think in terms of who's responsible for license agreements, it is primarily a legal document. So our General Counsel's Office is the one that's, um, you know, moving those, uh, license agreements forward with the Law Department. The Law Department also has to sign off, and if there's, um, concession revenue that's part of that agreement, it has to go through the FCRC process as well. Um, but again, the Strategic Partnerships team, uh, Small and Mighty does do a lot of that individual handholding and working with groups that are looking or going through that license agreement process.

In terms of if a volunteer is injured, um, I'm not sure I have the answer.

1 MATT DRURY: Yeah, that's okay. I can- I can
2 interject a little bit here and just say that the,
3 the, the fact is that it will depend on the
4 circumstances traditionally. So depending on the,
5 the scale of the event and the, the, the nature of
6 the incident, you know, where that, uh, liability and
7 responsibility lies, um, you know, can vary widely.
8 So ultimately, um, there are- for- it is one of the
9 reasons why for larger gatherings, special events,
10 uh, of that nature, you know, providing proof of
11 insurance is sometimes a requirement because that's-
12 the city needs to protect itself, like, legally. Uh,
13 but your question is, you know, for example, if an
14 informal, you know, volunteer is informally, you
15 know, taking care, you know, helping pick up around
16 the park and injures themselves, that's a more
17 complicated, you know, discussion that would have to
18 be adjudicated on a on a case-by-case basis. And
19 then lastly, I think you asked for a reiteration of,
20 uh, Heather's testimony about, um, the Parks Equity
21 Initiative. So I think she can quickly recap that as
 well.

 HEATHER LUBOV: Um, currently we receive \$778,500
 for primarily staffing for Partnerships for Parks

through CPF. So we're asking for a \$221,500 increase. So just to get us up to a million.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you everyone, and thank you, Chair, for being so patient with me. I gotta run. Happy Nurses Week to all the nurses that are hearing. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Thank you, Council Member. Uh, you know what, I think I'm just going to do this entire hearing a little differently, but I have a couple follow-up questions. Uh, how often do inspectors conduct cleanliness assessments of the parks, and is it— does it differ by borough?

MATT DRURY: Sure, um, so, uh, park staff, just to— so there are sort of layers of inspection, uh, that happen on any given day. So— and I'll start sort of with the most granular and, and kind of work our way up. Um, so our park supervisors and managers are in our parks every day. So I— I think we would argue there's a layer of sort of inspection and, and supervision that's happening nonstop.

Um, additionally, there are spec— uh, monthly, uh, park supervisor inspections which are, uh, undertaken by our maintenance and operations division. Um, where they are sort of spot-checking,

you know, parks that are under their management purview.

Uh, separate and apart from that, we have what's known as our Parks Inspection Program, and that is undertaken, uh, by an entirely separate division. It's, it's akin- I don't know if for people who have worked in the retail industry, it's a little bit like a secret shopper, uh, experience where a, a highly trained, uh, staff, not in court, outside of coordination with our, you know, not announced to our, uh, MNO staff, is- is doing very granular, comprehensive, deep inspections of park properties. And they are out, you know, providing, uh, thousands of inspections at all of our properties.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: What are the type of things that they're looking for in these inspections?

MATT DRURY: They, they generally- there's two types of categories that they're inspecting. One broad category is cleanliness, and the other is overall condition. So cleanliness would refer to, uh, uh, you know, graffiti, litter, dog waste. And then the overall condition could be, you know, looking at faucets within a public restroom, you know, public restroom facility, you know, a broken

bench, uh, broken, broken glass, broken sidewalk.

Like, there's, you know, pieces that are sort of structural, if you will, um, you know, that they are assessing as well. And though the, these assessments are, uh, hmm, mhm, accumulated over time, and that's actually what informs the cleanliness and overall condition ratings that are in our Mayor's Management Report.

So those are sort of the gold standard, if you will, that we hold ourselves to.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: So if an inspector goes out there, you know, inspecting a park and they see that there's litter, trash, etc., um, do they make a call to the park manager? When is it addressed?

MATT DRURY: Yes, great, great, great, great question. Yes and, and it folds, uh, sort of in a cascading sort of prioritization. If they see any immediate, uh, safety concerns, let's say a jagged metal blade, you know, jagged piece of metal or something that could be an immediate concern. That's known as an IA, an immediate action item. And that is, that is flagged immediately for MNO staff and it's addressed as quickly as possible.

1 Separate and apart from that, this data is
2 reviewed on a- I want to say it's monthly or
3 bimonthly, uh, a very frequent, a monthly basis with,
4 you know, between PIP staff and MNO staff where the,
5 where these comprehensive, uh, this comprehensive
6 data is reviewed and patterns are detected and any,
7 you know, sort of repeated challenges with a given
8 park. Let's say it has struggled in, you know, you
9 know, in a, in an inspection or two in a row, like,
10 those are, you know, we do a deep dive into those.
11 And so there's obviously, you know, even though the
12 inspections are conducted independently, the- the
13 information is shared, you know, immediate-
14 immediately and consistently.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: If someone has a permit
16 for, let's just say, a family day or community day,
17 something like that, um, and that happens on a
18 Saturday, is the park inspected after the event? Is
19 there someone that goes out and how soon after does
20 that happen?

21 MATT DRURY: So I would- so the beauty of the
Parks Inspection program is that, uh, it is
essentially the- the inspections are essentially
randomized. So, and that, that can happen. So it

1 can work in either direction. The inspection can
2 theoretically happen right before a big event or at
3 the end, at the beginning of like a busy weekend, or
4 it can happen at the end of a busy weekend.

5 So it is a snapshot in time that, you know, so
6 over you know, statistically, it will sort of account
7 for, you know, what we're looking for is sort of a
8 consistent level of service being provided to a park,
9 even though at any given moment it could be really,
really busy.

10 And then, you know, so obviously when you walk
11 through a park, you will experience it at that moment
12 in time. So as these— excuse me— as these
13 inspections are repeated over time, you're building
14 sort of a statistical base where you can zoom out and
15 sort of provide, you know, that way you can kind of
16 rely on the data. Otherwise you're just getting
captured in one specific moment in time.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: So if it—

17 MARGARET NELSON: Oh, sorry, I just wanted to add
18 to that because I think, uh, the— your question is a
19 little bit about also how a specific event, how
20 that's seen by our local park staff. So I think
21 there's good— like, as part of that, um, special

1 event permit application and approval, there's the,
2 the special event application goes to our special
3 event permit staff for review. Part of their review
4 is talking to the local park management about this
5 event, the timing of the event. They get the
6 approval of the local park staff. So the local park
7 staff is then also gonna know when that event is
8 happening.

9 So, uh, they make sure that the site is ready for
10 the event in the morning of the event. And our
11 protocol is to try to have somebody from park
12 maintenance kind of onsite checking that event, uh,
13 especially at the end of the event to notice if
14 they're, you know, 'cause, we require folks to clean
15 up after their event. So if the event wasn't cleaned
16 up after, if we- it's gonna require resources of, of
17 ours. We note that to try to let that group know,
18 like, you're, you're in violation or you didn't clean
19 up appropriately, or we may have to charge you for
20 that cleanup.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I was gonna ask, what, if
any, enforcement measures are taken if you realize
that a group did not, uh, you know, uphold their end

of the bargain and, and just to use that terminology, um, in terms of cleaning?

MARGARET NELSON: Yeah, I think that, you know, we- we try to work with groups, um, around making sure they understand the expectations and that they meet those expectations. If they haven't met those expectations, you know, we'll let them know. Um, we might just make sure in the next, um, the next time they apply for a permit, we- we do sometimes take bonds and those bonds are to help pay for things that- that they, you know, like any sort of damage or any additional cleanup and that's the purpose of the bond system.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, thank you for that. Uh, because I am doing this hearing just a little differently, I want to make it more conversational, so I'm going to turn it to my colleague Council Member Morano, and then I'll jump back in.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your testimony today. And, uh, I also want to join Council Member Narcisse in, uh, praising the work of great groups like, uh, NYC H2O, which helped to make the, uh, parks in our district a lot cleaner and a lot better. So, thank you for your work. Uh,

1 by the way, for a group like NYC H2O, uh, I've heard
2 some concern about how formalized the structure is
3 for them to become a CBO. Can you speak briefly
4 about how that actually occurs?

5 MARGARET NELSON: So I think we have, um, I think
6 we have a good working relationship with the H2O. I
7 think they do a lot of different programming, um,
8 throughout our park system. I think most of that is
9 taking place using special event permits. I think
10 we're also in the- in the process of talking to them
11 about using work permits because some of the work
12 they're doing is actual restoration work and maybe
13 would require a different kind of permit. Um, so
14 again, not every, not every group, um, and especially
15 H2O, which is, is lightly touching a lot of different
16 areas, is, is, is the appropriate vehicle for, say, a
17 license agreement, as I understand. But we can look
18 more into- kind of, I'm not familiar specifically
19 with all the complexity of that specific group, but
20 happy to talk more as a follow up.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you. Um, you
mentioned in your testimony prioritizing historically
underserved communities and equitable investment.
Staten Island has more parkland per capita than any,

uh, any other borough. Can you tell me specifically how Staten Island fares in PFP staffing, grant funding, volunteer programming, and community partnership resources compared to the other boroughs?

MARGARET NELSON: Um, I, I mean, I, I'll just say top line, I think we look to distribute our resources equally- across the boroughs. Um, so we do have community engagement coordinators in Staten Island like we have in other boroughs. I think in terms of the money that we're giving out, it really is a function of who's applying for the money. I, I was excited to hear that in terms of the Catalyst program where we're actually, um, you know, reaching out to, to figure out parks that need more of that support and more organized volunteer groups. We are working with several Staten Island Parks and, and working to- with the Catalyst program to do specific outreach in Staten Island, which I'm excited about. And Heather, I'm going to turn it over to Heather who wants- if she wants to speak more to that.

