

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID WASTE JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 1  
CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID  
WASTE JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON  
PARKS AND RECREATION

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May 20, 2024  
Start: 9:43 a.m.  
Recess: 5:47 p.m.

HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Justin L. Brannan, Chairperson of  
the Committee on Finance

Shaun Abreu, Chairperson of the  
Committee on Sanitation and Solid  
Waste Management

Shekar Krishnan, Chairperson of  
the Committee on Parks and  
Recreation

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE:

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Selvena N. Brooks-Powers  
David M. Carr  
Amanda Farías  
Kamillah Hanks  
Crystal Hudson  
Farrah N. Louis  
Francisco P. Moya

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COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE: (cont.)

Chi A. Ossé  
Keith Powers  
Yusef Salaam  
Pierina Ana Sanchez  
Althea V. Stevens  
Nantasha M. Williams

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND  
SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT:

David M. Carr  
Julie Menin  
Vickie Paladino  
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.  
Sandra Ung  
Inna Vernikov  
Susan Zhuang

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND  
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David M. Carr  
Robert F. Holden  
Linda Lee  
Julie Menin  
Mercedes Narcisse  
Vickie Paladino  
Sandra Ung

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A P P E A R A N C E S

Jessica Tisch, Commissioner of the New York City  
Department of Sanitation

Javier Logan, First Deputy Commissioner of the  
New York City Department of Sanitation

Joe Antonelli, Deputy Commissioner of Management  
and Budget at the New York City Department of  
Sanitation

Ryan Merola, Deputy Commissioner of External  
Affairs at the New York City Department of  
Sanitation

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

Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, First Deputy Commissioner  
of the New York City Department of Parks and  
Recreation

Matt Drury, Chief of Citywide Legislative  
Affairs of the New York City Department of Parks  
and Recreation

Mark Focht, Deputy Commissioner and Chief  
Operating Officer of the New York City  
Department of Parks and Recreation

Therese Braddick, Deputy Commissioner for  
Capital Projects of the New York City Department  
of Parks and Recreation

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

Margaret Nelson, Deputy Commissioner for Urban  
Park Service and Public Programs of the New York  
City Department of Parks and Recreation

Max Barton, Union Representative for Liuna  
Labor's Local Union 1010 Pavers and Road Builders

Joe Puleo, President of Local 983

Dilcy Benn, President of Local 1505, DC37

Negin Farsad, Friends of Tompkins Square Park in  
the East Village, part of the Play Fair for Parks  
Coalition

Ralph Baselice, Vice President for Local 983

Mohammad Biswas, self

Veronica Escamilla, self

Carla Rodriguez, self

Carina Kaufman-Gutiérrez, Deputy Director at the  
Street Vendor Project

Mohamed Attia, Managing Director of the Street  
Vendor Project

Miguel Varela, self

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

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

Adam Ganser, Executive Director of New Yorkers  
for Parks

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

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

Jake Patel, Special Assistant of the New York  
League of Conservation Voters

Preeti Sodhi, Senior Director of Community and  
Government Relations with Friends of the High  
Line

Keisha Lewis, High Line Teen Employment Program

Angela Padilla, Highline Teen Employment Program

Mame Bousso Kane, Highline Teen Employment  
Program

Joaquin Eleno, Highline Teens Employment Program

Iyana McGhaney, Highline Teen Employment Program

Fahad Hussain, Highline Teen Employment Program

Merritt Birnbaum, President and CEO of Riverside  
Park Conservancy

Keri Butler, Municipal Art Society of New York

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

Vanessa Butler, speaking on behalf of Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks Foundation

Morgan Monaco, President of the Prospect Park Alliance

Rosa Chang, Co-Founder of Gotham Park

Christina Taylor, Deputy Director of the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance

Natalie Huang, GrowNYC Workers' Collective

Eric Menjuar, Bargaining Committee of the GrowNYC Workers' Collective

Arif Sunmonu, Government Affairs Lead at GrowNYC Workers Collective

Sitra Bowman, GrowNYC Workers' Collective

Violet Black, GrowNYC Workers' Collective

Lena Frey, GrowNYC Workers' Collective

Austin Aracina, driver and coordinator for GrowNYC's compost program

Andrew Wallach, Chairman of the board of the Natural Areas Conservancy

Giuletta Fiore, Historic House Trust of New York City

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

Sara Evans, Director of the Living Collection at  
Greenwood Cemetery

Scott Daly, Senior Director of the New York  
Junior Tennis and Learning

Beth Slepian, self

Jane Selden, Chair of Committee on Waste  
Reduction at the Climate Activist Group 350NYC

Samantha Normandia, speaking on behalf of Marissa  
DeDominicis, Executive Director of Earth Matter  
New York

Keanu Arpels-Josiah. organizer with Fridays for  
Future NYC

Justin Wood, Director of Policy at New York  
Lawyers for the Public Interest

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Haley Gorenberg, Chair of Friends of Mount  
Prospect Park

Darren Hinton, self

Sharon Brown Jeter, self

Anna Sachs, self

Clare Miflin, Executive Director of the Center  
for Zero Waste Design

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

Eric Goldstein, New York City Environment  
Director at the Natural Resource Defense Council

Julie Jenkins, founder of the Stewards of Ewen  
Park

Justin Green, Executive Director of Big Reuse

Maria Garrett, self

Rafael Espinal, Board Member of the Forest Park  
Trust

Tami Lin-Moges, Interim Director of the Nature  
Conservancy's New York City Program

Kate Wimsatt, Director of GrowNYC Zero Waste  
Schools

Ulrike Nischan, speaking on behalf of the four  
borough-based Solid Waste Advisory Boards

Zachary Hendrickson, member of Brooklyn Community  
Board 4 in Bushwick and Grants Manager



1  
2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone  
3 check for the hearing on Sanitation and Parks and  
4 Recreation. Today's date is May 20, 2024. Located in  
5 the Chambers. Recording is done by Rocco Mesiti.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning and  
7 welcome to the New York City Council Committee on  
8 Finance jointly with Sanitation and Parks.

9 At this time, please place your phone on  
10 vibrate or silent mode.

11 If you want to submit testimony, send it  
12 to [testimony@Council.nyc.com](mailto:testimony@Council.nyc.com). Once again, that's  
13 [testimony@Council.nyc.com](mailto:testimony@Council.nyc.com).

14 At any time during this hearing, do not  
15 approach the dais.

16 Thank you for your cooperation.

17 Chairs, we are ready to begin.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Sergeant.  
19 [GAVEL] Okay, good morning and welcome to Day 10 of  
20 FY25 Executive Budget Hearings. I'm Council Member  
21 Justin Brannan. I Chair the Committee on Finance.  
22 Today's hearing will begin with the Department of  
23 Sanitation followed by the Parks Department, and I'm  
24 pleased to be joined today by my friend and  
25 colleague, Council Member Shaun Abreu, who Chairs the

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2 Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management.

3 We've been joined so far this morning by Council  
4 Members Carr and Williams. Welcome, Commissioner  
5 Tisch and your team. Thank you all for joining us  
6 today to answer our questions.

7           Just to set the table, on April 24, 2024,  
8 the Administration released the Executive Financial  
9 Plan for FY24-28 with a proposed FY25 budget of 111.6  
10 billion dollars. DSNY's proposed FY25 budget of 1.89  
11 billion represents 1.7 percent of the  
12 Administration's proposed FY25 budget. This is an  
13 increase of 5.3 million dollars, or 0.3 percent, of  
14 the 1.88 billion that was originally budgeted in the  
15 Preliminary Plan. This increase results from several  
16 actions, mostly from funding the Waste  
17 Containerization Pilot and costs associated with the  
18 Collective Bargaining Agreement, partially offset by  
19 reductions in the Snow Removal Budget. The Executive  
20 Plan also includes an additional 10 million dollars  
21 for FY24 to account for under-budgeted overtime  
22 spending and, as of March 2024, DSNY's headcount was  
23 321 above their FY24 budgeted headcount.

24           In the Council's Preliminary Budget  
25 Response, we called on the Mayor to add 7.1 million

2 dollars to restore Community Composting and extend  
3 the GrowNYC contract along with 22 million dollars  
4 for restoring cuts to litter basket service. Once  
5 again, the Mayor's Executive Plan for DSNY included  
6 zero dollars from what the Council wants to see,  
7 despite the Council locating over 6 billion in  
8 resources that weren't included in the Preliminary  
9 Budget and could go towards covering the City against  
10 under-budgeted costs as well as investing in services  
11 that make New Yorkers' lives that much easier. We're  
12 thankful that donations kept the composting program  
13 going as long as it did, but philanthropy alone can't  
14 sustain public programs and should not be expected  
15 to. A budget reflects what a community values, and  
16 the Council is committed to delivering a final budget  
17 that recognizes all resources we have available and  
18 supports New York City's quality of life.

19 My questions today will largely focus on  
20 DSNY's new needs and PEGs in the Executive Budget,  
21 along with how DSNY is approaching expiring federal  
22 stimulus dollars.

23 I'm now going to turn to my Co-Chair for  
24 this hearing, Council Member Shaun Abreu, for his  
25 opening statement.

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2 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you, Chair  
3 Brannan. Good afternoon, and welcome all to the  
4 Fiscal 2025 Executive Budget Hearing for the  
5 Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management  
6 jointly with the Committee on Finance. My name is  
7 Shaun Abreu, and I am the Chair of the Sanitation and  
8 Solid Waste Management Committee.

9 This afternoon, we will discuss the DSNY  
10 Fiscal 2025 Executive Expense Budget and the  
11 Executive Capital Commitment Plan for Fiscal Year  
12 2024 to 2028. I'd like to begin by thanking the  
13 Members of the Sanitation Department for their hard  
14 work over the past year. The Sanitation Department's  
15 Fiscal Year 2025 budget in the Executive Plan totals  
16 1.9 billion, funding 9,476 positions. Budget actions  
17 in the Executive Plan decreased DSNY's budget by 12.9  
18 million in Fiscal Year 2024 and 5.3 million in Fiscal  
19 Year 2025 when compared to the Preliminary Plan. The  
20 Department's Executive Plan includes 10 million of  
21 additional funding in Fiscal Year 2024 for higher-  
22 than-projected personnel spending across multiple  
23 program areas as well as funding in each year of the  
24 planned period for the Waste Containerization  
25 Program, which was brought as a pilot to West Harlem

1 as a revolutionary way to containerize trash in New  
2 York City. The Sanitation Department's Fiscal Year  
3 '24 to '28 Capital Commitment Plan totals 1.6 billion  
4 and supports 198 distinct projects. The Committee  
5 recently held a hearing on street cleanliness in New  
6 York City, bolstering the City's ability to be  
7 prepared to keep our streets clean. The Committee  
8 would like to revisit some of these items and others,  
9 including the November Plan PEGs that were not  
10 restored, particularly the elimination of the  
11 Community Composting Program, the ballooning cost of  
12 waste export, commercial waste zones, and street  
13 sweeper-related costs.  
14

15 It is the Council's responsibility to  
16 ensure that the City's budget is fair, transparent,  
17 and accountable to all New Yorkers. As the Chair of  
18 this Committee, I will continue to push for  
19 accountability and accuracy and ensure that the  
20 budget reflects the needs and interests of the City.  
21 It is essential that the budget that we adopt this  
22 year is transparent, accountable, and reflective of  
23 the priorities and interests of the Council and the  
24 people we represent. This hearing is a vital part of  
25 this process, and I expect DSNY to be responsive to

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2 the questions and concerns of Council Members. I look  
3 forward to an active engagement with the  
4 Administration over the next month to ensure the  
5 Fiscal Year 2025 Adopted Budget meets the goals the  
6 Council has set out.

7 I would like to thank our Committee Staff  
8 for their hard work, Financial Analyst Tanveer Singh;  
9 Unit Head Aliya Ali, Committee Counsel Morganne  
10 Barrett; Policy Analyst Ricky Chawla, and my Deputy  
11 Chief-of-Staff Jalissa Quigley.

12 I'd like to welcome and thank  
13 Commissioner Tisch, our Sanitation workers, and the  
14 Department's civilian staff for the work that they  
15 do. I'm looking forward to hearing from the  
16 Commissioner.

17 The Committee Counsel will now swear you  
18 in.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: Good morning.  
20 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and  
21 nothing but the truth before this Committee and to  
22 respond honestly to Council Member questions?  
23 Commissioner Jessica Tisch.

24 COMMISSIONER TISCH: I do.  
25

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: First Deputy  
3 Commissioner Javier Logan.

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LOGAN: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: Deputy  
6 Commissioner Joe Antonelli.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ANTONELLI: I do.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: Deputy  
9 Commissioner Ryan Merola.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: I do.

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

13 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Good morning, Chair  
14 Brannan, Chair Abreu, and Members of the Committee on  
15 Sanitation and Solid Waste Management and Finance.

16 I am Jessica Tisch, Commissioner of the  
17 New York City Department of Sanitation, and I am  
18 joined today by our First Deputy Commissioner Javier  
19 Logan; Joseph Antonelli, our Deputy Commissioner of  
20 Management and Budget; and Ryan Merola, our Deputy  
21 Commissioner of External Affairs.

22 It is a terrible time to be a piece of  
23 trash in New York City. The 10,000 public servants at  
24 the Department of Sanitation are deep into multiple  
25 rounds of offensives in the trash revolution,

2 enacting a broad variety of changes to the  
3 management, collection, sorting, and processing of 44  
4 million pounds of waste produced across the city  
5 every single day. Each of the strategic initiatives  
6 on which I will update you today could have been era-  
7 defining on its own, and yet we are not allowing one  
8 major project to distract from any other. Just as we  
9 collect the trash in every part of the city, we are  
10 changing the way that trash is managed in every part  
11 of the city. This complete overhaul of our essential  
12 service is working with historic decreases in rat  
13 sightings reported concurrently with this effort.