HEATHER LUBOV: Uh, yes. So we have a Catalyst organizer who is working along the North Shore Esplanade in Corporal Thompson Park and in Tappen Park. Um, and that's specifically to do community

engagement work at a very local level, and it's just those 3 parks that he's working in. So, I mean, the Esplanade is large, but it's just those 3 locations.

Uh, in addition, we have been trying very hard to get as many groups as possible to apply for the Green Fund grant. Um, we've seen a slight increase. If you could get the word out to groups, we'd be happy to fund them.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Sure.

HEATHER LUBOV: So, um, you know, we've, we've seen a slight increase as we try, you know, to get the word out, but any help that you could provide, we would love.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Uh, I was really glad to hear in, um, your testimony, Deputy Mayor, that the, the admission that the permitting system can be difficult to navigate, because it's been a frustration from a lot of the folks that, that I've heard from. I- in your testimony, you say that community organizations told you the special event permitting process was difficult to navigate. W- what specifically were the biggest complaints that you heard?

1 MARGARET NELSON: So as I said in the testimony,
2 we did a series of 9 borough in-person forums last
3 year where we invited, uh, groups to come and talk to
4 us so they could both hear about what the special
5 event permit process is and what the rules and
6 requirements are, and also hear from them kind of
7 what their challenges were and how we might be able
8 to address them.

9 So I think we have to - we have to keep in mind
10 that we have a special event permit process in order
11 to make sure that events that are happening in our
12 parks are happening safely with the right, you know,
13 not impinging on other people's use of, of the space,
14 that, um, and a variety of other things that we have
15 to keep in mind, right? So there's a lot of checks
16 and balances here, uh, that we have to make sure
17 we're providing for the safety of parkgoers.

18 So we ask people to apply for-for- to host a
19 special event using our special event, uh, process
20 where we need people to apply at least 21 days in
21 advance, but ideally months in advance. And
sometimes things that people wanna do might require
insurance. They might require- you have to go to
NYPD for amplified sound permit. You might- if you

1 have a generator, you have to go to FDNY. And
2 sometimes all of those requirements aren't
3 necessarily clear to a small group up front. And so
4 as they're trying to figure out their event, they're
5 running into these obstacles.

6 So I think, first of all, trying to provide more
7 clarity up front, uh, where we've revised our website
8 to make it more clear what some of those requirements
9 are, um, is one of the things that, that, uh, we're
10 doing. The other thing is we're putting together a
11 pamphlet, again, just with this information on how to
12 do a special event, trying to get our, uh, our rules
13 and our requirements more out there so that they're
14 familiar with it. I would say that, um, you know,
15 PFP— one of the great things about PFP is that those
16 community engagement coordinators can really hold the
17 hands of small groups who may not understand the
18 special event permits process and really help walk
19 them through, help them develop that relationship
20 with the special events, uh, borough permit
21 coordinators, um, and make sure they're getting
 answers, you know, to their questions. The other
 thing we heard is that, you know, a bit of
 transparency. Like, they might be applying for a

1 site and that site might not be available and they
2 wanna know, well, tell— how do I find out what site
3 would be available? And so one of the things we did
4 with our athletic permit process a few years ago is
5 that we really were able to create more transparency
6 by putting online a map of all our courts and fields
7 and being able to show the public when those courts
8 and fields are already permitted, so you're not
9 applying for a permit for a site that's not
available.

10 So again, in some of our parks, there's a lot of
11 demand. You might apply to do an event and that
12 site's already taken. And so that's something we're
13 looking to see if we can replicate with the special
event permits process too, but that's still to come.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Chair, one final
15 question, if I may? Um, I noticed a lot of
16 impressive-sounding volunteer numbers in the
17 testimony and briefing materials, but the Mayor's
18 Management Report shows volunteer turnout declining.
19 Can you explain that contradiction? Uh, er, are
20 people counted multiple times? What exactly counts
21 as a volunteer? Did the counting methodology change?

1
2 MARGARET NELSON: I think we have various ways we
3 count volunteers, so my guess is gonna be like
4 whatever is reported in the Mayor's Management Report
5 might be a subset. Um, but I don't have that in
6 front of me, so it's something we can get back to
7 you. But, uh, Assistant Commissioner Smith, go
8 ahead.

9 KARINA SMITH: That's exactly what I was going to
10 say. So, um, the Mayor's Management Report is
11 exactly a subset of volunteerism, um, in the Parks
12 Department. And, and as, uh, Commissioner Nelson
13 said, volunteerism comes into parks in a variety of
14 ways. In many different buckets. Um, so that is
15 probably what's accounting for that discrepancy, um,
16 in the report.

17 MARGARET NELSON: Yep.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you.

19 MARGARET NELSON: Yep.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Uh, I believe that the
21 Council Member gave you a promotion to Deputy Mayor,
so congratulations.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: I almost called you Mayor
today. It's my third hearing of the day.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: So I do have a couple follow-up questions before we go to the Bronx. Um, when will— so you mentioned a pamphlet that would, would help folks. Uh, when will that pamphlet be complete and ready for distribution?

MARGARET NELSON: It's— thank you for the question, Council Member. Um, it is in production at the moment. We are vetting a few final items. We're hoping to have it ready by the end of the year, and when we do produce it, it's going to be in multiple languages so that um, it's, it's accessible by, by all communities.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Uh, does PFP work with local Council Member offices to get the word out about all the help that's out there? I, I, so I know that the resources are there, the help is there, but how do folks actually gain access to the help?

MARGARET NELSON: Yeah, I think we would love— we do work with Council Members' offices and we would love to work more with any Council Member that's interested. I mean, we can set— we can put together, like, an informational event. Um, we— we can attend any meetings you have with community members to kind

1 of, you know, promote our services. And I think,
2 again, if you know of a group that's interested in
3 volunteering in our park or doing some service in our
4 park, you know, you should contact PFP and put them
5 in touch because our community engagement
6 coordinators can start that intake process of, like,
7 talking to them about what they want to do, connect
8 them to trainings, connect them to resources.

9 So we want to be a resource for you and your
10 community groups to engage with parks. Absolutely.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'd love to— and we can
12 talk about this offline— but I'd love to host, uh, a
13 workshop here at 250 for members' offices.

14 MARGARET NELSON: We would love that. We would
15 love that.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Before the summer gets
17 here. Yep.

18 MARGARET NELSON: Yeah.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Uh, one final
20 question. This is for Heather. Can you name the
21 neighborhoods that are currently benefiting from
Green Fund grants?

HEATHER LUBOV: Oh, uh, actually, I mean, Green
Fund grants are pretty much all over the entire city,

1 but I will say I think it's 80% are focused in
2 environmental justice communities. But basically we
3 try to hit every neighborhood. So, uh, I mean, it
4 Oh, well, okay, here's the answer. Ah, ah, ah, okay,
5 this, this time around, um, we gave away 49 grantee-
6 49 grants. We're about to- the press release hasn't
7 even gone out yet, so hot off the press.

8 Uh, we are about to give out 49 grants worth
9 \$325,000. 6 in the Bronx, 19 in Brooklyn, 8 in
10 Manhattan, 7 in Queens, 4 in Staten Island, 5 serve
11 multi-burrows. 71% are serving environmental justice
12 areas, and 80% are led by, uh, majority BIPOC
13 leaders.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, how many in Queens?

15 HEATHER LUBOV: 7. We've seen a slight decline
16 in Queens, and we want to make sure that that goes
17 back up. Now, I should point out though that there
18 are some grantees that are multi-year grantees. So
19 this is- these are new grants that are being made.
20 So it doesn't mean that there are no other grants out
21 there that are being spent. This is just the new
money that we're about to distribute.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: And you talked about potentially, uh, increasing in Queens. How, how would you go about that?

HEATHER LUBOV: Any way that we can. It's really a matter of getting the word out. So, you know, we- we go to community boards, we- you know, all the same things that you've heard, all the methodologies, social media, email, community boards, in-person meetings, brochures, postcards, whatever we can do to get the word out. So we would love your help.

MARGARET NELSON: And I just want to add, I think the Green Fund Grant program, which is relatively new, is such a critical tool with helping these community-based organizations because as you know, they want and want to see a lot of activation of their parks, but they might not have the funds to do that. And so now the fact that they can go and get a grant to do an activity in their park for the community is just a really wonderful, um, kind of asset that we can provide these community groups.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, thank you. Council Member Sanchez.

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you, Chair, um, and good afternoon. Uh, I'm on the same boat as

1 Council member Morano. We've been spending a lot of
2 time today together, which is awesome. Um, so I, I
3 first just wanted to start with just so much
4 gratitude, uh, for the work that Partnership for
5 Parks does, the support from the City Parks
6 Foundation, um, and really, really, really give
7 flowers to Pilar Maschi. I don't know if you know
8 her, I mean, she's been there for a long time. Um,
9 but just the work that she does to organize our
10 friends groups in the West Bronx is transformational,
11 right? It's, it's just incredible. Like, this woman
12 will put up flyers. She'll just spend a whole day,
13 like, putting up flyers on every building just to get
14 folks out to a meeting and, and build that civic
15 capacity. Um, and it's, it's really- it just really
16 matters, right? Uh, we have very low civic capacity,
17 er, ah, right now. Low civic engagement because
18 we're such a low-income community. But this is what
19 starts to transform that, right? Getting people
20 involved.

21 Um, so I have a very, uh, simple, direct
question. Um, in preparation for this hearing, I
reached out to all of my friends of parks groups at
Aqueduct and at, uh, Washington's Walk and Sedgwick

1 and, and all the others. And I actually heard one
2 thing resoundingly from them, which is a frustration
3 around dealing with smoking in our parks. Um, just
4 folks going in and they're smoking cigarettes,
5 they're smoking marijuana, they're smoking, you know,
6 around children and things like that. And so my
7 question for you all is, um, you know, one, flagging
8 it for you, uh, Matt, just to make sure, uh, it's on
9 your radar for, for the PEP officers and every- and
everything.

10 But what should I tell our friends of parks
11 volunteers regarding how, you know, they should best
12 route those concerns because they're, they're
13 concerned about, you know, getting into an
altercation with folks like that.

14 MARGARET NELSON: Yeah, um, thank you, thank you,
15 Council Member, for the question. That is a
16 frustrating thing for the groups to have to
17 experience. I really do recommend that groups use
18 the 311 process. That would avoid that direct
19 conflict, uh, with, with, uh, the person in violation
20 of our park rules and that information does go to
21 Park Enforcement Patrol. As you know, they might not
be able to respond kind of in the immediate, uh,

1 timeframe, but having that record of complaints helps
2 them, uh, figure out where they're doing regular
3 patrol. So if we see a pattern of complaints coming
4 in regarding smoking in a certain park, that will
5 help them then, you know, try to send some resources
6 there in the future.

7 So I, I would, I would recommend that to the
8 groups.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you. And just to
10 make this a hearing kind of- hearing style question,
11 do you have information about how quickly you're able
12 to respond to those kinds of requests?

13 MARGARET NELSON: Um, I don't have it here, but
14 we could look at that data. Um, you know, because I
15 think, you know, basically we would have the 311 data
16 for complaints about smoking in parks, and we can
17 show what the resolutions were. If I'm going to have
18 to guess, most of them are going to be closed without
19 being able to go right away, just just because of
20 our, uh, enforcement capacity. But, you know, uh,
21 you know, we can work with you on making sure the
 parks that people are complaining about, that we're
 getting- working with the captains there in the Bronx
 to have some patrols there.

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Got it. And last follow-up, not advocating for this, just asking, does NYPD ever get involved, um, in this if a complaint is narrowly about smoking?

MARGARET NELSON: I think, you know, we work very closely with NYPD. They really focus on crime, um, and crime patterns, um, and I do not believe that they would- they do not really enforce against park rules in our parks.

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Got it. And sorry, I said that was the last one, but this is the last one, I promise. Uh, what does a PEP officer do, uh, if they are able to make it in time?

MARGARET NELSON: Sure. I mean, I think that, um, for our PEP officers, um, you know, they are there to enforce park rules. Um, they would first to try to really educate the parkgoer. We try to use enforcement as a last resort, but they do have the ability to issue a summons, uh, for smoking in a park.

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Okay, great. Thank you. Thank you so much, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I just want to go back, um, before, before we go to Harlem. I want to go

back to something you mentioned earlier about the data, um, the volunteer, uh, data that you have. Uh, is that compiled, uh, with the data that comes from NYC Service, or is it separate? Is it aggregated into one, or is it— is it—

MARGARET NELSON: Thank you for the question. So NYC Service's data is separate from ours. We compile and collect our own, uh, volunteer data and, uh, information. Um, each— we have multiple divisions, uh, within the Parks Department that collects the data. Um, and then we have a central repository for that information, um, called the Let's Green NYC initiative. And we store, um, the number of hours, the number of volunteers, um, that do formalized projects in our parks there.

So the data from NYC Service though NYC Service may be involved in a project that we're doing, we collect the data ourselves through our different, um, management arms.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Uh, what are the standards that DPR uses when a community group proposes youth programming, sports, wellness classes, cultural programming, um, to determine if such

programming will be allowed to occur on parks property?

MARGARET NELSON: Sure, thank you for the question. Um, you know, if a group is looking to do an event in our park, they would use the special event permit process to apply for- for such event. And, you know, we really do want to encourage groups to activate and use our parks, um, for those kind of variety of events, youth events, cultural events. We just need to screen them to make sure, you know, that where they wanna do the event is not already, you know, permitted for some other activity. We need to make sure, depending on the nature of the event, that they can provide the appropriate insurance. You know, if they need- as I stated before, if they need amplified sound, they have to get a sound permit. There are places that we don't necessarily allow sound. So, uh, that's what the role of our special event permit coordinators, um, are there to do, is to kind of take that application of what they're looking to do and help them work through and make sure they can run a safe, you know, event for the public.

Again, we don't, um, do a lot of denials. I would say the main reason for denial is probably

going to be that the space is not available, um,
because it's already permitted.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Sorry, I, I, I have a few
groups in my district, um, that for some reason every
summer they run into issues with the permitting
office, I guess, particularly in Queens, um, to which
either they're denied or they're just given a really,
really, really hard time. Um, oftentimes our office
has had to step in- well, the previous office has had
to step in, um, and so that, that's why I asked the
question, uh, what, what would constitute a denial?
Because I do see it in my district quite often.

MARGARET NELSON: Um, you know, I'm surprised to
hear that. I think we should work with your office
to take a review of what you're seeing. We're happy
to do that, um, because I think by and large, you
know, we're, we're permitting like over 20,000
permits, you annually. Um, and so I think we are
permitting a significant number of events in our
parks and that, you know, in, in that process, you
know, if this, the original site or the original day
that somebody's looking to do, I think our permit
coordinators really work with the applicant to try to
find an alternate time or day to help them work to be

1 able to do their event. That is, that is what they
2 do day in and day out. Um, so I'm, I'm surprised to
3 hear of the difficulties. We certainly want to work
4 with you to try to overcome them and have that be a
5 smoother process.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I, I appreciate that.
7 Uh, aside from conservancies that have formal
8 contracts or licenses to perform maintenance
9 activities in parks, do any volunteer groups or other
10 local community groups perform similar maintenance
11 activities or other park functions that, uh, DPR
12 would otherwise perform?

13 MARGARET NELSON: Yeah, thank you, uh, Council
14 Member, for the question. Um, so basically, as I
15 said before, we have a huge maintenance staff that's
16 on a schedule cleaning our parks, um, and we take
17 great pride, um, in the level of cleanliness and care
18 and condition that we keep our parks in.

19 So, uh, you know, we do not see other groups
20 coming in and, uh, you know, we step back while they
21 step in. Uh, the volunteer work that's happening
22 really is a supplement and an added value to the base
23 level of care that we're providing for our parks.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. One final question and I'm going to turn over to Council Member Salaam. Uh, when a potential partner organization makes a proposal to parks but there are concerns about insurance, permits, staffing, safety, noise, lighting, or site conditions, who works with them to revise and fine-tune the idea?

MARGARET NELSON: So if, if a community-based organization is not affiliated with Partnership for Parks and they're just applying for a permit directly to the borough, the borough permit coordinator would work with them. But again, a plug for PFP here, um, you know, groups that are affiliated with PFP and have a community engagement coordinator, that person can really help them navigate the process and work with them to run a successful event.

MATT DRURY: Sorry, and I'll just interject quickly that if, if an event, a proposed event is of a specific size or scale, like typically over 500 or so, we actually have a dedicated citywide special events team for, for events that have a little more complexity or, you know, moving pieces a little more, hmm, you know, uh, substantial, for lack of a better word. Um, and that, then that team, similar to our

borough permit offices, can help applicants kind of, you know, uh, clarify policies and things of that nature as well.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Do the borough permit offices, uh, do they refer folks to, uh, PFP?

MATT DRURY: There's, there's essentially a- oh, sorry, yes, the permit offices are certainly, you know, our boroughs, our borough operations, our borough commissioners and their teams work very, very closely with PFP and our outreach coordinators. So, you know, we're one agency, one family. So, uh, yes, I think it's very common. I don't know if refer is quite the word, right word, but, you know, there's certainly dialogue, or it is not uncommon for, oh, hey, you know, we're interacting with this, uh, with this organization about a permit, but there's, you know, there's not a firewall that's not siloed. They'll have discussions with the borough commissioner, with our, you know, with the Partnerships for Parks Commissioner Smith, if you have anything else you want to add.

KARINA SMITH: Um, sometimes the question may come in, like, if, if a group goes to the borough process and the borough will automatically ask, like,

1 are you affiliated with PFP? So the question comes
2 up. If they're not, um, sometimes, yeah, again,
3 referral may be not exactly the best word there, but,
4 um, if they're not, PFP may be tagged and saying,
5 like, you know, this group is coming to us often to
6 do these things. You might want to consider working
7 with them or something like that. So it comes in
8 dribs and drabs in different ways.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Is it required that the
10 staff person do that, or is it at their discretion?

11 KARINA SMITH: Is it required- I'm sorry, you
12 said, is it required- is it required that the staff
13 person that's working with this group that's
14 applying, um, and let's say this group is having
15 issues, is it required that they, you know, uh, I
16 don't want to use the, the term refer again, but I
17 don't know what other term to use, refer them to PFP,
18 or is it at their discretion to, to do so?

19 MATT DRURY: I, I, if I can, uh, I think I'd
20 characterize for a permit- for a borough permit
21 office, it may not be immediately clear that the
applicant- you know, the applicant could just be an
individual or a family, just, you know, right? Like,

it's not always immediately clear that they represent a formalized CBO or similar institute.

So, uh, there's not really a formal mechanism in place for, again, a referral.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Do you think—

MATT DRURY: I think it's a more organic kind of process where —when we become aware of an organization and it becomes more substantial, that—that we wanna make sure they're aware of PFP and, and any resources that might be available to them.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Do you think it would be helpful if it was something that was required for them to say, if the— if there was a process in place? I'm asking because I, I, I never want it to be— well, I guess it— no one ever wants it to be that if there is a group that unfortunately, uh, has a bad reputation with the person they're working with at parks, that, you know, they may not have access to what other groups may have access to. Um, in term— do you get where I'm going with it?