14 While the trash revolution has many  
15 components, I will provide updates on four key  
16 fronts. First is containerization. We are moving  
17 forward with a once-in-a-generation change to the way  
18 that trash is set out, making tremendous strides in  
19 the long-discussed but long-delayed process of  
20 getting every single piece of trash off our streets  
21 and sidewalks and into secure bins and containers.  
22 Starting March 1, 2024, container requirements went  
23 into effect for all businesses of every type in New  
24 York City to get their trash off the streets and into  
25 a secure bin. There is now a new 3-1-1 service



2 request whereby residents can report a business not  
3 using bins. Between resident complaints and  
4 observations of our DSNY enforcement staff, we have  
5 written over 2,500 summonses to businesses for  
6 failing to containerize their trash since the warning  
7 period ended on April 1. Later this fall, when  
8 container requirements go into effect for lower-  
9 density buildings, those with one to nine residential  
10 units, approximately 70 percent of all trash in the  
11 city will be containerized. In the spring of 2025,  
12 installation of stationary on-street containers will  
13 begin in Manhattan Community Board 9 for the first  
14 full-district containerization program serviced by  
15 new automated side-loading trucks. The responses to  
16 our RFP to select a specific on-street container were  
17 due just three days ago, and the review begins today.

18 In addition to commercial and residential  
19 waste, we have also taken steps to rethink the way we  
20 contain public space trash in litter baskets, placing  
21 over 1,600 of the new Better Bins across the city,  
22 with the significant help of Council Members who have  
23 wisely chosen to use discretionary funds to speed the  
24 spread of these new icons that stand at the vanguard  
25 of the trash revolution. Whereas the old mesh baskets

2 forced New Yorkers to look at the trash all day, the  
3 new baskets allow us to look to the future.

4 As containerization spreads across the  
5 city, so too does the second key front in the trash  
6 revolution, the largest and easiest curbside  
7 composting program ever. This program is on track to  
8 reach every single residence in all five boroughs  
9 starting the week of October 6th. While curbside  
10 composting programs have existed in New York City for  
11 the last decade, none have ever served more than  
12 approximately 40 percent of the city. When Mayor  
13 Adams took office, he committed to developing a  
14 universal program that works for New Yorkers, and the  
15 team at DSNY set to work developing a model built for  
16 long-term sustainability. No more stops and starts,  
17 no more complicated rules, no more drama. The  
18 resulting program, currently running in Brooklyn and  
19 Queens and coming to the other three boroughs this  
20 fall, will be the first to reach 100 percent coverage  
21 citywide, providing residents with simple, universal  
22 weekly collection of leaf and yard waste, food  
23 scraps, and food-soiled paper products on their  
24 recycling day. That simplicity is the most important  
25 part of the program. There's no need for sign-ups,

2 special dates to remember, or specific locations to  
3 visit within limited hours. Simply place your  
4 material out on recycling day, your Sanitation  
5 workers will collect it from your home, and will  
6 ensure that it's put to good use. This is a  
7 composting program for all New Yorkers. Make the  
8 separation of compostable material easy, and people  
9 will do it, and we have numbers to back this up. In  
10 Fiscal Year 2023, DSNY diverted a record 211 million  
11 pounds of compostable material from landfills, an  
12 incredible increase from just over 150 million pounds  
13 the year before. This is a testament to the value of  
14 simple, universal programs, especially given that  
15 includes only a part of our ongoing citywide rollout.  
16 The ease-of-use principle holds true for our network  
17 of nearly 400 smart composting bins across the five  
18 boroughs, where residents can drop off their  
19 compostable material 24/7 through an easy-to-use  
20 smartphone app. These bins are serviced six days a  
21 week and have proven to be very popular and, weeks  
22 ago, we made good on a promise to bring curbside  
23 compost collection to every Department of Education  
24 school, giving the next generation of composters  
25 familiarity with the ease and importance of the

2 program. When the Adams' Administration began, only  
3 about half of schools received this service, and only  
4 about half of the next generation of composters were  
5 learning about proper separation of waste for  
6 beneficial reuse. Now, they all are, and they're  
7 showing their parents and guardians the way.

8           Material collected through each of these  
9 initiatives, curbside residential collections, smart  
10 bins, and schools, is put to beneficial use either  
11 through composting or through anaerobic digestion.  
12 The Department produces tens of millions of pounds of  
13 finished compost every year at the Staten Island  
14 Compost Facility, where in January, Mayor Adams and I  
15 cut the ribbon on a major expansion. That 33-acre  
16 site is now permitted to accept over 62 million  
17 pounds of food waste per year, up from just 3 million  
18 pounds prior to the expansion, in addition to another  
19 60 million pounds of leaf and yard waste. The new  
20 technology on-site can turn waste into compost in  
21 half the time it used to take, weeks rather than  
22 months. We are producing tens of millions of pounds  
23 of beautiful New York City compost every year, and  
24 giving it back to New Yorkers for free with a list of  
25 events available on our website.

2           While the City has sufficient permitted  
3 and contracted capacity to process compostable  
4 material from a citywide program, we are currently  
5 engaged in a procurement to distribute that capacity  
6 more evenly across the region. Those City procurement  
7 rules limit the extent to which we can talk about  
8 future status of processing infrastructure for  
9 putrescible waste. Beneficial use and waste equity  
10 are both key to our long-term planning.

11           DSNY would also like to raise the issue  
12 of commercial organic separation. Local Law 146 of  
13 2013 requires certain commercial establishments to  
14 separate their compostable material, but this Law is  
15 now substantially out of step with the City's  
16 commitment to diversion of compostable waste. The  
17 commercial waste zone system will improve commercial  
18 diversion in that DSNY is requiring carters to charge  
19 businesses less to collect recyclables and  
20 compostable material than to collect trash, but we  
21 also urge the Council to consider an update that  
22 would allow DSNY to require a source separation at  
23 all commercial establishments in line with the  
24 progress made in residential diversion. This seems  
25 obvious to me. Taken together, reform of commercial

2 organics and the citywide wraparound residential  
3 services will make our streets and our air cleaner.

4 DSNY is also moving full speed ahead with  
5 a third era-defining overhaul of how the trash is  
6 managed in New York City. Our implementation of the  
7 commercial waste zone program described in Local Law  
8 199 of 2019. This Law was designed to reform the  
9 commercial waste hauling system by establishing new  
10 safety standards for workers in the commercial  
11 carting industry, improving service for businesses,  
12 increasing diversion rates, and reducing vehicle  
13 miles traveled as well as harmful emissions from  
14 waste hauling vehicles. In January, we announced the  
15 entire suite of contract awards for this program  
16 available on our website, and the first of New York  
17 City's 20 non-exclusive commercial waste zones will  
18 come online in the second half of this year in  
19 Corona, Elmhurst, and Jackson Heights. Businesses  
20 will be able to register new carting contracts  
21 beginning in early September and must do so by  
22 January 2, 2025. DSNY has a substantial outreach and  
23 education program planned for before and during that  
24 period. This program will add legal safeguards to the  
25 commercial carting industry that will protect

2 workers, business owners, and our environment. We're  
3 talking about 12 million miles fewer traveled by  
4 commercial carting vehicles and making good on a  
5 promise from when this program was created.

6 Businesses will pay less for the collection of  
7 recyclables and compostable material than they do for  
8 trash, a citywide average of 32 percent less for  
9 recycling and 18 percent less for compostable  
10 material. That means businesses will have a  
11 meaningful financial incentive to separate their  
12 waste properly.

13           Containerization, composting, and the  
14 implementation of commercial waste zones are major  
15 changes in the way the Department performs our work,  
16 but they also necessitate changes in the ways New  
17 Yorkers conduct their work around waste and, in  
18 addition to education and outreach, there must be a  
19 robust enforcement component of each of these  
20 programs. The Department of Sanitation will never  
21 enforce for enforcement's sake but, as part of the  
22 trash revolution, we are not afraid to hold property  
23 owners accountable to the very basic requirements we  
24 have around cleanliness. The legal requirements to  
25 maintain a clean sidewalk, to remove litter and

1 debris from the first 18 inches into the street, and  
2 to set out waste at the proper time and in the proper  
3 receptacles. In 2023, our enforcement of these  
4 critical rules around cleanliness was up over 60  
5 percent compared to the year prior, and we target  
6 ongoing enforcement in the highest density parts of  
7 the city, doubling down on this Council's  
8 designations around rat mitigation zones.  
9

10 In addition to enforcing the basic rules  
11 of cleanliness outside every property in the city, we  
12 have implemented new strategies to combat two  
13 specific quality of life offenses. The first is our  
14 camera enforcement approach to the scourge of illegal  
15 dumping, a crime wherein dumpers use cars, vans, or  
16 trucks to dispose of everything from construction  
17 debris to entire suites of office equipment to  
18 regular bags of trash. This occurs in areas that  
19 dumpers consider to be out of the way, like dead-end  
20 streets, underpasses, and perhaps most distressingly,  
21 alongside cemeteries. For many years, the Department  
22 of Sanitation did not have a meaningful enforcement  
23 strategy against the crime of illegal dumping. We  
24 just cleaned over and over again, and the behavior  
25 continued to afflict neighborhoods like East New



2 York, Glendale, and Hunts Point. We have  
3 significantly stepped up illegal dumping surveillance  
4 in the last two years. Last year, we issued more than  
5 300 summonses for illegal dumping, an increase of  
6 about 70 percent over 2022. Each of those summonses  
7 starts at 4,000 dollars with the cost of cleaning up  
8 the mess also passed along to the dumper, and we  
9 impound the vehicle involved. The dumpers are on  
10 notice that they won't get away with it any longer.

11           The same is true for people who use our  
12 streets for free storage for abandoned or derelict  
13 vehicles. Under State law, DSNY has jurisdiction for  
14 the removal of vehicles identified as derelict,  
15 meaning without license plates and with a value of  
16 under 1,250 dollars, with authority for removal of  
17 vehicles outside this category residing with the NYPD  
18 but, for the public, this distinction is meaningless.  
19 Who knows the value of a car that has taken up space  
20 outside their home, sometimes for years without  
21 moving? Who needs to know which agency to call?  
22 That's why in 2023, DSNY and NYPD launched an  
23 interagency Abandoned Vehicle Task Force to cut  
24 through the red tape. A team of five NYPD officers  
25 were assigned to DSNY to partner with our derelict

2 vehicle operations team so that when we encounter  
3 vehicles on the street that do not meet the derelict  
4 criteria but qualify as abandoned, we can action them  
5 then and there. Thanks to these efforts, in 2023, we  
6 increased our derelict vehicle removal by 43 percent  
7 and removed nearly 8,000 vehicles that Calendar Year.  
8 In 2024, we are on pace to dwarf that number.

9 All of you celebrate this work and most  
10 of you ask for more of this work. You speak often  
11 about the concerns of your constituents related to  
12 the cleanliness of commercial corridors and other  
13 dirty conditions in your districts, but there are  
14 gaps in our enforcement authority, areas where the  
15 Department of Sanitation does not have the tools we  
16 need to do our jobs. We want to get the job done and  
17 there are three bills awaiting action by this Council  
18 that would give us the tools that we for sure need.  
19 Intro. 97, sponsored by Council Member Ung, will  
20 provide a meaningful escalator in fines for the small  
21 number of commercial property owners who repeatedly  
22 allow filth to congregate on our streets and  
23 sidewalks; Intro. 11, sponsored by Council Member  
24 Bottcher, will expand the hours of the day that DSNY  
25 may enforce commercial cleanliness rules, and Intro.

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2 57, sponsored by Council Member Ossé, will codify and  
3 clarify the penalties for failure to containerize  
4 commercial waste, one of the most successful  
5 cleanliness programs underway in this city. In 2023,  
6 over 1,600 locations received four or more summonses  
7 for dirty area, and nearly 500 were issued 10 or  
8 more. Three dozen were issued 50 or more. Take this  
9 commercial location, which has received 37 summonses  
10 year to date and, despite that, when Sanitation  
11 Officers checked the site on Tuesday, this is what  
12 they found, filth littering our public spaces, and  
13 here you can see a business that has been summonsed  
14 for flouting set-out requirements 34 times and still  
15 hasn't gotten the message. Clearly, the escalating  
16 fine structure is not currently steep enough to act  
17 as a disincentive to repeat offenders. Enforcement is  
18 not about generating revenue. It is about compliance  
19 but, under the law today, bad actors can simply look  
20 at DSNY enforcement as the cost of doing business.  
21 That has to change, and that change starts with you.  
22 Cleanliness is a shared responsibility. We urge the  
23 Council to pass Intro. 97 and implore the Committee  
24 on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management to vote  
25 Intros 11 and 57 out of Committee.

2 We are also asking for your support with  
3 a home rule message for a State legislative bill. The  
4 bill would allow the Department of Sanitation to  
5 engage in automated enforcement against alternate  
6 side parking violators, letting the mechanical brooms  
7 do their important work. Automated enforcement has  
8 worked well for the MTA in the bus lanes, and it can  
9 do the same for clean streets. These bills are moving  
10 with the support of a very broad coalition of State  
11 legislative leaders, and we need your support in the  
12 Council as well.

13 But even as we pursue a wide variety of  
14 innovative programs and even with the challenging  
15 fiscal climate, we are not slowing down on our core  
16 cleanliness work, and neither are the people who  
17 create the need for that work. This area of abandoned  
18 railway along Staten Island's North Shore has been  
19 allowed to become the definition of a no man's land  
20 over a period of decades with dumpers easily climbing  
21 the fence, and Staten Islanders had been left with  
22 little choice but to conclude that no one cares. That  
23 must end. The DSNY Targeted Neighborhood Task Force  
24 began a major operation at this site last week, and  
25 we will not stop until it is clean.

I will now discuss the Executive Budget, which includes 1.985 billion dollars in expense funds in Fiscal Year 2024 and 1.89 billion in Fiscal Year 2025, reflecting increases of 83.7 million and 26 million, respectively, from the budget adopted last June. The Fiscal Year 2025 budget includes 1.13 billion for personal services to support a total budgeted headcount of 9,476 full-time positions, including 7,844 uniform positions and 1,632 civilian positions and 756.7 million for other-than-personal services, or OTPS. DSNY's Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Budget includes 3.36 billion in capital funding and a 10-year plan, 1.18 billion of which is for garages and facilities, 2.06 billion for equipment, 64.9 million for IT, and 59.8 million for solid waste management infrastructure. The Capital Budget includes funding for several major facilities projects including 487 million in funding for the construction of a new garage for Bronx Districts 9, 10, and 11 with demolition, 283 million in additional funding for the construction of a new garage for Queens District 1 with design slated to begin next year, upgrades to the facility that serves as the home for the Bronx District 12 garage, which has an

2 overall budget of 55.5 million and will begin  
3 construction next year, and the 20-million-dollar  
4 finishing touches of the 213-million-dollar build-out  
5 for the brand-new home for Staten Island's District  
6 3, which is slated to be completed next spring.

7 We look forward to taking your questions  
8 about the end of the era of the black bags in the  
9 City of New York and the FY 2025 Executive Budget.  
10 Thank you.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,  
12 Commissioner.

13 We've also been joined by Council Members  
14 Moya, Menin, Ung, Fariás, Louis, Marte, and Council  
15 Member Stevens on Zoom.

16 I appreciate your testimony. It's no  
17 secret that your agency is one of my favorite  
18 agencies between Ryan and Patty Harkin and CBK10. I  
19 think I talk to them more than I speak to my wife on  
20 some weeks, but they're super responsive, and this  
21 Council appreciates that. I think all of us believe  
22 that a clean city is a safe city, and a safe city is  
23 ultimately the foundation for everything else, so we  
24 work in partnership with your agency quite a bit.

2 Before we begin, we might not get to all  
3 the questions, so we'll make sure that we'll do a  
4 follow-up letter after the hearing, just to help us  
5 advocate on your behalf.

6 I want to talk about some of the ARP  
7 funding. I want to better understand how the agency  
8 plans to continue providing services that may have  
9 been previously supplemented with expiring federal  
10 ARP funding so, for several years now, DSNY has  
11 utilized the federal COVID stimulus funds to support  
12 general operations, such as litter basket service and  
13 waste export. These funds have been filled by City  
14 tax dollars in the upcoming Fiscal Years. What did  
15 the ARP funding for litter basket services support?

16 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Different things in  
17 different years. In FY 2022, it funded litter basket  
18 service. More recently, it's funded waste export, but  
19 I think the key thing to understand about the ARP  
20 funding versus regular City dollars expense funding,  
21 it's truly just a funding swap so we don't, I mean,  
22 day-to-day, we don't see it or think about whether it  
23 is expense dollars or ARP funding, so it doesn't fund  
24 increases in those services, just instead of City  
25 funding.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: With the change in work habits, have you seen need for increased litter basket pickups in areas where maybe in the past people weren't working as much from home?

COMMISSIONER TISCH: As you know, for the past two years, we have been running historic levels of litter basket service. Some baskets are serviced three times a day, and we've done that largely with the help and partnership with the Council, which during the Adopted Budget worked with the Administration to pick that litter basket funding number. I think we've landed in a good place over the past two years, and we have seen complaints about overflowing litter baskets go down significantly since we achieved that funding level. As to whether the residential, the patterns have changed, an important thing to keep in mind on our litter basket service is like we really study this, and we change sometimes the level of service that a basket gets, not just season to season, but month to month. For example, in the winter season, we don't need as much litter basket service as we use in the spring and summer when more people are out using the streets.



CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Just to clarify,  
there's no change in level of service with the change  
in funding from federal to city dollars, right?

COMMISSIONER TISCH: There is no change.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. The Council  
has often had to negotiate at adoption for the  
provision of additional funding for a litter basket  
pickup service each year. This is something that we  
would love to see baselined. Would you agree with  
that? Just tug your earlobe twice.

COMMISSIONER TISCH: I've been around long  
enough to know that this is something that  
historically has been worked out between the Council  
and the Administration as part of the Adopted Budget.  
I will say at this point, it doesn't really affect us  
so much anymore on which budget it ends up in, as  
long as we can do the summer hiring of Sanitation  
workers to support the level of service. We've been  
in very good shape the past few years with  
historically high numbers of Sanitation workers.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: How much funding  
in your estimation is necessary to provide the  
appropriate litter basket service for the city?

2                   COMMISSIONER TISCH: I mean, obviously, I  
3 would love a limitless amount of funding for litter  
4 basket service because seeing an overflowing litter  
5 basket on the streets of New York City really pulls  
6 at my OCD, but I do think that we landed over the  
7 past two years, with your leadership and the Mayor's  
8 leadership, at a good number of 22 million dollars  
9 and, just so you know, there was a 42 percent  
10 decrease in litter basket complaints that we've seen  
11 with this new level of service, the 22-million-dollar  
12 level of service, as compared to when we had lower  
13 funding levels for it.

14                   CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah, just as  
15 commentary, not necessarily directed at you or  
16 something you have to respond to, but for something  
17 like litter basket service, it just doesn't feel like  
18 it should be something that's left to the whims of  
19 yearly negotiation, but it is what it is.

20                   COMMISSIONER TISCH: Acknowledged.

21                   CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah. In FY24,  
22 DSNY had 370 million in ARP funding that was  
23 allocated for waste export decreasing to 196 million  
24 in FY25. Has that funding also been replaced by City  
25 dollars in upcoming Fiscal Years?

2 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Yeah.

3 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. The  
4 Executive Plan includes new needs for a PS adjustment  
5 of 10 million dollars in FY24 only. Could you tell us  
6 what that funding supports?

7 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Yeah. The funding  
8 supports various areas of the PS budget based on  
9 projected year-end spending. Primarily, it was a  
10 reduction in uniform-based salaries of 12.2 million  
11 and a reduction of 2.9 million in holiday pay, a  
12 reduction of 1.5 million in assignment differentials,  
13 and a reduction of 500,000 in longevity payments.  
14 These reductions help to offset other areas of the PS  
15 budget that were projected to have higher spending.  
16 For example, that includes 12.1 million in uniform  
17 overtime pay, which still keeps us within the  
18 overtime budget target, 11.5 million for civilian  
19 overtime, which also still keeps us within the  
20 overtime budget target, 1.2 million in civilian-based  
21 salaries, another 1.2 million for night shift  
22 differential payments, 900,000 dollars for back pay,  
23 and 300,000 dollars for terminal leave. These changes  
24 help right-size our budget based on the projected  
25 year-end spending in these categories.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I appreciate that, and the analysts back at Mission Control appreciate it even more.

The Executive Plan includes new needs for the waste containerization pilot. Could you detail for us, for FY25, '26, '27, '28, what that funding supports?

COMMISSIONER TISCH: Yes. The funding supports the expansion of the M-9 containerization pilot to include all residences and schools as well as the creation of a Waste Containerization Division in the New York City Department of Sanitation to help oversee all containerization programs in the Department. The M-9 school and residential planned expansion was funded for 643,000 dollars in FY25 to cover 12 uniform positions and 278,500 for additional containers. There was also 1.1 million added to support mailers to announce the forthcoming citywide bin mandate for all one- to nine-unit residences citywide, and 750,000 dollars for the environmental impact study for containerization. Finally, there was 630,000 in FY25 and out to cover five civilian positions to oversee the containerization programs in the City.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: What are the metrics for success for the pilot?

COMMISSIONER TISCH: There are a lot of different metrics that the Department will be considering. I can go through some of them now, but I think an important thing to consider is we will certainly add to them as the Phase One rolls out but, right now, we have things like tons per truck shift, the number of truck starts and finished trucks, illegal dumping complaints, utilization on the number of unlocks, rat complaint numbers, improper disposal tickets, and bin reliability numbers. Those are just a few. On the qualitative side, we will look to levels of compliance that we visually see.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Are there plans to expand the pilot?

COMMISSIONER TISCH: Based on the lessons learned from the M-9 containerization program, the plan is to roll out waste containers citywide for high density.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: The Executive Plan included PEGs of 22.3 million related to a decrease in the snow removal budget due to a decrease in the amount of snow. Are there any adjustments

2 being made to the snow removal strategies considering  
3 this, weather patterns, and climate conditions?

4 COMMISSIONER TISCH: As I think you know,  
5 the snow budget, the number that's in the budget,  
6 it's really a projection of how much we think we'll  
7 spend based on the average of the previous five  
8 years, but I want to be very clear that if conditions  
9 warranted and next winter we have a bad winter, I  
10 don't feel constrained or limited by that number in a  
11 budget book, and obviously the Mayor has given us  
12 authority to spend whatever we need to on snow to get  
13 the job done. We have over the past two years had a  
14 number of substantial innovations in our snow  
15 fighting efforts. Among them, the new Blade Runner  
16 2.0 was key to our great performance this year in  
17 snow response. We can see from our mobile device, our  
18 phone, our computer, where the trucks are, what  
19 streets have been plowed, what streets haven't been  
20 plowed. I can give a whole demonstration of it if  
21 you're interested. We've also made significant  
22 investments in our snow fighting equipment over the  
23 past two years, including over a billion dollars  
24 spent on our collection trucks, which double as  
25 plows, significant funds to replace our holsters,

2 which address some of the smaller, tighter streets,  
3 and, of course, our bike lane equipment and so, yeah,  
4 we are constantly thinking about and planning for  
5 snow, but not so much to project that next year and  
6 the out years we won't have snow. We still plan as  
7 though we're going to have a monster snowstorm.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I just have a  
9 couple more. I want to talk about overtime a bit.  
10 What factors contribute to the OT expenses within the  
11 uniformed headcount, and how does the Department plan  
12 to manage and potentially reduce those costs in the  
13 upcoming Fiscal Year?

14 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Sure. The main  
15 drivers of all uniformed overtime are holidays that  
16 fall on normal collection days, those long weekends,  
17 as well as peak vacation months that often coincide  
18 with when schools are out. This year, the Department  
19 worked to better smooth the vacation schedule to help  
20 reduce overtime in the summer months and, during  
21 weeks of holidays, the Department cancels all non-  
22 critical functions in order to reduce the need for  
23 overtime to staff our collection chase, as we call  
24 it, which requires us to run additional trucks to  
25 collect set-out material from the holiday. Through

2 the more efficient use of our resources, we have been  
3 able to collect all four commodities during holiday  
4 weeks, therefore no longer instructing residents to  
5 hold, for example, their recycling to the following  
6 week.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I know you and I  
8 have spoken about this, is there a price tag for  
9 figuring out the pickup schedule between Christmas  
10 and New Year's? That week is always rough.

11 COMMISSIONER TISCH: That week is rough,  
12 and the reason it's rough is it's generally two  
13 holidays back-to-back. This year, on one of those  
14 weeks, we chased all four commodities, and on one of  
15 those weeks, we didn't chase all four commodities  
16 but, again, coming up with a price tag is hard to do  
17 because the new thing we've done is we've canceled  
18 all of the other functions, meaning we don't run T  
19 and T, for example, during those chase weeks. We call  
20 in some of our Sanitation police officers to go back  
21 and work on the truck. We basically throw now  
22 everything at collection so that residents don't see  
23 the City's streets look meaningfully dirtier during  
24 holiday weeks when you don't want it to look dirtier.



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2 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Yeah, I  
3 just want to say again, the men and women of  
4 Sanitation truly, I mean, it's a thankless job. It's  
5 a job where our garbage disappears, and we don't even  
6 think about it. The only time we think about it is  
7 when it doesn't, and we lose our minds so I think  
8 it's important to recognize the hard work that they  
9 do.

10 I'll have some more later. I'm going to  
11 turn it over to Chair Abreu.

12 Quickly, we've been joined by Council  
13 Members Powers and Restler. Chair Abreu.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I agree with the  
15 Chair. I lose my mind, too, when I don't see trash  
16 getting picked up but, for the most part, I think  
17 we're doing all right.

18 I'm going to go right into Community  
19 Composting, Mayor Adams' favorite topic. In the  
20 November Plan, DSNY eliminated funding for the City's  
21 Community Composting programs in the PEG. Since that  
22 time, we have heard from numerous community groups  
23 and constituents as to what I believe is a short-  
24 sighted decision by the Administration. In both the  
25 Preliminary and Executive Plan, a number of PEGs were

1 restored, but Community Composting has still not been  
2 restored. Can you please explain why the  
3 Administration chose not to allocate savings from  
4 asylum-seeker spending and underspending and snow  
5 removal towards restoring funding for Community  
6 Composting initiatives in the Executive Plan?  
7

8 COMMISSIONER TISCH: I cannot speak to  
9 budgeting decisions made in the Executive Plan, and I  
10 have to defer to the Budget Director for a response.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I believe that  
12 there is certainly I think more than just some wiggle  
13 room for OMB to make this important decision. Did  
14 DSNY specifically put in a request to have Community  
15 Composting restored fully in its engagement with OMB?

16 COMMISSIONER TISCH: So you know from our  
17 discussions and my prior testimony and Q and A  
18 response that I understand very well the value of  
19 Community Composting in New York City. I hope you  
20 will also understand that per the answer to the last  
21 question, I cannot speak to internal conversations or  
22 budgeting decisions made as part of any plan.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Before the Admin  
24 put in the PEG in the fall, this was before any  
25

2 budget decisions were made, did DSNY put in a request  
3 to OMB to have Community Composting restored fully?

4 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Same answer as the  
5 previous.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: All right, so I'll  
7 take that as not answering, but how do you address,  
8 and this goes to you and the Administration, how do  
9 you plan to address the concerns and feedback from  
10 community members, environmental advocates, and  
11 stakeholders who have advocated for the restoration  
12 of funding for Community Composting?