MATT DRURY: I do and I think broadly speaking, I think we'd want to make sure that any, frankly, any individual, any group, any— whether formalized or not, we want to make sure if they want to help their,

1 their local parks and make those parks more exciting
2 and better places to experience, we- we want to make
3 sure they have access to that. And - and there
4 shouldn't be any, uh, so to the degree that there is
5 any, you know, sort of, uh, lesser-than treatment or
6 anything like that. You know, if there is a
7 relationship complication, some of these groups have
8 known each other for years, or, you know, agency- if,
9 if there's anything that needs to be resolved there,
10 that's something we'd obviously want to know about
11 and take a very close look at and do whatever we can
12 to conflict resolution or whatever that might- path
13 might be. Thankfully, it's exceedingly rare. Again,
14 as Commissioner Nelson noted, you know, we are- tens
15 of thousands of New Yorkers are coming to us every
16 single day with things they want to do in our parks,
17 whether that's through special event permits or or
18 filming or athletic permits or what have you, or even
19 outside of the permit process, interesting ideas,
20 interesting proposals. And we do everything we can
21 to, to hear those out and advance as many of them as
possible, whether it's through formal permits or not.
And that's, that's, that's something we want to
continue, obviously, uh, er, ah, hmm, improving.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: If, if various groups are having issues with, uh, a permit office, um, who would they escalate their complaint to?

MARGARET NELSON: So one of the, um, uh, er, improvements that we made when we took a look at the permit process is to really streamline and centralize the permit process. So in the past, borough permit offices, depending on the borough reported, had different reporting structures. So we streamlined it to have all the borough permit offices report directly to the borough commissioner in that, um, in that, uh, borough. Uh, so that's one change that we made. So you can escalate to the borough commissioner.

Um, the other change we made is to really centralize policy. Um, so we have now a citywide, uh, special events policy office and a citywide, uh, athletic permit policy office. And so that also centralizes in making sure— we're trying to make sure that those standards and policies are, uh, uh, you know, kind of consistent across the boroughs, uh, and not just borough-based, for example.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: You know, we— we make it, um, a point to, especially when we're dealing with

1 the police department, uh, to ask them about cultural
2 training. Um, is that something that, that parks
3 employees, particularly in the permit office, have to
4 go through as part of their, their, their job
5 responsibility, given that they're dealing with so
6 many different community groups of different cultures
uh, is that something they go through?

7 MARGARET NELSON: I, I, I think we have a high
8 level of customer service and we do customer service
9 training. Uh, we would have to check to see if that-
10 like, what cultural components are included in that.
I'm happy to get back to you on that.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: How often is the customer
12 service training, uh, uh, done?

13 MARGARET NELSON: I, I'll have to check and get
14 back to you on that.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, please. I, I would
16 love the answer to those two questions. Thank you.
Uh, Council Member Salaam.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you, Chair. Uh,
18 thank you for the testimony. DPR has approximately
19 85 contractual agreements with private organizations.
Your private funding arrangements historically
20 channel more resources towards parks in wealthier
21

1 neighborhoods. What is DPR's current framework for
2 evaluating whether its CBOs and private partner
3 agreements are equitably distributed across all 5
4 boroughs? And what metrics does the department use
5 to ensure that parks in lower-income communities,
6 which typically lack access to philanthropic support,
7 are not falling further behind as the system
8 increasingly relies on private dollars and volunteer
labor?

9 MARGARET NELSON: Thank you, Council Member, for
10 the question. Um, I think we— again, I think with
11 the resources that we have as a city, um, do a great
12 job at taking care of our park system with, you know,
13 using city employees and city resources and capital
dollars to renovate our parks. We do appreciate when
14 private groups come in and can enhance the work we're
15 doing with their private fundraising. But I
16 recognize that, that is more easily able to do in
17 certain neighborhoods than others. I think that,
again, that's— it's why it's so important that we
18 have this 30-year partnership with City Parks
19 Foundation because they are out there fundraising
20 from private donors to bring money into underserved
21 parks. And through their Green Fund Grant program,

1 they're doing exactly that and bringing private
2 dollars and allowing small community groups who may
3 not have access to that fundraising resources
4 themselves to apply for grants that they can then use
5 to activate their parks and provide more programming
6 and, um, activities in their parks.

7 So again, I think this Partnership for Parks
8 program that we're talking about is really one of the
9 ways that- that Parks is working in this
10 public-private partnership to bring more private
11 dollars into under-resourced parks. Not only private
12 dollars for their own activities, but it's funding,
13 um, you know, it's funding the staff that are working
14 with these communities to build capacity.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Definitely. We
16 definitely need it.

17 HEATHER LUBOV: I would, um, I would add a couple
18 of things, um, when we started the Green Fund, it was
19 really meant to be temporary. It was meant to help
20 address funding cuts during COVID but what we found
21 from philanthropists, frankly, was that the knowledge
 that we have of the community and the ability we have
 to vet projects and then distribute money made it
 possible for those funders to get money out into

neighborhoods that they, themselves would not necessarily make direct grants to.

So we're definitely seeing that money being spread out in a way that it hadn't been before. And we have right now 20 supporters of the Green Fund. I'm hoping to double that, if not more, because the more money we have, the more money we can give out. Um, so that's one thing.

The second thing is the Catalyst program in particular was designed to help build groups in communities that don't have groups. Um, which is why the number of parks that each organizer works with is so low because they really spend a lot of their time in those neighborhoods.

And then the final thing that I would say is the Parks and Open Space Partners Coalition, which sounds like it's basically a group of conservancies that have money, is not the case. In fact, um, most of those groups are pretty small, and the benefit of having a membership that's made up of big and small conservancies is that we're able to share resources. So, um, for groups that don't necessarily have access to a full HR person or, you know, a full-time CFO, we're able to share back and forth. We're training

1 together, we're, we're subsidizing management
2 training, we're subsidizing cultural, uh, awareness
3 training, we're subsidizing training for gardening.

4 So we're doing everything that we can to share
5 those resources with as many groups as we can,
6 whether they're big or small.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Chair, if I may, one last
8 question. DPR reported a 25% decline in volunteer
9 turnout in the first 4 months of fiscal year '26
10 versus the same time period of fiscal year '25,
11 citing a suspension of its It's My Park Day to events
12 focused- refocusing on and strengthening community
13 engagement. Given that 73% of young New Yorkers want
14 to volunteer but don't know how, what is DPR's
15 concrete plan to rebuild the volunteer pipeline,
16 including through a new digital portal and volunteer
17 directory? And when will structured programming like
18 It's My Park Day be fully restored?

19 MARGARET NELSON: Thank you, Council Member, for
20 the an- for the question. Um, I'm going to turn it
21 over to Assistant Commissioner Karina Smith.

KARINA SMITH: Hi, Council Member. I'm a Harlem
girl too, so good to see you. We actually worked on,
um, uh, the Gate of the Exonerated together, so good

1 to see you again. Um, so The It's My Park, uh,
2 program was, uh, suspended for a little bit. Um, but
3 it actually— and what we actually learned, um, is
4 that it— there was still robust, um, engagement
5 happening, um, while it was technically suspended.
6 That's going to happen again. It's not suspended
7 again. And actually suspended is not the right word.
8 Pause is a better word, right? Um, It is no longer
9 paused and is in full motion. It's My Park season is
10 happening right now in full swing. Um, in terms of a
11 volunteer pipeline, um, digitally, we have, again,
12 I'm pointing back again to our Let's Green NYC
13 program where I— so I've been describing it as sort
14 of a— when people are not really sure where to go, if
15 you're able to go to our webpage, it's sort of like a
16 Match.com kind of situation, right?

15 So, like, if you say that you're interested in
16 working, um, and your interest is dogs, then you can
17 click that on our website and it'll link you to
18 different groups who are stewarding dog runs, for
19 example, or whatever your interest is. Um, you can
20 go to our It's My Park— I'm sorry, not It's My Park,
21 Let's Green NYC directory— and hopefully find
something that speaks to you and allows you to be

1 able to volunteer with an organization listed that
2 provides that type of, um, engagement or that type of
3 volunteership, and you can reach out to that
4 organization and join them and see if you can be a
5 part of it. There are also, um, opportunities if you
6 yourself are just— you're sincerely— nothing is
7 speaking to you. On our website, on that Let's Green
8 page, there's a button that says, I wanna volunteer
9 individually. And then you can literally just
10 self-select what it is that you want to do. You may,
11 you may not know, but you know you want to do
12 something. That's a great way to get in. That will
13 connect you to, um, a Partnerships for Parks
14 coordinator who can help you figure out what it is
15 that you want to do.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Gotcha.

15 MARGARET NELSON: And then I just also just want
16 to add on top of that. So It's My Park events are
17 very specific, kind of one type of volunteer events.
18 So even though we did a pause for, I think it was
19 like 2 months in the summer when we usually have to
20 cancel a lot of those events anyway for weather, you
21 know, there's lots of other volunteer events that are
 happening throughout our park system. And when you

1 look at the Let's Green numbers that, uh, uh,
2 Commissioner Smith was talking about, you know, we've
3 tried to really collect all the, all the data we can
4 collect from volunteer activities throughout our, uh,
5 agency, it's 1.5 million engagements over the past 3
6 years.

7 So I think we have a very robust kind of
8 volunteer engagement system that we always are
9 looking to grow. Um, and, um, so I just wanted to
add that. Thanks.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thanks.

11 KARINA SMITH: And Council Member, I wanted to
12 correct myself real quick. At individual- the
13 individual volunteer button doesn't connect you to
14 Partnerships for Parks. It connects you to a person
15 actually in my office who was overseeing, um, the
16 Let's Green NYC, uh, initiative and can then help you
17 figure out, you know, which part of parks to connect
to. I just wanted to clarify it didn't go directly
to-

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you for that
19 clarification.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Alright, I have a couple
21 more questions before we go into public testimony.

Um, can CBOs use parks or recreation centers to provide mental health resources wellness programming, caregiver support, or child care support on a consistent basis?

MARGARET NELSON: Uh, thank you, Council Member, for the question. Um, for our recreation centers, um, we do not rent out space in our recreation centers because we have park staff that are providing programming for our members, but we are open to groups that may want to provide programming who are members or more broadly for the public for free. So we're always looking for those kinds of partnerships, uh, with community-based organizations.

We have to make sure that, again, any, any partnerships we're doing are parks-appropriate use. Um, so maybe some of the activities you mentioned wouldn't really work for a rec center, but again, if somebody was looking to do that kind of programming in our park, they would apply for a special event permit.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. What are the most common reasons sports programming requests are delayed, denied, or limited?

1 MARGARET NELSON: So we're talking about athletic
2 permit requests? Um, so again, we, uh, permit- we
3 have huge demand, a huge and growing demand for our
4 fields and our courts, um, and I want to commend our
5 athletic permit coordinators who are doing, you know,
6 amazing work every day, uh, trying to get as many,
7 um, permits accepted as they possibly can. And that
8 includes oftentimes when people are applying and
9 maybe they can't get a specific time for that court
10 or field, trying to work with them to find other
11 times or fields that could work with them. So our
denial rate is low for athletic fields.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: For CBOs that propose
13 temporary sports-related events, what is DPR's
14 process for approving those events? What are the
15 most common reasons those requests get delayed or
16 denied? What support does Parks provide to help
groups meet those requirements?

17 MARGARET NELSON: Sure. So what we've realized
18 is that in the athletic permit space, right, usually
19 it's, um, it's leagues that are applying to do, you
20 know, league play. But tournaments, right,
21 basketball tournaments are more like one-day events.
We're trying to set up- it's- that's more like a

1 special event. So it's a joint process with athletic
2 field permitting and our special event staff because
3 those kind of one-day athletic style events also have
4 some special event permit type things. Like, uh,
5 again, there might be sponsorship, there might be
6 amplified sound. There are other things that we need
7 to take a look at in that permitting process.

8 So again, we have our teams working with groups
9 that are looking to do tournament play and try to
10 make sure we can accommodate.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Sure. Uh, oftentimes
12 CBOs may be running an event, sports or otherwise,
13 where the permanent area becomes unusable too early
14 because the lights are not strong enough, not
15 working, or not kept on long enough. For such
16 events, what is the process for requesting extension-
17 extension of lighting hours?

18 MARGARET NELSON: Um, so, you know, we recognize-
19 thank you for the question, Council Member. You
20 know, again, because we have limited fields and
21 growing demand, we recognize that lighting some of
these fields does extend the playing time, right,
that we can make available to folks.

1 So it is an agency priority to— we have fields,
2 we have some number of fields that do have sports
3 lighting, and we have, you know, I think about 15
4 projects in the capital process pipeline to include
5 lighting of additional fields.

6 So that will be a great thing for our sports
7 users. Um, we can control a lot of this lighting
8 remotely now. We're moving into a technology where
9 you don't have to actually be on the field to turn on
10 and off the lighting, which is great. Um, so people
11 can reserve a field with the lighting, right?
12 They're paying extra for the lighting, and that
13 lighting should be on for the time that they are
14 permitted to play. Um, we do try to build in a
15 little extra time, like they should finish the game
16 at a certain time, and then we want to have the
17 lighting still on while they, you know, have time to
18 leave the field and leave the park.

19 Um, but in general, we try— our time for cutoff
20 for lighting is 10 p.m. and we have to keep in mind
21 that a lot of these fields are in residential
neighborhoods where we want to make sure we're being
respectful of the neighbors and not having, uh, folks
in the parks or with the lighting shining, you know,

shining in their houses for, you know, past a certain hour.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: How does DPR weigh safety, noise, staffing, and community demand when deciding whether lights can stay on beyond, uh, 10 p.m.?

MARGARET NELSON: Again, we pretty much have a policy now of lights not staying on past 10 p.m.. I think we have a few exceptions like Randall's Island where we're not abutting a residential community, so the lights can stay on a little longer there, but in general our policy is 10 p.m..

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Has the Parks Department ever granted a group, uh, an extension beyond 10 p.m.?

MARGARET NELSON: Um, I'm not aware, but we can check and get back to you. I think sometimes, you know, there might be, you know, some very extenuating circumstance where a call is made and we have to make a judgment call for the safety and security of that event or the park goes, you know. So I think we want to be accommodating, make sure everybody is safe. But in general, we're asking the folks who are permitting our fields to abide by our rules and the

1 timing and make sure they're getting off the field in
2 the right amount of time.

3 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: How was 10 p.m.
4 determined to be the set time for the lights to shut
5 off? How and when?

6 MARGARET NELSON: How and when? Um, I don't have
7 the answer to that question. We can get back to you.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, yeah, thank you.

9 MARGARET NELSON: I think in part it was because
10 there was very, you know, it was variability across
11 boroughs and we wanted to establish a set time, and
12 so that time was thought to be a reasonable time.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Have you all received any
14 complaints from, uh, permit holders about lights?

15 MARGARET NELSON: We receive complaints all the
16 time about a lot of things.

17 MATT DRURY: If I may, just, just to— not to
18 complicate the matter, but like we receive, we
19 receive feedback that 10 p.m. is— that they should
20 shut off even earlier, right? Like, we— like, from
21 local, like, residents. So not that— well, just to—
just to—

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Well, right now, the
permit holders is my—

1 MATT DRURY: Understood, but, and as you heard,
2 yes, you know, we certainly have gotten feedback that
3 there is a desire or a wish that those could be on
4 later. But I just want to make clear that we've,
5 we've heard just as loud, fervent voices in-
6 directly. And I think it's just actually a pretty
7 instructive example of the, you know, challenging
8 policy decisions that the agency has the
9 responsibility. And, and, you know, that, that is,
10 that is our job as the New York City Parks
11 Department, right? These are some of the policy
12 considerations that we have to balance. As you've
13 heard from our colleagues that, like, you know, we do
14 our best to strike that balance. We love that people
15 are out there using our parks, but also, you know, we
16 need to balance that with other community concerns
17 and issues that we're hearing.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: In the '90s, uh, Mayor
19 Dinkins started a program, to my understanding,
20 called Midnight Basketball, um, and I know that's
21 going- that's pretty far back. Um, probably before I
 was born, but, uh, do you have any, uh, data that
 speaks to the success or lack thereof for that
 program?

MATT DRURY: I, I, historically?

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Yeah.

MARGARET NELSON: Yeah. I don't think we would, because that's probably going back too far, but I would say, I think the current version of that program is Saturday Night Lights, where uh, there's I think over 100 sites, and we have in our Parks Department recreation centers, I think we're 14 of those over 100 or 150 sites where we're providing—we're keeping the rec—recreation centers open late on Saturday nights and working with NYPD providing lots of different programming, not only basketball but, you know, swimming and arts and crafts and other events, uh, for teenagers to give them a safe space to be on Saturday night.

And again, through DYCD, who has contracts with many different, uh, community-based organizations, there's lots of that programming that's happening in a safe, kind of secure environment for those teens to come to. And I think if I had to guess, one of the concerns about doing till midnight in parks outside is that it's harder to provide that safety and security that we'd want for our, our young population.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I appreciate that. Okay, uh, I do have one more question. This is more Southeast Queens based. Uh, Roy Wilkins Park has to go through Central for permitting. However, Basley Pond Park requests do not. They're close in distance. What is the reason that one park has to go through Central and the other the borough?

MARGARET NELSON: Um, so to my understanding, Roy Wilkins, if it's a— if it meets the criteria for a local permit that wouldn't require to go to Central Citywide Special Events, it would also be handled by the borough, the Borough Permit Office.

MATT DRURY: Yeah, if there's an instance where the same scale, the same nature, like essentially the same event is happening at two different parks and being handled by different, uh, different offices, that'd be— I think we'd wanna hear more about that. But, but traditionally, a larger scale event, a concert, something like that, would be handled by the, you know, central citywide special events team, whereas smaller events, barbecues, you know, reunions, picnics, what have you, you know, generally gets handled by, by the permit office.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: So if you can look, if you can look into that, I'm, I'm being told by, uh, uh, the organization that has a license agreement at the park that that is not the case. So if you can look into that.

MATT DRURY: Yeah, sure, happy to look into that. Will do.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Alright, um, No further questions, Council Member? Alright, so with that, I want to thank the Parks Department for joining us today, as well as, uh, City Parks Foundation and all of the, uh, organizations. Thank you so much. We're gonna turn this part of- yep.

I'm now opening the hearing for public testimony. I remind members of the public that this is a formal government proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As such, members of the public shall remain silent at all times. The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed from the witness table.

Further, members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the

Sergeant-at-Arms for inclusion in the hearing record. If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fad—uh, fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized.

When recognized, you will have 2 minutes to speak on today's hearing topics, uh, examining the Parks Department engagement with community-based organizations and volunteers and Intro 822. If you have a written statement or additional written testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at Arms. You may also email written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours of this hearing.

Audio and video recordings will not be accepted. We're gonna call our first panel. 6 people per—okay, 2, 2 panels, then we have 6 or 7 on virtual. Got it. Matt Molina, Kara Nowakowski, Shawnique Woolfalk. Oh, okay. If I mispronounce your name, I do apologize. If you can just, uh, state it clearly for the record when you give your testimony.

MATT MALINA: Good afternoon. Can you hear me? Good afternoon, everyone. Uh, nice to— nice to see you. Uh, do I need to hold— no, okay. Uh, thank

you, Chair Hankerson and Members of the Council's Committee on Parks and Recreation, for convening this hearing and providing the opportunity to testify.

My name is Matt Malina. I'm the director and founder of NYC H2O, a nonprofit organization that has been stewarding the Ridgewood Reservoir in Highland Park for the past 10 years.

In that time, we have maintained and improved the site, removed invasive species including the formidable phragmites, restored native habitat, and brought over 9,000 New Yorkers, school children, families, and community members to experience the remarkable nature that abounds there. We have provided over \$3 million in services at no cost to the Parks Department.

I'm here today because the Parks Department's ad hoc approach to do this work is unsustainable. We need the ability to enter into a license agreement similar to what's in place for larger parks that, um, uh, Councilman Salaam, uh, spoke about and, and, um, Councilman Morano and, uh, Councilwoman Narcisse had alluded to and asked questions about.