13 COMMISSIONER TISCH: As you know, I am  
14 very supportive of Community Composting. I understand  
15 the value that community composters have delivered in  
16 New York City for decades and understand also the  
17 value they can continue to deliver in New York City.  
18 We have a number of composting programs, really  
19 historic investments that Mayor Adams and this  
20 Administration has made in composting. For the first  
21 time ever, we are rolling out universal curbside  
22 composting service on your recycling day so, in  
23 addition to collecting metal, glass, plastic, and  
24 paper and cardboard, we're also going to be  
25 collecting food scraps and yard waste. Other

2 Administrations have tried to do this. No one has  
3 gotten beyond 40 percent. In October this year, we  
4 are going to hit all 3.5 million residences weekly on  
5 their recycling day and provide the most convenient,  
6 the most easy-to-use compost service that this city  
7 has ever had or frankly that any city has. In  
8 addition to that, we have rolled out hundreds of  
9 smart bins across all five boroughs. These bins are  
10 available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, where  
11 New Yorkers can easily deposit compost anytime they  
12 like. Finally, we have rolled out composting service  
13 in every single public school and many independent  
14 schools in New York City. This has also been  
15 something that the Council has long pushed for. We  
16 not only did it, but we did it way ahead of schedule  
17 and, so while I understand the concerns around  
18 Community Composting, it is absolutely the case that  
19 this Administration has made historic investments in  
20 composting in New York City and composting in New  
21 York City has never been more available than it is  
22 today.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you for that.  
24 Look, a lot of my constituents are also excited about  
25 curbside coming to Manhattan by the fall but, also I

2 think what my constituents and what this Council  
3 believes in is that curbside expansion also works  
4 well together with Community Compost. We can have all  
5 the infrastructure in the world, but we fundamentally  
6 believe that education of Community Composting, the  
7 civic engagement that Community Composting brings and  
8 the energy that it brings, pairing that with the  
9 infrastructure expansion is going to increase the  
10 likelihood of that infrastructure being used.

11 Commissioner, can you please speak to the percentage  
12 of compostable material that was composted as part of  
13 the curbside program in Queens?

14 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Do I have that here?  
15 I can get that for you, but I'll give you the precise  
16 number, but I'll give you, our current breakdown  
17 right now is about 20 percent of the material that we  
18 collect is composted and 80 percent is otherwise  
19 beneficially reused. As I've discussed in my  
20 testimony and previously, we are in the process, we  
21 are doing a procurement right now to diversify our  
22 infrastructure for where we send the material and,  
23 among the things, the goals of that procurement are  
24 waste equity and the type of beneficial reuse. I  
25 don't want to project what the outcome is going to

2 be, but I can tell you I'd like to see an outcome  
3 where we have more diversity in terms of where the  
4 trucks are going so we don't overly burden one  
5 neighborhood and I'd like to see the percentage of  
6 the amount that is composted increase.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: If we could get  
8 that data point.

9 COMMISSIONER TISCH: We'll get it to you.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Specifically, the  
11 percentage of compostable material that ends up as  
12 either compost or anaerobic digestion, I would like  
13 to have that.

14 COMMISSIONER TISCH: I'm sorry, what'd you  
15 say?

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: So my question is,  
17 what percentage of compostable material is either  
18 composted or goes to anaerobic digestion?

19 COMMISSIONER TISCH: I just answered that.  
20 It was right now approximately 20 percent versus 80  
21 percent, but I believe I'd like to see that number  
22 come up meaningfully this fall when our procurement  
23 process is complete and look forward to reporting to  
24 you on updates then.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Yeah, so my  
3 question is what percentage of organic material, how  
4 much of it has gone to the landfill versus how much  
5 of it is either composted or going to anaerobic  
6 digestion?

7 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Okay. 100 percent of  
8 what is given to us, meaning what our residents put  
9 out, is either sent to be composted or to be  
10 anaerobically digested. When a New Yorker or a school  
11 sets out their compost material, we do not send any  
12 of it to landfill. We either send it for composting  
13 or for digestion.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you. All  
15 right. My last question on Community Composting, and  
16 this is a contracts question. You may or may not be  
17 able to answer, but is DSNY considering extending the  
18 GrowNYC contract related to Community Composting  
19 initiatives and, if so, what factors are being taken  
20 into account in the decision-making process?

21 COMMISSIONER TISCH: As I've testified  
22 before at our Preliminary Budget hearing, the GrowNYC  
23 contract is currently in its final year with no  
24 renewals available on the contract. That contract  
25 ends and cannot be extended this summer. I cannot

2 begin a procurement per City's procurement rules  
3 until I have funding in hand so, if the Community  
4 Composting funding is restored, I will commence  
5 immediately a procurement to procure those services.  
6 However, to be clear, we shouldn't call it the  
7 GrowNYC contract because that will be a competitive  
8 procurement.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Understood.

10 All right. I'm going to move over to  
11 commercial waste zones. What is the proposed fee  
12 structure for waste hauling services within the  
13 commercial waste zones and how will the fees be  
14 determined for businesses located within each zone?

15 COMMISSIONER TISCH: All right. All  
16 contractual fees set the maximum rate that the  
17 carters are allowed to charge. Businesses are  
18 encouraged to negotiate lower prices with each carter  
19 in their zone. The Department will publish a rate  
20 calculator tool online that will allow a business  
21 owner to see the maximum rate for each carter within  
22 their zone based upon the services they select as  
23 this will provide full transparency to the maximum  
24 rates allowed for the carters. Now, for each waste  
25 stream, the rates are set based upon the service type



so, for example, curbside containers or off-street containers, the amount of waste being collected per month and how often the collection occurs. In addition, proposers may include additional fees for extra service such as late payment fees and dumper compactor cleaning.

CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Commissioner, can you please provide information on the anticipated revenue generated from fees charged to businesses for waste hauling services within the zones?

COMMISSIONER TISCH: When it's fully rolled out, it should be 7 million dollars annually.

CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: And how does the fee structure for waste hauling services within the commercial waste zones ensure fairness and equity for businesses of different sizes and industries, particularly small businesses and those in economically disadvantaged areas?

COMMISSIONER TISCH: So as a result of complex negotiations and I would say smart, careful contracting by the Adams' Administration, in 18 of the 20 zones, at least one of the three carters will operate at a maximum rate that is below the current Business Integrity Commission rate cap for commercial

2 carters. There are only two zones in which all  
3 awardees will be operating at a maximum price above  
4 the current BIC rate cap, and the amount over is in  
5 the low single digits but, as I mentioned before,  
6 like the current BIC rate cap, these are maximum  
7 allowed prices and businesses are encouraged to  
8 continue the practice of negotiating for lower  
9 pricing as carters compete against one another within  
10 their awarded zone so the pricing is very much the  
11 ceiling, not a floor.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Commissioner, are  
13 there any provisions or incentives within the fee  
14 structure for waste hauling services to encourage  
15 sustainable practices such as recycling, waste  
16 reduction, or the use of low emission vehicles?

17 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Yes. As I mentioned  
18 previously, within the fee structure, there are very  
19 specific incentives for recycling and waste  
20 reduction. Discounts for recycling and organics apply  
21 to all service elements of a customer's bill,  
22 including the fixed monthly charge, the weight volume  
23 base charge, the service charge per pull, and monthly  
24 rental charge. For recycling, the negotiated rate  
25 discount averages 32 percent citywide and the

2 organics rate discount averages 18 percent citywide  
3 and, as I mentioned before, businesses can negotiate  
4 for even greater discounts with their carter service  
5 provider.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: How does the City  
7 plan to monitor and enforce compliance with the fee  
8 structure for waste hauling services within the zones  
9 and what penalties or consequences will be imposed  
10 for noncompliance?

11 COMMISSIONER TISCH: This is going to  
12 completely overhaul or change the way that we manage  
13 and regulate the private carting industry. The first  
14 thing that I'll point out is that now haulers are  
15 required to have written service agreements with  
16 every customer. In today's world, too many of these  
17 agreements are not written so we get all of the  
18 benefits associated with written service agreements  
19 that must require the provisions that we established  
20 in our RFP. We're also going to be collecting a huge  
21 amount of data from each carter, everything from GPS  
22 tracking to complaints and violations and that sort  
23 of information, which will very much help our  
24 enforcement efforts, and each carter and their  
25 contract is now subject to an audit by DSNY and we

are building out a robust Audit Team within our  
Bureau of Commercial Waste to hit the ground running.

CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Excellent. What  
types of outreach and education, particularly aimed  
at informing businesses, residents, and stakeholders  
about the transition to a new waste management system  
does DSNY plan to do? This is one of my big concern  
areas as we roll this out. The outreach and education  
is going to be very, very important.

COMMISSIONER TISCH: This is a place where  
we do have a very meaningful budget for outreach and  
education, and the general strategy is to do the  
outreach zone by zone, but the intention is, as we  
move zone by zone, to hit all 100,000 business owners  
or businesses citywide through a combination of both  
mailers and door-to-door conversations and outreach.  
We have a registered contract of 1.5 million dollars  
with an M/WBE vendor called Metropolitan Strategies  
and Solutions, and they are going to be hitting the  
ground for us this summer in our Queens Central Zone,  
which is the first zone to begin doing that outreach  
for the first time.

CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: And will there be a new RFP or will this company also do the outreach for the other boroughs as they get rolled out?

COMMISSIONER TISCH: We sized this contract to make sure that we would have the capacity for them to do the outreach for the whole city. I mentioned that we are going to be learning from this pilot program, meaning from the first zone and, if we find that we need more outreach with more budget, we will certainly come back to you on it, but we'll learn more this summer as it proceeds.

CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Do you think that 1.5 million suffices for the initial phase of outreach?

COMMISSIONER TISCH: I think so... Oh, for the initial zone? Oh, yeah. It's way more than we need for the initial zone. I think it's what we need citywide, but I may come back to you after we've done the first zone and say, actually, I think we need a little more, I think we need a little less. I keep saying that this first phase is an important phase to learn from, and among the things that we are going to learn is did we size the outreach appropriately? Oh, I brought with me for you. This is the mailer, Chair,

1 that every business in Queen Central is going to get.  
2 It's in multiple languages, and also the flyer that  
3 will be given door to door also in multiple  
4 languages.  
5

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: I have a lot more  
7 questions to ask, but I want to give the opportunity  
8 to my Colleagues to ask some questions too.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Chair.  
10 We've also been joined by Council Members  
11 Sanchez, Paladino, and Zhuang.

12 Now we'll start with questions from  
13 Council Member Carr followed by Williams.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you, Chair.  
15 Commissioner, always great to see you. I just want to  
16 start by thanking you for your collaboration with my  
17 office. Everyone on your senior leadership team to  
18 the Chiefs and Borough Operations to the rank and  
19 file of the agency are phenomenal partners in the  
20 fight for a better quality of life so thank you so  
21 much.

22 You brought some really, I think,  
23 persuasive visuals about how important the Targeted  
24 Neighborhood Task Force is, and I think that  
25 dovetails nicely with the Lot Cleaning Unit, which

2 does the private side of the same mission, so to  
3 speak. Can you talk a little bit about what's in the  
4 Executive Plan currently for those two initiatives  
5 and what we could do to kind of help you continue to  
6 do those important operations?

7 COMMISSIONER TISCH: They are wiped out in  
8 the Executive Budget. We have a surplus number of  
9 Sanitation workers so, while they are zeroed out in  
10 the Executive Budget, we are still able to run a  
11 meaningful amount of Targeted Neighborhood Task  
12 Force. We're not able to do the lot cleaning at this  
13 time.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: So you think you'd  
15 still be able to do something like you did at the  
16 North Shore White Rail, you recently did one in my  
17 District in the neighborhood of Travis, you don't see  
18 that those operations would be impeded by being  
19 zeroed out?

20 COMMISSIONER TISCH: It will depend on  
21 attrition and hiring of Sanitation workers. When I  
22 have a surplus number of Sanitation workers, as I do  
23 today, because we hired Sanitation workers last year,  
24 anticipating that those programs were going to  
25

2 continue in perpetuity, I can continue to run the  
3 service.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: So we have to depend  
5 on a higher headcount in order for you...

6 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Right but, if I do  
7 not have an excess, I cannot.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: And what would we  
9 need to get you in this final budget adoption in  
10 order to continue without that kind of dependency and  
11 then, of course, I'm just going to, with my last  
12 minute, ask two other questions. We talked about  
13 curbside e-waste at the street cleanliness hearing  
14 that Chair Abreu had earlier this month. Can you talk  
15 a bit more about what you've been seeing in terms of  
16 drop offs at Garage 3 and the Muldoon Avenue site? It  
17 is absolutely a continued need on Staten Island since  
18 we don't have e-cycle, and can you just give us those  
19 budget lines that you may need to kind of continue at  
20 FY24 levels for those three programs?

21 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Sure, so to continue  
22 at FY24 levels, where is it? Okay. Lot cleaning. Joe,  
23 will you help me here?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ANTONELLI: So lot  
25 cleaning was PEG'd at a headcount of 15 Sanitation



workers, and then the combination of T and T and the other cleaning programs was a total of 94 so, between the two initiatives, it was 109 Sanitation workers taken in the PEG.

COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Okay. Well, I appreciate those answers. I think that these programs are mission critical for DSNY. You've done phenomenal work with them, and I think that we as a Council should do what we can to make sure you can continue to do that great work. Thank you, Chairs.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We've got Council Member Williams.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you, and I just wanted to echo my appreciation for the Department of Sanitation, Chief Kavanaugh, Ryan, Garage 12, and Garage 13. Thank you so much. We have a lot of complicated issues, and you all are always so responsive to all of our crazy requests.

I have a question about enforcement. You know, that's the bane of my existence. So around illegal dumping cameras, again, thanks, Commissioner. You were actually the person to help me quantify how terrible illegal dumping is. You're like number one in the City by giving me that information that you

1 shared with the 3-1-1 calls so what plans does the  
2 City have for implementing illegal dumping cameras to  
3 deter and capture instances of legal dumping across  
4 the city? I know you gave us maybe a few last year.