A license agreement allows us to raise private and public funds to improve the reservoir's, uh,

1 infrastructure, including its historic gatehouses,
2 for the community to benefit from and to build trails
3 for the public inside its basins.

4 Right now, there's 50 acres of reservoir that is
5 unused by the public. There's nowhere else in New
6 York City where 50 acres is off limits to the public.
7 Not even Fresh Kills Landfill is off limits to the
8 public. That the Parks Department is making
9 available to, to the public. So it's, uh, it's— it
 needs to change.

10 Um, without one, we can't enter into contracts,
11 hire contractors, or accept capital grants tied to
12 parks property, no matter how strong our track record
13 is or how clear the community, uh, would benefit.
14 The cost of that barrier is not abstract. In 2025,
15 State Senator Julia Salazar committed \$770,000 in
16 grant funds to electrify the East Gatehouse at the
17 reservoir, a building that has sat unused for 2 years
18 since the Parks Department spent \$5.3 million to
19 renovate it. We asked for a license agreement to
20 manage the work, offering to use contractors that the
21 Parks Department themselves use, uh, to, to work on
 their electrical systems.

Um, Parks Department said no. We made a second offer to transfer the grant entirely to Parks. They would do the work, and all we asked is that, um, we could use the building and have a license, uh, agreement for us to have a community kayaking program, um, where we could use that building and make it, make it possible. Parks said no again.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Mr. Malina, just for the sake of fairness, because the time has expired, if you can just wrap up. You got— with your final paragraph.

MATT MALINA: Absolutely. Sorry. Uh, the gatehouse still sits unused. Senator Salazar was frustrated and withdrew the funding, um, and the Ridgid Reservoir and community lost \$770,000. We hope that the Parks Department, um, would formalize their, uh, protocols for entering into, uh, formal agreements with CBOs. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'm sorry, I know the time goes by very, very quickly.

KARA NOWAKOWSKI: Thank you. I'll try to speak quickly. Um, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kara Nowakowski. I am a board member, a coach, and a swimmer with Team New

1 York Aquatics, or, uh, TNYA. Um, TNYA is New York
2 City's only LGBT-inclusive adult aquatics charity,
3 and with over 1,000 members and affiliates, we are
4 the largest such charity in the entire country. TNYA
5 offers programming in swimming, artistic swimming,
6 water polo, and adult learn-to-swim.

7 We're also a proud member of the Water Safety
8 Coalition as the largest CBO provider of adult
9 learn-to-swim programming in New York City. Uh, LGBT
10 organizations like TNYA are more important than ever
11 right now. Uh, I personally have been a competitive
12 swimmer since I was 6 years old, and joining TNYA is
13 the first time in my life I've ever had other trans
14 and non-binary, uh, teammates as well as coaches.

15 Um, and I, I know that many of my teammates feel
16 the same way. We're here testifying today, uh,
17 because right now current parks policies require us
18 primarily to use rental pools, um, usually at full,
19 um, like market value rate. Uh, and that means that
20 75% of our operational budget goes towards rentals.
21 Um, fortunately, we're seeing signs of improvement,
 um, under the, under the current administration.
 We're heartened by the department's plan to broaden
 nonprofit usage of its pools.

1 Uh, but we'd like the agency to consider the
2 following 3 points, and I'll make this quick. Uh,
3 first, Parks should implement transparent and fair
4 permitting guidelines for its pools the same way it
5 does for the ball fields uh, and the courts that we
6 heard about today. Um, LGBT teams routinely book
7 athletic fields. Pools should be no different.

8 Uh, number 2, parks should prioritize
9 affordability and permitting and develop price caps
10 for programs using parks pools and thereby establish
11 the precedent that city-owned facilities must be used
12 for affordable purposes only, not for profiteering.
13 And third, parks should use permit rules to expand
14 pool access year-round.

15 One really interesting thing about pool operating
16 expenditures is that you can't turn a pool off
17 overnight. You can't turn a pool off unless it's
18 drained. Um, and so that means that the maintenance
19 fees are relatively stable unless the seasonally
20 we're draining the pools. So this means for rec
21 centers in particular, every minute of pool time that
we're not using is wasted money. Parks could easily
expand operating hours without a significant increase

in public spending, especially if it would allow permitting from CBOs during these extended hours.

Our community wants nothing more than to partner with parks and contribute to our city, and we earnestly hope that parks can build on the promising start it's made in 2026 and make this partnership a reality. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

SHAWNIQUE WOOLFALK: Hello. Thank you so much, Board Chair. Um, my name is Shawnique Woolfalk. I am the founder and the CEO of Art in the Park, which is a local nonprofit organization, um, based out of East Harlem. A little over 10 years ago, um, while I was sitting in the park with my two sons, a vision came over me to start, ah, nonprofit and do more for my community. And that park was Alice Carnegie Triangle Park in East Harlem.

From that simple moment, Art in the Park grew into something truly special. We provide free programming, a welcoming environment, and a space where young people and families have a safe space to learn, create, and belong. What began as my desire to do more for my community has grown into a beloved nonprofit.

Over the years, we have transformed Alice Carnegie Triangle Playground into a creation hub, a place where youth and families return year after year, eager for the free programming, and a sense of community we provide. Many of this programming wouldn't be possible without the support from Partnership for Parks and the Parks Department.

Twice a year, we host a beautification where community members plant bulbs in memory of loved ones. And in the fall, we plant, and then in the spring, they see them bloom. It's a healing, joyful tradition that connects neighbors, honors those who we have lost, and brings new life to our shared green spaces.

Um, to date, we have, uh, planted over 5,000 bulbs. We have picked up about 200 bags of trash, and we have, uh, provided over 1,000 smiles, maybe more. Um, but none of this work would be possible without the steadfast support from the partnership from Parks. Their staff go above and beyond, providing not only the tools and resources needed for our beautification projects and our community days, um, but the kind of hands-on genuine support that

lets community-led organizations like ours truly thrive.

Partnership for Parks and Parks Department have created more than a partnership. They have created a platform, a space where neighbors become collaborators, where parks become classrooms, and where communities come together to learn and grow. For groups like Art in the Park, Partnership for Parks is the backbone that makes grassroots-grassroots impact possible, and their investment in the community partnerships is an investment in the heart of New York City. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much. Thank you to you both. Gonna call our next panel. Leona Chin, Jermaine Sean Smith, Christopher Leon Johnson. Okay, however.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah, hello, my name is Christopher Leon Johnson. I support Intro 822 that need to get passed. Shout out to the I I, the, the, uh, did a lot of great work in New York Red Bulls. They should have won an MLS Cup, but that's how life goes. You know, I mean Don Garber, we need to put regulation and, um, promotion inside of Major League— inside US soccer. Um, shout out to Pele, who

1 did a lot of great work for the Cosmos. Well, it was
2 sad they didn't set up shop in the city, like in
3 Coney Island, then, uh, Patterson. I hope that City
4 Council one day find a way to get the Cosmos back
5 into New York City, hopefully play at Coney Island or
6 somewhere in New York City, like, uh, the park in
7 your district. I think it's your district in St.
8 John's, or I think it's Linda Lee's district, um, the
9 park is same- the, the soccer field, St. John's.

10 But I want to say this right now, that I hope to
11 God that, um, going forward, that you, sir,
12 introduced the bill on behalf of Mr., um, Shabazz
13 Stewart, when it comes to the park, the bike parking.
14 I know they work with Annie, um, Miss- the New York
15 City Parks Department. They open a deliverista right
16 outside. Shout out to the workers, just surprised
17 they're opening up. I got them this morning because
18 they didn't even open up yet. They did that for the
19 photo op for April 7th, for the photo op so they can
20 get on the, um, the ticker for the 100-day ceremony.
21 But I'll say this right now, that I hope that going
forward you introduce the bill to City Council where
when they come to the bike parking, a certain
percentage of the bike parking must go to a

1 Black-owned, um, MWBE-owned company. And it should
2 go designated to ONI. It should be a bill for where
3 ONI deserves— it deserves his just due because they
4 got done dirty, um, last session under Eric Adams
5 when it came to the bike parking contract. But I
6 hope that when it comes to giving out contracts to
7 the city, where just like how any major contract in
8 the city was done by the city of New York, 25% goes
9 to NWE company, a bike, a bike, uh, parking company
10 like Arnie should be part of that. They should— it
11 should be a bill introduced on their behalf to where
12 that a bike parking company, 25% of that bike parking
13 infrastructure be designated to a minority-owned
14 company that's been issued to ONI. So thanks so
15 much, enjoy your day. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

15 LEONA CHIN: Yes, um, good afternoon, Council
16 Chair and Council Committee members. Um, my name is
17 Leona Chin. I'm the program manager for Kissina
18 Synergy. Um, we steward and, um, take care of the
19 park, um, in Flushing, Queens. Um, our team is
20 comprised of, um, dynamic, proactive, diverse,
21 inclusive, multigenerational, multilingual, and
multi-abled volunteer teams that are dedicated to

1 environmental stewardship, collaborative community
2 service, and responsive civic eng- engagement and
3 outreach.

4 Um, I'm here today to, um, advocate for more
5 funding for parks, uh, because of the collaborative
6 work that we do with them. We serve with New York
7 City Parks Partnership for Parks, Um, um, and, uh,
8 natural resources group, um, by taking care of the
9 trees, plants, um, and shrubs in Casino Park. We
10 also, uh, conduct water sampling. We take care of
11 the rain gardens. We also take care of, um, the
12 catch basins in our area because there's a flooding
13 issue there.

14 Um, our teams are comprised of special needs,
15 prevocational, um, teams, college teams, high school
16 teams, corporate teams, and family teams. We serve
17 Tuesday through Saturday from 9 to 12. Um, we have
18 an amazing relationship with Parks Department. Um,
19 they support us in all of the work that we do, but we
20 find that every fiscal year, um, we find that we're
21 missing our key personnel, because either they've
moved on or, um, they've been excessed.

Um, we're here to support their, um, funding,
and, um, I'm running out of time. Um, we're just

very thankful that, um, we have the funding that we have, but we'd like to see it restored and increased to the 2% that we had many years ago. Thank you.

JERMAINE SEAN SMITH: Looking at the timer.

Alrighty, um, good afternoon, Chair Hankerson and Members of the Committee on Parks, the ones that were here, um, and Recreation. My name is Jermaine Sean Smith, Executive Director of the Southern Queens Park Association.

Since 2022, I've been in this role. SQPA, we've, uh, stewarded 54 acres of Roy Wilkins Park since 1977, and we are the only, uh, Black-led organization in New York City doing so. Um, I want to start with the truth. The relationship between SQPA and the New York City Parks Department has gone through real ups and downs. There were seasons where no communication happened, broke down, um, consistently, and that dysfunction was never one-sided. SQPA owns its share of the history.

For the past 2 years, however, that relation has been on the upswing, and this Committee should hear that clearly. Um, that turn began with former Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa. She listened, she showed up, she treated SQPA not as a problem to be

managed, but as a partner to be respected. Um, she helped us begin to rebuild trust, and that had eroded over the years.

Today, that work continues under Commissioner Shimamura. That partnership, the partnership we have right now, the strongest SQPA has had, ah, with New York City Parks in years. When we've brought forward our capital vision for Roy Wilkins Park, both Commissioner Tricia and Queens Borough Commissioner Jackie Langsam welcome the conversation to offer this stay engaged. Um, accountability; I'll be, uh, you know, I would not be honoring the Committee's invitation if I only spoke about what parks has done well, but SQPA has also taken accountability for the changes that we've seen and what we do.

Over the past 4 years, we've done the hard work, unglamorous work of putting our own house in order. We professionalized our HR, um, done work to make sure that we have board structure to keep us accountable. Here's our ask, because of my time, I will close with this: SQPA is pursuing a sole source concession agreement, um, that would give us certainty for the next 50 years. State legislation Senate Bill 11963-015 would require Parks to

1 establish a formal publicly available process for
2 these agreements with clear deadlines and arbitration
3 enforcement.

4 That bill matters for SQPA, and for every
5 community-based organization doing this work across
6 the 5 boroughs. I respectfully ask the Committee to
7 keep an eye on that legislation and keep believing
8 that community-led stewardship supported by
9 responsive Parks Department is one of the best
10 investments New York City can make. Thank you, Chair
11 Hankerson. Happy to provide. Do I get an additional
12 2 minutes? Um, that is Senate Bill 11963-01-5.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, we're gonna call
14 our next panel, which is on Zoom. Uh, we're gonna
15 call Adam from New York Parks. One. Okay, Adam, are
16 you there? It's on Zoom.

17 ADAM GANSER: Yep.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

19 ADAM GANSER: Hi, can you hear me?

20 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Yes.

21 ADAM GANSER: Something's up with my audio. Can
you say something again just so I can—

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: We can hear you. Can you
hear me?

ADAM GANSER: Uh, yeah, I'm, I'm on. Thanks.
Apologies. Little technical glitch.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: No worries.

ADAM GANSER: Uh, my name is Adam Ganser. Um, appreciate the hearing and appreciate being able to testify. It's nice to see you, Council Member. Um, I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. New York City's park system is a lifeline for New Yorkers. So much so that when the public's frustration from decades of disinvestment has led to a massive ad hoc quasi-public-private system to maintain these public spaces citywide.

As you've heard, the city has over 40 not-for-profit parks conservancies. There are nearly 500 volunteer organizations supported by Partnership for Parks across the city with the sole focus of improving their local parks, and the agency itself notes that there are more than 200,000 volunteers citywide that choose to spend their free time maintaining their parks.

While this may seem like a reason to rejoice in civic engagement, it begs a question: why do we need a population of a small city of volunteers to do the

works that the Parks Department should be doing
itself? The answer, of course, is funding.

Public funding for the Parks Department has been
an embarrassment for the for 40+ years, and during
that time we've seen the system descend in national
rankings and the inequity of access to clean, safe
parks become a flashpoint. What's worse is that the
city wants to have its cake and eat it too, at the
expense of New Yorkers. Having its cake means
millions of private dollars going to conservancies
and millions of free volunteer hours for basic
maintenance of our city's parks. And eating that
cake means that the administration continues to pull
resources from the agency while making it extremely
difficult for conservancies and small volunteer
organizations to do this work.

License agreements, insurance, and
indemnification permitting have all been a constant
source of frustration—

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired—

ADAM GANSER: Of all sizes. If you— if I could
finish, I just need 30 seconds.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay.

ADAM GANSER: To its credit, the Parks Department has made significant steps recently towards streamlining permitting. But the agency suffers from a depleted administration staff at all levels, notably, ah, administration, uh, assistance, event staff, and more, the very people who can help on these issues. And funding for Partnership for Parks, a lifeline for hundreds of volunteer organizations, is constantly on the chopping block.

And while there have been pro- has been progress on license agreements, insurance, and indemnification for parks groups, The Parks Department is tethered to the City Law Department, which drags its feet when real reform is needed.

The Council, the Administration, and the agency must prioritize further reforms so that all New Yorkers can get the benefits of these groups. Thank you very much, everybody.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Adam. Next, we're gonna have Alan.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

ALAN MUKAMAL: Good. I'm the founder of Red Hook Pool, which is a member of Water Safety Commission.

1
2 Last year, the pool was closed most of the season due
3 to a mechanical— I, I went, and, um, the day broken—

4 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Alan, I'm sorry, but
5 you're having, uh, service issues. You're not coming
6 through through clearly on our end, unfortunately.

7 ALAN MUKAMAL: After somebody else talk, if I'll
8 see if I fix this.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, Alan, we're going
10 to come back to you, uh, you may have to turn your
11 camera off and keep the audio on. You may have to
12 try it that way, but we're going to come back to you
13 because it's not coming through clearly.

14 ALAN MUKAMAL: Thanks.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Uh, we're going to move
16 to George Sands.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

18 GEORGE SANDS: Okay, are we good? Can you hear
19 me?

20 CHAIRPERSON HANKKERSON: Good to go.

21 GEORGE SANDS: Thank you. Thank you for this
opportunity to share our insights. My name is George
Sands and I volunteer with Friends of Mount Prospect
Park. The Parks Department plans to commandeer Mount
Prospect Park's lawn for a largely paved skateboard

1 facility behind barriers. The city has driven
2 volunteers to organize, 3,000 petitioning park
3 lovers, Brooklyn CB9, and environmental, health,
4 historical, and climate-conscious skateboarding
5 groups all call on you to protect the park.

6 When people in power aren't hiding behind
7 deference, they acknowledge the plan contradicts the
8 tree canopy law, urban forest plan, and policies to
9 address the dangerous paved heat island effect.

10 Also, paying for the water management undercuts
11 climate budgeting because the taxpayers are legally
12 required to pay for extra engineering for this I
13 invent environmental harm.

14 You're paving permeable parkland and cutting and
15 endangering shade trees in Brooklyn which has the
16 least green space per person and the worst tree
17 canopy in the city, and also has more than 40% of the
18 city's skateboard facilities, mostly around Mount
19 Prospect Park.

20 So much for equity. The project was a secret
21 deal. Participatory budgeting was used to direct
hundreds of thousands of dollars voted by District 39
with no site disclosed, even though it had been

picked. To pave a park in District 35, which had no vote.

We volunteers want an investigation for violating the City Council's Adopt-a-Park law. It requires preserving a park's integrity, but the plan pours concrete throughout the center of this National Register eligible park, and the sponsor is supposed to donate maintenance money and indemnify the city. But documents indicate the city zeroed out a million dollar funding from California celebrity skateboarder Tony Hawk's organization. And safety issues—

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired—

GEORGE SANDS: 2 seconds. And safety issues pinpointed by experts raise taxpayer liability for injuries to parkgoers, passersby, and skateboarders due to flawed site selection. We call on you to correct course before permanent damage is done. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, George. Uh, next we'll have Hayley Gorenberg. You may begin.

HAYLEY GORENBERG: Thank you for this opportunity to shed light. My name is Hailey Gorenberg, and I volunteer for multiple New York City parks-oriented organizations, including as a community resident

voting member of Brooklyn Community Board 8's Parks, Youth, and Education Committee, which I'm highlighting today.

I started attending CB8 committee meetings because CB8 was one of two boards long time on record as attached to my neighborhood's park, Mount Prospect Park, and the city had suddenly announced a huge concrete skateboard facility would be built there. I attended so many meetings that I became a voting member.

Parks Department practices with this volunteer organization are alarming. Parks fails to give materials in advance of showing a design, sometimes insisting on a vote in the same meeting. Why not give materials in advance? We are told that's just not something they do. Even though we know that reasoned input would involve materials in advance so volunteers would have time to formulate questions or address agency misrepresentations, sometimes flagrantly inaccurate statements when meeting with New York City Parks. But when they went to the Public Design Commission on March 23rd, after the Mount Prospect design was disclosed days earlier, what did project reps tell the mayoral appointees?

Oh, they said they had given the CBA Committee materials in advance. They also told the Mayoral Commission that CB8 had, quote, explicitly said the community board wanted the skate facility built on Mount Prospect Park's beloved historic green parkland.

They also said CB8 had verified that messages in support came from within the CB8 district, but CB8 district and committee leadership say none of that is true. They do not verify messages of support and that the city is, to quote, steamrolling this project at this location with no community consultation on siting. That tracks everything else we know.

The signs are that New York City Parks and the city are using CB8 volunteers as a fig leaf to falsely portray community support and legitimacy for a wildly inequitable, damaging, and even dangerous project sucking up millions of dollars of taxpayer money.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Hayley. Love the fabric that's behind you as well.