5  
6 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Yeah. We have put up  
7 lots of illegal dumping cameras this year, and we  
8 have more planned for the next fiscal year. Ryan, can  
9 you speak to how many cameras we plan to put up over  
10 the next Fiscal Year currently?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: I can,  
12 Commissioner and, Council Member, thank you for the  
13 question. We have 280 up right now citywide. For the  
14 next Fiscal Year, in terms of the funding we've  
15 received from the City, from Council Members, and  
16 from a few State partners, we are looking to add  
17 approximately 85 more cameras over the next year, and  
18 that number, I'm going to come back to you with a  
19 little more solid after we receive the funding and we  
20 make the purchases because we'll have an exact number  
21 then, but we're looking to add capacity 30 percent  
22 more than we have right now on the streets.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. Do you  
24 have a timeline for the installation and deployment  
25

2 of illegal dumping cameras in high-risk areas like  
3 mine?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: In this, the  
5 timeline is always driven by when we have permission  
6 to actually spend the funding. Once we do from the  
7 Office of Management and Budget, it's typically a  
8 four- to seven-month process to get a camera in, prep  
9 it, make sure the pole is ready, and put it up on a  
10 pole.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ANTONELLI: I'll just  
12 explain there, because that sounds crazy. It could  
13 sound crazy. But for each pole, we need to request  
14 permission, either from Verizon or from Con Ed,  
15 whoever owns the pole, and so there are a number of  
16 site surveys that are required before we can just  
17 throw a camera up there so we'd like to see it in  
18 under six months, but sometimes it takes a little  
19 longer.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: As a follow-  
21 up, Commissioner, to that, Council Member, thank you  
22 again for your partnership in talking to our utility  
23 partners last year when this was a new program for  
24 them.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: You're welcome.

3 In addition to cameras, enforcement officers, do you  
4 think you have the capacity outside of cameras? Are  
5 there other things that you're looking to do to deter  
6 illegal dumping?

7 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Our Sanitation  
8 enforcement is up over 60 percent over the last year,  
9 and we both have more Sanitation police officers than  
10 we've ever had, about 50 percent more than we've ever  
11 had, but we're also giving them different tools to do  
12 their jobs more efficiently, and I think that's one  
13 of the reasons that you're seeing the results you're  
14 seeing in terms of our enforcement efforts.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. Thank  
16 you, Chairs.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Now we have  
18 questions from Council Member Menin followed by  
19 Restler.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Thank you so much,  
21 Chairs.

22 I had a number of questions about  
23 composting. I want to echo the concerns that have  
24 been previously raised by the Chair and others about  
25 the 7-million-dollars cuts, which my community

1  
2 strongly opposes. I am getting inundated with emails,  
3 texts, phone calls about this issue from residents on  
4 the East Side of Manhattan and Roosevelt Island who  
5 are really concerned about the cuts so I just want to  
6 reiterate our strong concerns about that.

7           On smart composting bins, in terms of an  
8 expansion to those bins, when do you believe that  
9 that could occur? The bins in my District are full  
10 almost immediately, and so I just want to get a  
11 better understanding of what the agency's plans are.

12           COMMISSIONER TISCH: We're doing two  
13 things with the smart composting bins. First is we  
14 are changing out, replacing the inserts in the bin to  
15 make them larger, to take up more of that orange  
16 shell so that they have significantly more capacity  
17 than they currently do, and we are starting those  
18 replacements with the bins that get full quickest so  
19 there you'll see some, I think, immediate relief this  
20 summer. We don't have budget at this time to add new  
21 or to expand the number of smart composting bins that  
22 we have, which is now currently at about 400 bins,  
23 but we are, right now, contemplating moving some bins  
24 that are highly underutilized, they're not opened

2 frequently at all, to places where the bins are  
3 getting full.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: And you said this  
5 summer, do you have a sense of when this will be  
6 occurring, and you said the areas that are being  
7 utilized the most, can you break down what those  
8 areas are?

9 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Yeah, I mean, they  
10 won't really be a surprise to you, but I will provide  
11 to you, to your office, data on where we see the bins  
12 filling up consistently and any plans in your  
13 District to move bins from other Districts where  
14 they're not being used as frequently or productively.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Great, thank you.  
16 My next question is on rat mitigation, so I know you  
17 and I have had a number of conversations where I'm  
18 using in my office, our ex-borough, to actually treat  
19 the tree pits where we fumigate them. We've had  
20 tremendous success with that, but it's labor  
21 intensive, obviously, and it's not something that we  
22 can just fund out of our office. Does the agency have  
23 any plans to utilize that technique?

24 COMMISSIONER TISCH: I am not the Rat  
25 Czar, I'm the Sanitation Commissioner, and my stake

2 in the war on rats is to get the trash off the  
3 streets and stop feeding the rats. The exterminators  
4 don't report to me. They work at the Department of  
5 Health, the Department of Education, NYCHA, and so,  
6 unfortunately, I am not up to speed on what specific  
7 techniques they use or don't use.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Okay, thank you.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, Council  
10 Member Restler. You're up.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Commissioner  
12 Tisch, how are you?

13 COMMISSIONER TISCH: I'm good, Council  
14 Member. How are you?

15 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I'm great. I just  
16 want to say, firstly, I think that under your  
17 leadership, the Department of Sanitation has been one  
18 of the strongest performing agencies in this  
19 Administration, and I've really appreciated the  
20 innovation that has been really impressive. I think  
21 you and your team deserve a great deal of praise for  
22 the work that you're doing and helping to move us  
23 into the 21st century and how we're keeping our  
24 streets clean, collecting garbage, and helping to  
25 reduce the presence of rats in our community. These

2 are all incredibly important things to every single  
3 person on this dais, and you've done a really  
4 impressive job, so thank you for that.

5 Now, there's a but coming, right?

6 Inevitably. No, I'll start with something first. I  
7 just really wanted to commend you for working with  
8 folks in the State Legislature, especially Assembly  
9 Member Brian Cunningham on the new legislation that's  
10 been proposed in Albany this year to put cameras on  
11 street sweepers, which I think is such a smart idea.  
12 Has your team developed any estimate on the number of  
13 cars every day that fail to comply with ASP?

14 COMMISSIONER TISCH: I don't have an  
15 estimate on the number that don't comply, but what I  
16 will tell you is when people get upset that our  
17 street sweeper didn't get to their street, it is  
18 often because on blocks that we hit before, there is  
19 so much non-compliance that our street sweepers get  
20 slowed down and stuck, and I believe that putting the  
21 cameras on those brooms is going to work as well, if  
22 not better, than similar programs have worked, for  
23 example, to keep the bus lanes clean and clear.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I couldn't agree  
25 with you more. I think it's something that I really



2 hope this Council will take up with a home rule  
3 message soon. I think it's that and red light cameras  
4 are the two most important things we have to get done  
5 this session in Albany. Anything we can do to help,  
6 please let me know.

7 I did want to check on Community Compost.  
8 I'm deeply concerned about the Administration's cuts  
9 to community compost at McCarran and (INAUDIBLE)  
10 Hall. This last weekend, I was talking to dozens of  
11 neighbors who just could not understand why they no  
12 longer will be able to bring their food scraps. My  
13 understanding is that Earth Matters, Lower East Side  
14 Ecology, and Big Reuse have existing contracts with  
15 the Department of Sanitation that can be kind of  
16 immediately reactivated come July 1, if and when this  
17 City Council restores funding in the budget. My  
18 understanding is that GrowNYC does not. Are there any  
19 contract mechanisms? You're a good government problem  
20 solver. Have you come up with any solutions for ways  
21 to extend the GrowNYC contract or other ways that we  
22 can reactivate the GrowNYC sites as quickly as  
23 possible at the beginning of the new Fiscal Year?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: We have four  
25 contracts currently, you are correct. I believe that

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2 two of them, if funding is restored, can resume very  
3 quickly once it is restored. One contract that cannot  
4 be extended anymore and is done this summer is the  
5 GrowNYC contract. As you know from our work together  
6 on the other side, when you were on the other side, I  
7 can't start a procurement until I have the funding in  
8 hand. What I committed to Chair Abreu is if the  
9 funding is restored, as soon as that funding is in  
10 hand, I will immediately commence a competitive  
11 procurement for those types of services, but as you  
12 also know, that is not a quick thing. I don't have,  
13 unfortunately, a workaround that keeps us compliant  
14 with the PPB rules.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I have some  
16 ideas. I'm out of time, but if you'd be amenable to  
17 chatting with Chair Abreu and myself and I'm sure  
18 other Members of the Council about some ideas we have  
19 for how we could try to speed up that procurement, we  
20 would really welcome the opportunity to brainstorm  
21 that together.

22 COMMISSIONER TISCH: I'd love it.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Terrific. Then  
24 I'm out of time, but just very, very fast. Really  
25 excited that the next big step on waste

1 containerization is big buildings. Any timeline on  
2 that, and we would really love to have some smart  
3 bins in CB1 and CB2 in Brooklyn. Any timelines on  
4 those?  
5

6 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Okay. The large on-  
7 street containers for the high density, we're running  
8 phase one in Manhattan 9 starting next spring. We're  
9 doing the procurement right now. We've already  
10 ordered the special sideloading trucks, but you  
11 should see them hitting the streets of Manhattan 9 a  
12 year from now, which is very exciting.

13 In terms of the smart composting bins, I  
14 do not have money in my budget at this time to expand  
15 them. Although I would say for Council Members who  
16 are looking for an expansion of it, we are happy to  
17 take Council Member funds if you want to allocate  
18 funding for that purpose, and we can add to that very  
19 successful program in your District where there's  
20 need.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, I want to  
22 acknowledge I've been joined by Council Member Hanks.

23 Also, I want to acknowledge PS276, the  
24 Battery Park City School is joining us this morning.  
25 Nice to see you guys, represented well by our

Colleague Chris Marte here in the City Council.

Thanks for being here today at this hearing.

We now have questions from Council Member  
Louis followed by Marte.

COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chairs,  
and good morning, Commissioner. I want to echo the  
sentiments of my colleagues. This is probably my  
favorite agency. I know I said it on the record.  
Yourself, Ryan, and your team have been instrumental  
in addressing illegal dumping in my District and  
providing enforcement efforts to keep New York City  
clean. I'm very grateful.

I have three questions. I'll start with  
derelict vehicles, then I'll go into private  
property, and then enforcement. I wanted to know what  
is the expense dedicated to towing and disposal of  
abandoned or derelict vehicles in the FY25 budget,  
how many vehicles did DSNY process in FY24, and does  
this projection remain in FY25 and, as abandoned  
vehicles in both residential and commercial  
neighborhoods become increasingly large and  
hazardous, what is the main limiting factor in an  
increasing capacity for removing such vehicles off

2 the street, and has DSNY requested for supplemental  
3 funding to address those needs?

4 COMMISSIONER TISCH: I'm going to forget.  
5 Can I start with the derelict vehicles and then  
6 answer your other two?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Well, do you want  
8 me to ask all of them first?

9 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Okay, sure, all  
10 right. All right, so that's all derelict vehicles.

11 COMMISSIONER TISCH: All right.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Now, this is a  
13 private property. How much funding is dedicated to  
14 illegal dumping prevention efforts, including  
15 maintaining the security cameras and dumping hot  
16 spots? I think you're aware of the hot spot in my  
17 District.

18 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Yeah.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: And does DSNY bill  
20 for the cost of these cleanups to private owners to  
21 address these areas?

22 The last one is on enforcement. How does  
23 DSNY currently enforce laws and regulations related  
24 to illegal street vendors that are not in compliance  
25 with the current laws and their behavior continues to

2 exude uncleanliness and public health concerns, and  
3 is there any funding in the FY25 Executive Budget to  
4 address that, whether through campaign initiatives  
5 for awareness or anything else? That's it, thanks.

6 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Okay. Let's start  
7 with derelict vehicles. We have significantly upped  
8 our derelict vehicle enforcement. We started last  
9 year, and what we did is we made a partnership with  
10 the NYPD, where whether a vehicle is abandoned or  
11 derelict, we can take it off the street, so we have  
12 five NYPD officers assigned to work in our Abandoned  
13 Vehicle Task Force, and we're doing, in addition to  
14 that, lots more joint operations on the street. Last  
15 year, we took over 8,000 vehicles off of the street  
16 and, this year, now that this Task Force is up and  
17 running, we are on pace to dwarf that number. In  
18 terms of costs, we don't pay the tow truck companies  
19 that we use for the service so there are no specific  
20 costs in our budget or line items in our budget other  
21 than our personnel costs associated with it.

22 On illegal dumping, this camera program  
23 has worked very well. Last year, it's basically like  
24 we catch one illegal dumper a day in the city. They  
25 get a 4,000-dollar summons, their vehicle gets

2 impounded, and they also, and you touched on this in  
3 your question, have to pay the bill for the cost of  
4 cleaning up the material as well.

5 On your question about vending, generally  
6 with vending, we try to take a compliance-first  
7 approach where we look to see is there some condition  
8 that the vending is created like, for example,  
9 blocking the entrance to a store, blocking a curb  
10 cut, throwing grease down a sewer drain. We also have  
11 taken a warnings-first approach to vending. The  
12 warnings can take many different, well, really two  
13 main different forms. The first one, and the one that  
14 we use much more often than not, is putting up flyers  
15 in multiple languages in the areas where we're going  
16 to be performing the vending., but we also have the  
17 ability, we've upgraded our systems if we don't have  
18 a flyer in the area to issue what looks like a  
19 summons but it's in fact a warning with no cost  
20 associated to it, to the person or the vendor.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you. That's  
22 all my question.

23 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Thank you.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

25 Council Member Marte followed by Sanchez.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you, Chair  
3 Brannan and Abreu, and thank you, Commissioner, for  
4 being here. I want to start off like Lincoln Restler,  
5 we're truly impressed by all the work your agency  
6 does every single day. Thousands of people out in the  
7 streets serving the millions of New Yorkers, and I've  
8 seen the difference with some of your policy  
9 decisions, especially taking black bags off the  
10 streets. We've walked through Tribeca and SoHo and  
11 seen the overnight changes for those communities,  
12 especially during this peak tourism season so thank  
13 you so much for that.

14 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Thank you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: However, I join all  
16 my other Colleagues, especially our Chair Abreu, in  
17 saying we need to fully fund Community Compost and  
18 bring it back and hopefully baseline it. Today,  
19 dozens of workers throughout the city don't have a  
20 job. What's even worse, those dozens of workers serve  
21 thousands of New Yorkers every single weekend and  
22 throughout the week, providing them with an  
23 opportunity to get rid of their waste scraps and give  
24 them the education that they need to help save our  
25 city and our planet so hopefully you can use your



2 position and your influence to make sure that we  
3 fully get them back because, if we don't get them  
4 back this year, then it's going to create a pattern  
5 that's going to really destroy our communities.

6 On that note, what can we do, especially  
7 with our contracts and the current RFP, so we don't  
8 repeat this again? What type of extension mechanism  
9 or provisions we can put in place where people don't  
10 have to be unemployed for months waiting for you to  
11 finish your procurement process?

12 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Thank you, Council  
13 Member. The issue that we are running into now with  
14 the curbside composters is, in its first instance,  
15 it's a funding question, right, so to answer your  
16 question, on the funding side, if it was baselined in  
17 the budget, then we wouldn't be in the position that  
18 we're in now, although I guess it could be subject to  
19 a PEG even if it was baselined, but the real issue  
20 that we face today is that there is no funding. There  
21 is a second compounding problem where. if the funding  
22 is restored, one of the Community Composters,  
23 GrowNYC, their long-term contract with the City  
24 expires this summer with no more renewals available  
25 and, per the City's rules, I cannot begin a

2 procurement today without having the funding in hand  
3 to fund it and so, had the funding not gone away a  
4 few months ago or six months ago, we wouldn't be in  
5 this position because we would have started a  
6 procurement for the next year and there wouldn't have  
7 been any gap period but, because the funding went  
8 away when it did, we were unable to put out a new RFP  
9 and start that procurement so, even if the money  
10 comes back, we will have certainly a gap period while  
11 that competitive procurement is finalized.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Yeah, and I think  
13 the essence of my question is, how do we avoid this  
14 in the future? We have a lot of clever minds on our  
15 side and on your side. I know Lincoln Restler  
16 suggested ways where he can help speed up the  
17 procurement process, but we know this is a constant  
18 dance and we're trying to avoid it.

19 My last question is about the 7th  
20 Northmoor site, which DSNY was trying to do a  
21 deposition of. Have you thought about other uses for  
22 that location, and where are you on the planning  
23 process to figure out what could happen at that  
24 space?

COMMISSIONER TISCH: I'm going to turn that over to Deputy Commissioner Merola, who is up to speed on the Northmoor location.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Council Member. As you know, we did not move forward in the way that we were planning to. This site is a rather small and restricted site, but we have spoken with HPD and we'll go back to them again to see if we can't find another use for it. At the moment, no one wants to see a site lie fallow but, understanding that there is limited use, we're still trying to come up with a creative use for it so we'd be happy to report back to you on that.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARTE: Thank you on that.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, now we have questions from Council Member Sanchez followed by Hanks.

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you so much, Chairs, and good morning, Commissioner.

I'm going to join the chorus of Council Members just thanking you for your leadership, for your sharp leadership. Ryan, in particular, who gets

2 my texts, I appreciate the work in Districts 5, 7,  
3 and 8.

4 I'm going to focus on street vending,  
5 which your testimony and a lot of the questions and  
6 answers at last year's hearings did focus a lot on.  
7 Just to start, can you share an update on DSNY's  
8 approach to street vending enforcement? You said that  
9 the agency takes a compliance-first approach rather  
10 than a license-check approach, which I really  
11 appreciate, but can you share some of the numbers in  
12 terms of summonses issued by the Department, how many  
13 of those are for being unlicensed in particular  
14 versus other violations, street-siting regulations,  
15 etc.?

16 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Yeah. Ryan can give  
17 you those numbers.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: Thank you,  
19 Commissioner, and thank you very much, Council  
20 Member. Actually, I compiled a list of what's been  
21 our top summonses for Calendar Year 2024. As you  
22 would imagine, we do have a lot of summonses for  
23 vending without a license, general and mobile food,  
24 but I want to make sure you're aware of the other  
25 ones that are top hits for us. Parking in a metered

1 spot for the purpose of vending, storing items  
2 inappropriately around a cart or not on the setup  
3 itself, vending in a bus stop, vending on a  
4 restricted street, unattended food and food cart  
5 items, and then leaving a dirty area. These I'm happy  
6 to send over to your office afterwards in the numbers  
7 but, in total this year, we've issued 936 violations  
8 so far, and the ones that I just gave you make up a  
9 significant portion of that.  
10

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you for  
12 that, but you don't have the relative breakdown of  
13 how those break out?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: I do in more  
15 specificity in front of me, and I'm happy to send it  
16 to you. It's a long list to read, I will tell you. I  
17 think to your question, we have still probably the  
18 highest violation number that we issue is general  
19 vending without a license, which happens to be the  
20 most restricted type of vending citywide. This year  
21 it's 187, but I will also tell you too what the  
22 Commissioner had said earlier. We are not doing that  
23 unlicensed vending without having done a compliance  
24 approach first and, typically speaking, without  
25

2 having issued other compliance violations first as  
3 well.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you. I  
5 appreciate that and just want to make sure I'm  
6 understanding how we square, right, because I want a  
7 compliance-first approach and that's what I've been  
8 asking for and why I'm sponsoring Intro. 431 is to  
9 change the system in many ways, but just really  
10 helpful to understand that breakdown so, if I run out  
11 of time, maybe the Chairs will be nice to me, but,  
12 thinking on Fordham Road, right, it's easy to say  
13 that probably 90 percent, 70 to 90 percent on any  
14 given busy, beautiful Saturday of street vendors that  
15 are out there are unlicensed, and it is a restricted  
16 street so I say that to say that there's no universe  
17 in which we could, I don't think we would want to as  
18 a City, give Sanitation all of the enforcement  
19 capacity that you would need to just address illegal  
20 vending or just to address the conditions that we're  
21 seeing in many of our communities so, Commissioner,  
22 for you or for your team, are there tools that you  
23 wish the Department had and particularly more  
24 behavioral-based interventions that you think would  
25 change the dynamic that we see on the street?

2 COMMISSIONER TISCH: I think that the key  
3 driver of the dynamic that we see on the street is  
4 the number of licenses we give out as a City so I  
5 think that that's probably the key thing.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you. Yeah,  
7 I mean, there's no secret that I believe that making  
8 licenses universally available but then making it  
9 worth something, right? You're scared to lose that  
10 license. You value it. It's your source of  
11 livelihood, and now you don't have to get your goods  
12 thrown out or be under threat of whatever sort of  
13 enforcement action I think is the path forward so I  
14 will always say that in every hearing that I have the  
15 opportunity to. Thank you, Chairs, for letting me say  
16 that today, but just look forward to working with the  
17 department more so on this issue.

18 COMMISSIONER TISCH: And I just want to  
19 make one key point for your understanding and then  
20 also happy to talk about it with you at length later.  
21 The data shows a higher number of unlicensed vending  
22 summonses than other summonses, and you may look at  
23 it and say, wait a minute, you told us a compliance-  
24 first approach, we would expect to see that the  
25 number of unlicensed summonses would match the other

2 numbers. Few things happen that I want to make sure  
3 everyone understands. First, is oftentimes when our  
4 Sanitation police show up, vendors abandon their  
5 property, and they leave, and they leave the property  
6 on the ground. Rather than disposing of that  
7 property, we bring it back to our lot where other  
8 vendors or other people come and collect things like  
9 cars that are impounded and, when a person who has  
10 abandoned property on the street, vending property on  
11 the street, comes to collect the property that they  
12 have abandoned, they are issued an unlicensed vending  
13 summons if they can't show a license, and so I just  
14 want to be very clear as you look through these  
15 numbers and we talk through these numbers that that,  
16 among a few other things, inflates the number of  
17 unlicensed vending summonses that are issued as  
18 compared to the condition-based summonses.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: That's really  
20 helpful. Is it possible that when you share the data,  
21 you could highlight what percentage of cases?

22 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Yes.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Yeah. I really  
24 debated having Ryan read out the table, but the time  
25



2 wasn't enough, but thank you. Thank you,  
3 Commissioner. Thank you to the agency.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We have questions  
5 from Council Member Hanks followed by Salamanca.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Thank you, Chair  
7 Brannan, Chair Abreu. Good morning. It's good to see  
8 you, Commissioner Tisch.

9 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Good morning.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: I echo the  
11 sentiments of my Colleagues and what a great and  
12 responsive agency the Department of Sanitation has,  
13 that reputation.

14 I have two questions. One, I believe that  
15 you, I came a little late, you've addressed in your  
16 opening statement the commercial waste zones so we're  
17 going to have, from my understanding, the pilot will  
18 be in Queens and the rollout will be in January of  
19 2025, so I think my biggest question is when it comes  
20 to the outreach and the education of the program,  
21 what does that look like borough per borough, and  
22 when do you think you'll start putting those pieces  
23 together, and what kind of assistance or help do you  
24 need from us to make sure that we are disseminating  
25 the information properly?

2 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Thank you. We're very  
3 excited about this. We start the outreach and  
4 education this summer, and we have hired an M/WBE  
5 vendor. We have 1.5 million dollars in our budget,  
6 and they are going to be hitting the pavement this  
7 summer, specifically focused on the businesses in  
8 Central Queens, and they'll be doing in-person  
9 outreach. In addition to this, we have a flyer and a  
10 mailer, in many languages, that are going to each  
11 business in that first zone, and that rollout will be  
12 complete, has to be complete by January 2nd is the  
13 deadline. We will take a little time. We will assess  
14 how that rollout went, and we'll see if we have to  
15 make any tweaks or changes based on what we've  
16 learned, and then the plan is to have an aggressive  
17 rollout schedule thereafter. Now, when I say  
18 aggressive, it's not like we're going to say, okay,  
19 every district, we're going to turn on on the same  
20 day three months later, but we are going to be as  
21 aggressive as we can be while still being responsible  
22 to make sure that it's all done the right way, and  
23 the thing that I just always remind people of is what  
24 happened in L.A. When this is done poorly, when the  
25 implementation is a rush job, when there is

2 insufficient outreach, when something goes wrong,  
3 that means trash left on our streets every single  
4 day, and we know that there's 20 million pounds of  
5 commercial trash that's set out every day. We have to  
6 make sure that we are getting it right so that those  
7 20 million pounds of commercial trash do not sit on  
8 our streets every day.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Thank you so much.  
10 One more question, Chair?

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: So this is a little  
13 bit more local. The Jersey Street Garage RFP and  
14 construction timeline, can you provide us with an  
15 update in the status of the Jersey Street RFP, and  
16 when will the next phase of construction be expected  
17 to begin, and what are the key milestones expected on  
18 the completion date for this project? One more. I am  
19 so sorry. I apologize. And most importantly, the  
20 questions that we're getting from constituents is  
21 what is the timeline for the relocation of the Jersey  
22 Street Garage from Jersey Street during the  
23 construction period? Thank you.

24 COMMISSIONER TISCH: The Staten Island,  
25 we're building a new garage for Staten Island 1 and

1 3, so they'll be leaving Jersey Street and going to  
2 this new facility. Right now, we are planning for a  
3 2025 move-in date to that new garage, and we are very  
4 excited about that. Joe, do you have the update on  
5 the garage that they're moving out of Jersey Street?  
6 If not, we can get it to the Council Member right  
7 after this. We're going to send you the Jersey Street  
8 information right after, but I want to just say you  
9 weren't here when I gave... oh, you have it? You  
10 weren't here when I gave my testimony, but we have, I  
11 think based on your advocacy, we have started a major  
12 cleanup of the railway yard, and I showed this  
13 poster, and I just want to say that I find it  
14 shocking and unbelievable that a condition like this  
15 was allowed to persist in this city. This has to be  
16 decades and decades of filth and buildup, and the  
17 Department is committed to cleaning it up, doing it  
18 safely, and our Sanitation workers are doing an  
19 incredible job under very difficult circumstances  
20 there, but I just want to thank you for bringing it  
21 to my attention. As soon as you sent it to me, the  
22 picture said a thousand words, and I knew that we had  
23 to do something to finally stop the insanity.  
24

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Thank you so much.  
3 Thank you.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, a question  
5 from Council Member Salamanca followed by Zhuang.

6 We've also been joined by Council Members  
7 Ossé and Vernikov.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you, Mr.  
9 Chair. Good morning, Commissioner, and your team.

10 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Good morning.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Commissioner,  
12 just a few questions here. I want to start off with  
13 the containerization. I saw in the last year that  
14 public schools are now using these kind-of-orange-  
15 looking containers to put their garbage in for  
16 pickup, but I'm seeing that not all public schools  
17 are complying with that, and they're leaving their  
18 garbage out, which creates a mess on the sidewalks.  
19 Are your superintendents currently monitoring this  
20 and reporting it to their higher-ups so that we can  
21 get the Department of Education to comply, at least  
22 the public schools?