HAYLEY GORENBERG: Thank you very much. It's Eyes on the Park.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Ah, yes. Uh, we'll have Kathy Matson.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHARPERSON HANKERSON: Kathy. Okay, we'll circle back. Uh, next we'll have Michael Taylor.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

MICHAEL TAYLOR: Yes, hello, good afternoon. I'm Michael Taylor. I'm Founder of Team Spartan Spades, a fitness group that uses obstacle course racing to introduce people to multiple health and wellness as we help improve the health and wellness of the Bronx and beyond, up here at District 11 in the Bronx.

Um, I'm here to advocate on the, on the behalf of parks to try to get more funding from the city 'cause it's very important and pertinent to the success of our parks to be seen on a global scale outside of places like Central Park and Cortona Park, which are the major parks in New York City. Um, during the week, I offer free workouts to people from 6:00 to 7:30 in the evening.

At this park, we have the soccer field and the soon-to-be Tony Hawk skate park that is also opening up in our area. Um, on behalf of the park constituents, I try to advocate for pedestrian

lighting, which is absent from Allerton Avenue up to Rosewood Avenue in that section of Bronx Park East.

Matters of safety concerns continue to be, um, ah, prevalent in this park because we lack um, the Pep Patrols are limited and the cleanliness of the parks are limited. On the capacity of safety, um, you know, we have people on dirt bikes and mopeds riding through the parks. People's lives are always, um, at risk when these guys are out here on these dirt bikes. Um, a matter of safety with the overgrowth and brushes, we have a huge homeless population that is being, um, looked into by, uh, social services because we have people who traverse the park and sometimes have to use the bathroom. Unfortunately, there's no restroom due to the high budget, high ticket cost of a restroom, which is about \$3 million.

We need to find some way that we can get a, um, restroom in this park area. This way we can avoid having men and women have to use, um, the local shrubs, which are basically spreading infectious waste in the area, which which again impacts the capacity.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

MICHAEL TAYLOR: Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much. Next, we'll have Rene Scotland. You may begin.

RENE SCOTLAND: Yes, one moment, please. Okay, thank you for giving me the time to talk, uh, virtually, um, to give my statement virtually. I am the founding member of Friends of Commodore Barry Clark. I have been with the group, uh, for 11 years. Um, ah, on behalf of Friends of Commodore Barry, I am especially grateful to be given this opportunity to express my appreciation for Partnerships for Parks. Doing so reminds me and our group that our work and our community are seen.

So as the founding member of Friends of Commodore Barry, um, I want to express my deep appreciation for Partnerships for Parks and the impact they've had on our work as park stewards. From the beginning, their support has been steady and truly empowering. Their commitment to environmental stewardship has strengthened everything we do. They have partnered with us on gardening and park cleanups, to programming, to community events.

The workshops they offer have helped us build our skills and confidence as organizers and leaders.

1
2 Their guidance has also translated into real tangible
3 outcomes for our group. For example, our inclusion
4 in the Catalyst program in 2017 provided our group
5 with critical support and structure. Ted Enoch and
6 his Catalyst team helped us, um, organize and
7 identify community stakeholders which to this day is,
8 is so important to know who those people are, who
9 those groups are, and as a result expand our impact.
10 An offshoot of that was an invitation to join the
11 Cohort Visioning Program.

12 This program gave us the tools to plan and lead a
13 visioning session in the park in the summer of 2018.
14 That work culminated in a spoke meeting in November—

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 RENE SCOTLAND: Same year.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: You can, you can, uh,
18 wrap up with your final, uh, statement.

19 RENE SCOTLAND: Okay, so I'll just say, um, the
20 redesign of the park is about to begin, um, hopefully
21 this year, and we have invested so much time in that
scope meeting, bringing the community in, and it's
just a dream and a wonderful sight to see that this
is going to happen.

Um, on a personal note, I've grown tremendously in my role, and partnerships— park has been a constant source. And having listened to, um, the speakers today, my ask would be from the Council to increase funding for park staff, because there's just so much grassroots organizations can do.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much. Uh, we're gonna circle back to, uh, okay. Uh, yeah, well, we'll circle back to Alan.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Are you still there?

ALAN MUKAMAL: Yeah, I'm here. Okay. Can you hear me okay?

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Yes, perfect.

ALAN MUKAMAL: So, I'm the Founder of Friends of Red Hook Pool, which is a member of the Water Safety Coalition. Last year, the Red Hook Pool was closed for most of the summer swim season due to a mechanical failure that went undetected and unannounced until the day the pool should have opened.

The Parks Department worked hard to open the pool after community uproar and managed to salvage the last 3 weeks of the short outdoor swim season. But

Red Hook Pool is one of the 4 major outdoor pools with a free learn-to-swim program.

So with its unanticipated closure, New York City lost 1/4 of its capacity to teach kids to swim. During last year's closure, I also came to learn that the Red Hook Pool was scheduled for a complete renovation with money secured from both federal and city sources after damages inflicted by Hurricane Sandy. Despite this being planned for years, there was no community outreach, and only after Council Member Avilés got involved did the Parks Department hold a town hall.

At the town hall last September, the Parks Department did take community input about hopes for the rec center and pool, but they did not share their plans whatsoever. Furthermore, since then they have not shared any plans or schedule or even provided a summary of the meeting. This is not an isolated case. There are many stories of plans that are not vetted with community and consequently fall flat. The Parks Department needs to be more transparent and take advantage of the insight that CBOs can bring to the table. And even putting major projects aside, CBOs can provide valuable input in programming as as

well as augment services that the Parks Department does not have the resources to support.

Outdoor swimmers have wanted lap lanes in all pools, yet frequently the outdoor pools do not support such a simple thing. Another question the community has raised but is unanswered is why are police officers have to be present for an outdoor pool to open?

Surely it's not necessary, and with community engagement, an alternate approach could eliminate this hurdle. There are CBOs that can provide low-cost-

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

ALAN MUKAMAL: Swim lessons- one second- like, the NYA who just spoke. If there's a lifeguard shortage, and there is, partnering with CBOs to simplify the process of training and testing lifeguards could turn that around. There are so many intelligent and dedicated people involved with swimming in New York City.

Boggling to me that Parks does not actively tap into the CBO community to meet their mission to provide quality recreational opportunities for all New Yorkers. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Alan. Uh, we're going to go back to Kathy Matson.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

KATHY MATSON: Hello, my name is Kathy Matson, and I'm representing Brooklyn's Cultural Roadblock Association, an organization of volunteers who work to improve life and solve problems in the community.

CURBA Block's- CURBA's block includes Mount Prospect Park. I moved on to Eastern Parkway in 2004. I was delighted by the green space, especially Mount Prospect Park. It has been a wonderful retreat for the community. The day camp groups go in there every day, and the dog walkers enjoy it for taking their dogs. Um, I use the park to exercise, walk around the oval. And book- read a book, and even the quiet- enjoy the quiet outdoors.

For the past 2 years, CURBA has been extremely concerned about the plan secretly created by a handful of officials to turn the center of the lawn of Mount Prospect Park into a large, mostly paved skateboard facility. The community was not consulted about the decision to convert the park.

For years, CURBA volunteers in Mar- Prospect Park have been doing trash pickup and weeding in the park.

1 Last year we helped to mulch around the trees. Curb
2 of Volunteers secured a free donation of professional
3 soil aeration and reseeded for Prospect Park in
4 2004. New York City Parks said that, that kind of
5 volunteer is supposed to be welcomed. They also
6 closed multiple 311 requests to have basic lawn
7 maintenance. Making them condition considered-
8 condition, uh, corrected when no work was done.

9 Our community would have enjoyed that green space
10 for 2 years, but instead the Parks Authority rejected
11 the improvement and have left the space neglected.
12 Then they tell us the skateboard park construction is
13 on the way to make the lawn greener. That should not
14 be. By paving the park, it will take away the
15 coolness of grass and not be as welcoming as it is
16 today. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you for your
18 testimony. Uh, finally, we're gonna go to Ethan
19 Norville.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

21 ETHAN NORVILLE: Hey, thanks for having me. Good
afternoon, uh, Chair and Committee. Um, I'm the
First Vice Chair, uh, Brooklyn Community Board 9,
and, you know, being so close to this, I have a

couple points I wanna talk about regarding just how, you know, parks are run and this kind of thing.

First thing, um, funding. A lot of parks, uh, in New York City, particularly Brooklyn too, end up kind of being undermaintained because of a consistent under- ah, funding. Um, if you can get some extra importance on that, we to really be able to have the constant funding that we need to sort of have a lot of the parks, you know, we kept the standard up to par and stuff like that.

And I can- my second point, I'm gonna use Mount Prospect Park as an example for both. The second point, we wanna see a lot more, uh, sort of bottom-up reconsideration when it comes to planning. A lot of people, even here on this call and in these organizations who support parks, are people who love the area that they live in and love the neighborhood to the point where they are devoted to it and want to give to it more than they take from it.

In a lot of the cases, these people are willing to give input and help plan how parks are developed and advanced, and in many cases, the feedback isn't sufficiently taken into consideration. Like with Mount Prospect Park, it's a park that has undergone a

1 bit of underfunding, has kind of had compacted soil
2 for a while, and hasn't been adequately cared for,
3 and at the same time, the solution to that is being
4 seen as paving over a chunk of it to sort of
5 repurpose it in the borough that has the most skate
6 parks and the most paved space and the least green
7 space per person, which seems like exactly the
8 opposite of a good idea.

9 Um, people should be considering a lot of, a lot
10 more local organizations in how we make these
11 decisions, and I look forward to a city where that is
12 the case. Thanks.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you for your
14 testimony. Alright, with that, that concludes our
15 hearing today on examining the Parks Department's
16 engagement with community-based organizations and
17 volunteers, Wednesday, May 6th, 2026. This hearing
18 is adjourned. [GAVEL]
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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date July 16, 2026