23 COMMISSIONER TISCH: It's a very prescient  
24 question. At this time, schools are not currently  
25 under a bin mandate. However, the Mayor feels

2 strongly about, as you know, containerizing all trash  
3 in the city, and school trash is a very important  
4 part of it. That is why, as part of our high-density,  
5 fixed on-street container program that we are  
6 starting in M-9, we're not just doing all buildings  
7 of 30 units or more. We're also doing all schools,  
8 and then the plan is to roll that out once it works  
9 beautifully in Manhattan 9. The plan is to roll that  
10 out citywide so that every school in the city will  
11 have these European-style on-street containers for  
12 all of their waste streams, not just for their refuse  
13 and their organics, but for all waste streams, and  
14 that we would hoist the containers using an automated  
15 side-loader.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Is there a  
17 timeline when there will be a mandate for the public  
18 schools?

19 COMMISSIONER TISCH: The rule that will  
20 include the schools is intended to run this summer  
21 but, in my opinion, many schools will have to request  
22 a waiver from that containerization rule until we get  
23 to their District with the large on-street container  
24 rollout because of the volume of waste that is  
25 produced.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: All right. My  
3 second question has to do with cameras. I do see here  
4 that in your statement, you stated that last year  
5 there were over 300 summonses. Each summons was about  
6 4,000 dollars. Have you kept track, have there been  
7 repeat offenders from these illegal dumpers in the  
8 communities.

9 COMMISSIONER TISCH: It shocked me, but  
10 yes, we have had, I think, at least one repeat  
11 offender that I know of, and maybe more, but as you  
12 know, the penalty is the stiffest penalty that we can  
13 give. It's not just the 4,000 summons. We also  
14 impound the vehicle and make them pay the costs of  
15 cleanup, but the cameras have worked. We're on pace  
16 right now to outpace last year's record-breaking  
17 enforcement numbers around illegal dumping.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: These  
19 individuals that are caught illegally dumping, I know  
20 that you impound their vehicles. What about the  
21 driver's license? Does it get suspended?

22 COMMISSIONER TISCH: No. That would  
23 require a change in state law, I believe.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Okay. One more  
25 question, Mr. Chair.

1  
2 My last question, Commissioner, the  
3 illegal car washes. With the new weather approaching  
4 driving up and down my District, I've seen an  
5 increase of car washes of these vans. I know that we  
6 passed a law not too long ago. There was supposed to  
7 be a period with the Department of Consumer Affairs  
8 on an educational component to educate them on how to  
9 properly get a license, and then there was going to  
10 be enforcement. Can you just give us a timeline of  
11 where are we now with that law?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: Happy to take  
13 them on, Commissioner. Council Member, thank you for  
14 the question. My understanding is that the Department  
15 of Consumer and Worker Protection is well underway  
16 with their six-month outreach and education campaign,  
17 and that enforcement, based on the effective date and  
18 the campaign ending, should be ripe for this summer,  
19 starting in July, and I will confirm the exact date  
20 with you after this.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: Thank you for  
22 that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. We have  
24 questions from Council Member Zhuang.

25



1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Thank you, Chairs,  
3 and I want to thank you, Commissioner. Your  
4 Department is doing a very hard job for our  
5 community, and especially I want to thank Ryan. He  
6 replied my message 4 o'clock in the morning. I said  
7 to him, he doesn't sleep. Thank you for not sleeping  
8 for our City because we are not a sleeping city.

9 I have two questions. The first one is,  
10 what's the reason why we lost significant federal  
11 funding? The federal funding portion, originally 20  
12 percent, dropped to 11 percent.

13 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Yeah, that didn't  
14 affect our service levels. That was more a budgetary  
15 thing, where we lost the federal funding that's been  
16 replaced with City dollars.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Okay, so that does  
18 not affect...

19 COMMISSIONER TISCH: It does not affect  
20 our service levels.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Also, the other  
22 question is, I have business corridors, and the area  
23 is growing, the business is growing. Do you guys have  
24 any plans for the area business is growing, put more  
25

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2 garbage cans, put more service? Is something we have  
3 to order it?

4 COMMISSIONER TISCH: A number of your  
5 Colleagues have using their discretionary funds to  
6 fund additional litter baskets, the better bins, in  
7 their Districts. It's something that has been very  
8 popular and very successful. What I would say is, the  
9 new litter baskets, they last so much longer than the  
10 old ones did. They'd break every year. These will  
11 last quite some time, so it's a great investment to  
12 make, not just now, but for the future.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: The City, in  
14 general, don't have any plan for that, so only for  
15 us?

16 COMMISSIONER TISCH: We get a certain  
17 amount of money each year to spend on new litter  
18 baskets, and those generally replace litter baskets  
19 that were existing but are old or worn out. No, we  
20 don't have money in our budget to do more than that.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ZHUANG: Okay, thank you.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thanks. Okay, I'm  
23 going to hand it over to Chair Abreu.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you,  
25 Colleagues, for your questions.

I'm going to turn it over to Street Sweepers. What is the Fiscal 2025 budget for street sweeping operations within the City, including expenses relating to maintenance, personnel, and cleaning supplies?

COMMISSIONER TISCH: Okay, hold on. I've got to get to my street sweeping section of my binder here. Okay, for Fiscal Year 2025, the Department is currently planning to order 76 new mechanical brooms for 30.8 million in capital spending. Additionally, we have, on average, 280 uniform personnel assigned to street sweeping functions in any given year, at an estimated salary cost of 22.2 million in FY25. Maintenance and cleaning supplies are ordered as needed and, as such, there is no specific budgeted value for the expenses in FY25.

CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Based on the street sweeping budget, how does the Fiscal 2025 budget compare to previous Fiscal Years?

COMMISSIONER TISCH: My understanding is that there was not any meaningful change to it, and that it's largely flat. Is that correct, Joe?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ANTONELLI: Yeah, the only thing that fluctuates is how many mechanical

1 brooms we purchase each year, but that's based on end  
2 of life and less about whether we receive new funding  
3 or not. It just comes out of our general equipment  
4 budget.  
5

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: And you said there  
7 were 76 new brooms?

8 COMMISSIONER TISCH: 76.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ANTONELLI: 76 for  
10 next year, and this current year, in FY24, we were  
11 able to purchase 104 mechanical brooms.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: How does DSNY  
13 ensure that the budget for street sweeping operations  
14 is used efficiently to maximize cleanliness and  
15 sanitation standards?

16 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Our street sweeping  
17 operations, we use daily assignments based on street  
18 cleaning regulation service schedules. Field  
19 personnel, in conjunction with our routing unit,  
20 evaluate routing efficiency by analyzing data from  
21 our internal reporting application, and field  
22 supervisors are also required to survey ASP segments  
23 to ensure cleanliness standards are met but, hands  
24 down, the single biggest challenge that we have with  
25 our street sweeping operations are cars that

1 regularly fail to move for alternate side parking,  
2 and this Council can help us very much in addressing  
3 that by sending up to Albany a home message that will  
4 support our, is it called a home message?  
5

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Home rule.

7 COMMISSIONER TISCH: A home rule.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Home message works...

9 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Home rule that will  
10 support our proposed state legislation to change the  
11 VTL law to allow us to put automated ticketing  
12 systems on our sweepers.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you.

14 Commissioner, in terms of metrics of cleanliness,  
15 what are metrics or indicators that the Department  
16 uses to assess the cleanliness of streets and public  
17 spaces following street sweeping operations?

18 COMMISSIONER TISCH: We have put GPS  
19 technology in all of our street sweepers, which we  
20 have been able to also present publicly on SweepNYC  
21 and also in Trash Dash, which is our internal  
22 reporting application to monitor the progress of all  
23 street sweeper routes.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: And how frequently  
25 are cleanliness assessments conducted, and are there

2 any benchmarks or targets established for  
3 maintaining?

4 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Cleanliness  
5 assessments are conducted daily by our field  
6 officers, focusing on street segments scheduled for  
7 sweeping. We also respond to all 3-1-1 complaints  
8 concerning street sweeping, and we investigate  
9 whether the designated sweeper serviced the area on  
10 the specified day of the complaint. The ongoing  
11 assessments help us maintain high cleanliness  
12 standards consistently across the city and, as I  
13 mentioned, we also have Trash Dash, where we will  
14 grill our superintendents and our borough chiefs on  
15 many things, but among them, missed segments for  
16 street cleaning.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: In terms of fines  
18 and penalties, what is the process for issuing fines  
19 and penalties for violations of street sweeping  
20 regulations?

21 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Fine amount is  
22 currently 50 dollars, and that is the maximum allowed  
23 under VTL law. I have advocated for raising the value  
24 of certain Sanitation-related fines. I don't advocate  
25 for changing this one. For this one, what we need is

1 a more obvious, easy way to summon vehicles that fail  
2 to comply, and that's the automated street sweeping  
3 violations.  
4

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Understood. Can you  
6 also provide information on the revenue generated  
7 from fines from street sweeping violations?

8 COMMISSIONER TISCH: You know, that's  
9 really the Department of Finance. The agencies don't  
10 generally get involved in revenue totals.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: All right, and with  
12 respect to the installation of cameras, I understand  
13 that's a big need of the Admin.

14 My last set of questions will be on waste  
15 export. I just wanted to get into that one. You know,  
16 waste export serves as a critical component of urban  
17 waste management, facilitating the disposal and  
18 processing of municipal solid waste beyond city  
19 limits. This practice helps cities meet waste  
20 disposal demands while minimizing environmental  
21 impact and optimizing resource utilization through  
22 partnerships with waste management facilities. In  
23 terms of total budget, what is the total budget  
24 allocated for DSNY's waste export activities,  
25

2 including expenses related to transportation,  
3 processing, and disposal of exported waste?

4 COMMISSIONER TISCH: The FY24 waste export  
5 budget is currently 507.7 million, and the FY25 waste  
6 export budget is currently 477.4 million, which gets  
7 adjusted throughout the upcoming Fiscal Year based on  
8 the actual tonnage and pricing. These prices or these  
9 costs are inclusive of all transportation,  
10 processing, and disposal.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Can you provide  
12 insights into the trends in the budget for waste  
13 export over the past few years, including any  
14 significant increases or fluctuation in cost?

15 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Yeah, refuse tonnage  
16 has been relatively consistent, maybe down a bit, but  
17 relatively consistent for the past few Fiscal Years  
18 at approximately 3.2 million tons per year, but the  
19 City's export costs have increased due to contractual  
20 price changes for short- and long-term export  
21 facilities, largely tied to agreed-upon consumer  
22 price index changes and inflation, which can average  
23 approximately 3 percent more per year. As you know,  
24 these contracts are very long-term contracts that  
25 predated all of us.



CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: How does the current budget for waste export align with the City's long-term waste management goals and objectives?

COMMISSIONER TISCH: The Department is consistently looking for ways to align the City's long-term waste management goals with the budget. For instance, when the citywide curbside organics collection program was funded, it allowed the Department to reduce its waste export budget by more than 10 million dollars in the baseline, which helped to offset the 14.5 million organics processing costs in the baseline.

CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: There have been ballooning costs over the past few years, and I think you started getting into some of the factors that contributed to that. Over the past four Fiscal Years, waste export costs have steadily increased, with the budget rising from 420 million in Fiscal Year '21, Adopted Budget to 471 million in Fiscal Year '25 in the Executive Plan, reflecting growing expenses associated with waste export activities. Can you elaborate on the factors contributing to the increase in costs associated with waste export over the past few years?

2 COMMISSIONER TISCH: The increased costs  
3 are largely, as I mentioned, tied to the contractual  
4 price changes with our export vendors, which are the  
5 result of CPI changes and inflation.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: And what are other  
7 ways that we can help reduce expenses related to  
8 waste export?

9 COMMISSIONER TISCH: One of the best  
10 measures for waste export costs are to encourage city  
11 residents to recycle as much material as possible,  
12 and the upcoming citywide rollout of the curbside  
13 organics collection program will also help with that  
14 so these alternatives to exporting waste help to  
15 lessen the financial burden on the City while also  
16 having a positive impact on the environment.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: Thank you,  
18 Commissioner.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Question from  
20 Council Member Ossé.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you so much,  
22 Chairs, and good morning, Commissioner. Nice to see  
23 you.

24 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Morning. Nice to see  
25 you.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Just, I guess, this  
3 is a pretty broad district-related question, but it's  
4 in relation to two of our pretty busy business  
5 corridors, one on Nostrand Avenue and also Malcolm X  
6 Boulevard. We've had to, I guess, move some of our  
7 supplementary Sanitation services through ACE to  
8 other parts of the District and, because of that,  
9 we've seen that there have been an increase in  
10 complaints of overflown litter baskets as well as  
11 just dirtier corridors, especially in those two  
12 business districts. I just wanted to hear from you  
13 both on what the cleaning schedule looks like for  
14 both of those corridors as well as if there could be  
15 any additional amount of attention that could be  
16 provided over there.

17 COMMISSIONER TISCH: We can get you  
18 information for those two corridors about how often  
19 those baskets are emptied. Our Cleaning Office can  
20 get that to you today. Our level of litter basket  
21 service that we run is at historic highs for the past  
22 two years. We've been running 22 million dollars a  
23 year worth of litter basket service, which has  
24 decreased the number of complaints we've gotten  
25 citywide by 42 percent for overflowing litter baskets

2 but, if we haven't gotten it right in one or two  
3 corridors, I'm interested to look with you at what  
4 the level of service is and, if you need additional  
5 levels of service, some Council Members use their  
6 discretionary funds to fund enhanced service on a  
7 specific corridor.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you so much. I  
9 guess another follow-up question is I know that we've  
10 had several tours in the District and have discussed  
11 potential installations of Sanitation cameras. I was  
12 wondering how those are operating, if they have been  
13 installed, and an update on those locations and if  
14 there have been any crackdowns of illegal dumping in  
15 several of those areas.

16 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Ryan, do you have the  
17 information on his cameras in particular?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MEROLA: Yes,  
19 Commissioner. Council Member, we have five cameras up  
20 and active in your District. I'd have to pull the  
21 specific enforcement history for each of those after  
22 that, but they were in consultation that we had last  
23 year where the hot spots were.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you.  
25

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. We've been  
3 joined by Council Member Salaam, and now we have  
4 final questions from Council Member Hudson.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much.  
6 Good afternoon. Good morning. Apologies if I missed  
7 this earlier, but I was just curious to know about  
8 the containerization pilot program and when that  
9 would be expanding and what the status is of funding  
10 for that program.

11 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Yeah. We had a major  
12 investment in the Executive Budget from the City to  
13 fund like the proper European-style rollout of large  
14 fixed on-street containers for high-density  
15 buildings. Phase one will be in Manhattan 9, and that  
16 is scheduled to start literally one year from today,  
17 and we're very excited about it. In the meantime,  
18 like why one year from now? There's a lot going on.  
19 We unveiled our new automated side loader. We're  
20 ordering more than a dozen of those trucks to service  
21 Manhattan 9. We're also doing the procurement to buy  
22 the actual bins and to select the bins that we're  
23 going to be using and the servicing of those bins as  
24 an example, and so that procurement is ongoing. The  
25 trucks are being made. We plan to roll it out a year

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2 from now to every high-rise building in Manhattan 9  
3 as well as every school. In the meantime, this fall,  
4 all smaller buildings, one- to nine-unit buildings,  
5 will come under a requirement to put their trash in  
6 individual wheelie bins, and that will be citywide  
7 requirement.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: So after Manhattan  
9 9, what's the subsequent rollout plan?

10 COMMISSIONER TISCH: The Mayor's been  
11 clear. He wants to containerize all 24 million pounds  
12 of trash or all 44 million pounds of trash that we  
13 produce in the city every day, but I don't have  
14 what's next district yet.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. That's it.  
16 Thank you.

17 COMMISSIONER TISCH: Thank you.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay,  
19 Commissioner and your team, thank you very much. We  
20 look forward to working with you and passing a good  
21 budget.

22 COMMISSIONER TISCH: I'd just like to say  
23 one more thing, if I could. A lot of Members have  
24 showered a lot of praise today on me and on the  
25 Executive Team and on the Department. I just want to

2 add that the 10,000 members, particularly the  
3 uniformed members of the New York City Department of  
4 Sanitation, they do God's work every day. They work  
5 really hard. It is a highly physical job. This City  
6 has asked, and I have asked, a lot of them over the  
7 past two years to take on additional  
8 responsibilities, to work different shifts, to do  
9 things in a different way, to start figuring out how  
10 to use containers and, at every step along the way,  
11 they have been team players, they have been the most  
12 extraordinary group of public servants that I have  
13 had the privilege of working with in my career. Thank  
14 you.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,  
16 Commissioner.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON ABREU: We love Garage 9.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, we're going  
19 to take a break, and we're going to... what time? We  
20 have the Parks Department coming in at 12:30, so  
21 we'll take a break.

22 [GAVEL] Good afternoon, and welcome to  
23 the final Executive Budget hearing for today, focused  
24 on the Department of Parks and Recreation. I am  
25 Council Member Justin Brannan. I Chair the Committee

2 on Finance. I am joined this afternoon by my good  
3 friend and Colleague, Council Member Shekar Krishnan,  
4 who Chairs the Committee on Parks and Recreation.

5 We've been joined this afternoon by  
6 Council Members Brewer, Nurse, Ossé, Hudson,  
7 Williams, Menin, and Carr.

8 Welcome, Commissioner Donoghue and your  
9 team. Thank you for joining us today to answer our  
10 questions.

11 For those playing at home, I'd like to  
12 set the table. On April 24, 2024, the Administration  
13 released the Executive Financial Plan for FY24-28,  
14 with a proposed FY25 budget of 111.6 billion dollars.  
15 Parks Department's proposed FY25 budget of 582.9  
16 million represents half a percent of the  
17 Administration's proposed FY25 budget in the  
18 Executive Plan. This is a decrease of 836,000 dollars  
19 from the 583.7 million dollars that was originally  
20 budgeted in the FY25 Preliminary Plan. This decrease  
21 results from a loss of 8.3 million dollars for the  
22 Parks Opportunity Program, partially offset by  
23 expanded hiring for exterminators and increased funds  
24 from the Collective Bargaining Agreement. As of March  
25 2024, Parks has 181 vacancies relative to their



2 budgeted FY24 headcount. In the Council's Preliminary  
3 Budget Response, we called on the Mayor to add 59.7  
4 million dollars to reverse prior-year PEGs and  
5 restore other programs. Not only was the Council's  
6 call for funding completely ignored, but in this  
7 case, the Parks Executive Budget actually dropped  
8 from where it was in the Preliminary Budget, which is  
9 very rare. As I've mentioned before, what  
10 restorations the Mayor made in the Executive Budget  
11 are a fraction of the cuts he made to key programs,  
12 which the Council has found weren't even necessary in  
13 the first place. Council analysts found sufficient  
14 resources left out of the Preliminary Budget that,  
15 after setting aside funds for the Rainy Day Fund and  
16 insuring against unexpected financial costs, it still  
17 leaves 1.63 billion dollars for restorations like  
18 we've called for here today. In a time when costs  
19 keep going up, a day at the park is still free last I  
20 checked, and the Council is committed to delivering a  
21 budget that protects public spaces and public assets  
22 like our parks.

23 My questions today will largely focus on  
24 the PEGs and the hiring freeze along with the general  
25 and Capital Budget changes.

I now want to turn to my co-Chair for this hearing, Council Member Krishnan, for his opening statement.

CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Good morning, everyone. Thank you so much, Chair Brannan, and thank you to everyone here. Welcome to the Parks Department, Commissioner Donoghue and her team for today's hearing on the Fiscal 2025 Executive Budget for the Department of Parks and Recreation.

My name is Shekar Krishnan, and I am the Chair of the Council's Committee on Parks and Recreation. I would like to thank my fellow Council Members and Colleagues who are present here today on this very important issue as Chair Brannan already highlighted.

Today, we will be hearing testimony from the Parks Department on its Fiscal 2025 Executive Budget, which totals 582.9 million dollars, a decrease of 55.3 million since adoption last year. This is most certainly less than 1 percent of the total City budget for Fiscal 2024 and represents a shocking and very disappointing steady decrease in our budget for our Parks Department from a Mayor and City Hall that explicitly campaigned on increasing

2 the Parks budget to 1 percent of our New York City's  
3 budget. In other words, we are moving backwards,  
4 moving backwards with an Administration that  
5 explicitly stated its commitment to increase the  
6 Parks budget. Yet another year where this has not  
7 happened. The Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget includes  
8 700,000 dollars in new needs for FY25 for additional  
9 exterminators in Brooklyn. Let me repeat that. The  
10 decrease in the budget we've seen for the Parks  
11 Department, the only area of new needs identified was  
12 for exterminators in Brooklyn. Only a handful, and  
13 most certainly not enough to serve the millions of  
14 residents even in the Borough of Brooklyn alone. It  
15 is a decrease of 1.5 million dollars in other  
16 adjustments and, of course, there are PEGs too.

17 We have seen the disastrous impact that  
18 the Mayor's PEGs have had on our City's parks, and  
19 now that the Second Shift has been eliminated, we  
20 will see further degradation. The Second Shift  
21 Program was a program where 100 hotspot parks in the  
22 city would receive additional cleaning and  
23 maintenance on weekends and evenings. This is  
24 especially urgent right now as the weather gets  
25 warmer, more and more New Yorkers use their parks

1 through the summer and the fall, we will see reduced  
2 cleaning shifts because of the loss of the Second  
3 Shift Program. I hope to see a return and in fact an  
4 expansion of the Second Shift Program in the adopted  
5 budget next month.  
6

7 I am hopeful that in the coming weeks the  
8 Mayor will realize the importance of Parks when  
9 negotiating the adopted budget but, as of now, the  
10 numbers are gloomy and disappointing. Not only is  
11 there a 55.3-million-dollar reduction in the Parks'  
12 budget since last year, but let me also point out  
13 what the Administration has done to meet the needs  
14 that we in the City Council have identified in our  
15 budget response. We called for a restoration of the  
16 PEG of 38.5 million dollars. The amount in the  
17 Executive Budget? Zero dollars. We called for 11.2  
18 million dollars in funding for urban park rangers,  
19 tree stump removal, and the Green Thumb Program  
20 restoration. The amount in the Executive Budget? Zero  
21 dollars. And we called for a restoration and  
22 expansion of the Second Shift Program in the amount  
23 of at least 10 million. The amount in the Executive  
24 Budget? Zero dollars.  
25

1  
2 Our parks are crucial for our mental  
3 health, for our well-being. They are essential  
4 spaces, especially as the weather gets nicer in the  
5 warm months of summer. We depend on clean parks,  
6 parks that are cleaned every day. We depend on parks  
7 where the bathrooms are cleaned every day, where the  
8 trees are maintained and not overgrowing. Our parks  
9 contribute to public safety and to sanitation, two  
10 values in particular that Mayor Adams has identified  
11 as principles and values that are important to him.  
12 If we want a city that's clean, we need our parks  
13 clean. If we want our parks clean, then we need to  
14 invest in them and increase the budget, not be  
15 cutting from it.

16 The Committee is excited to hear  
17 testimony today related to the FY25 Executive Plan,  
18 specifically the Parks Opportunity Program, the  
19 Second Shift Program, and the lifeguards, as we know  
20 pool and beach season is upon us too.

21 Before we begin with testimony, I would  
22 like to thank Council Staff for their hard work. Our  
23 Finance Team of Chima Obichere, Jack Storey, and  
24 Michael Sherman, our Committee Staff, Kristopher  
25

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2 Sartori and Patrick Mulvihill, and my own staff, Greg  
3 Clark and Chuck Park.

4 I will now ask the Committee Council to  
5 go over some procedural items and swear in the  
6 representatives from the Parks Department. Thank you.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Just a note,  
8 we're going to be taking public testimony on the  
9 Agencies' Executive Budgets today. If you're here and  
10 you want to testify on either the Parks or the  
11 Sanitation budget, just make sure you fill out a  
12 witness slip with the Sergeant-at-Arms. The slips are  
13 on the table in the back.

14 We've also been joined by Council Members  
15 Lee, Sanchez, and Salaam.

16 Now, I'm going to turn it over to  
17 Committee Counsel, Mike Twomey, to swear everybody in  
18 and we can get started.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: Good afternoon.  
20 Raise your right hands, please.

21 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
22 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this  
23 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member  
24 questions? Sue Donoghue.

25 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I do.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: Iris Rodriguez-  
3 Rosa.

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:  
5 I do.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: Matt Drury.

7 CHIEF DRURY: I do.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: Mark Focht.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: I do.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: Thank you. You  
11 may begin.

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Good afternoon,  
13 Chair Brannan, Chair Krishnan, and Members of the  
14 Finance Committee and Parks Committee and other  
15 Members of the Council. My name is Sue Donoghue, and  
16 I'm pleased to be here today testifying as the  
17 Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks  
18 and Recreation and to be joined today on this panel  
19 by several members of our agency's senior leadership.

20 Firstly, I want to thank the Council for  
21 its continued support for our City's open spaces over  
22 the past year and for championing the importance of  
23 parks for all New Yorkers. Thank you for allowing us  
24 the opportunity to discuss the agency's Executive  
25 Budget for Fiscal Year 2025 and to provide an

2 overview of our agency's mission to build and  
3 maintain a restorative and thriving park system.

4           The arrival of warmer weather in the  
5 spring means that we're heading into our peak season  
6 when our city's green and open spaces truly come  
7 alive and more and more people get outdoors to take  
8 advantage of our amazing parks to lead happier,  
9 healthier lives, and we've been busy delivering  
10 results for all New Yorkers. However, we also know  
11 that our parks are utilized all year round and we're  
12 ready. This spring, we were thrilled to celebrate the  
13 opening of the new Arvern East Nature Preserve and  
14 Welcome Center. This incredible 35-acre nature  
15 preserve hosts five different maritime ecosystems and  
16 offers New Yorkers a new way to observe and  
17 appreciate these natural environments, including  
18 accessible connections to the Rockaway Beach and  
19 Boardwalk. The new Welcome Center hosts a community  
20 meeting space, office space for our urban park  
21 rangers, crew headquarters for Parks maintenance  
22 staff, and public restrooms. This new facility is  
23 fossil-free, heated and cooled by a closed-loop  
24 geothermal system, while a rooftop solar array  
25 generates power to supply the building and eventually



2 provide additional energy to other residents in the  
3 neighborhood. The adjacent parking lot has been  
4 constructed with a permeable asphalt system and  
5 bioswales for stormwater, representing our commitment  
6 to resiliency and sustainability in our new climate  
7 reality. This formerly vacant, derelict space that  
8 was an eyesore for decades is now educational, green,  
9 and resilient open space to be enjoyed by the entire  
10 Rockaway community.

11 Working with our sister agencies, we're  
12 also very excited to launch the Mayor's Office of  
13 Marine Debris Disposal and Vessel Surrendering to  
14 help keep the city's amazing waterfront safe and free  
15 from marine debris. This new office will protect our  
16 shoreline from floating risks and sunken hazards,  
17 benefiting people, flora, and fauna that rely on our  
18 healthy and clean waterfronts.

19 To make sure our youngest neighbors get  
20 to enjoy summer to the fullest, we've been hard at  
21 work on reimagining and reviving various playgrounds  
22 across the five boroughs, recently reopening the  
23 playground at John J. Carty Park in Bay Ridge and  
24 Rainbow Playground in Sunset Park after full  
25 redesigns and reconstructions as well as breaking

2 ground on the reconstruction of Dongan Playground in  
3 Staten Island. These playground renovations represent  
4 millions of dollars of investment for the communities  
5 that rely on these public spaces, made possible with  
6 tremendous support from the City Council.

7 Our agency's operations and citywide  
8 services staff are also making targeted repairs and  
9 improvements to other Park facilities, such as  
10 installing diaper changing stations in Moore Park  
11 restrooms so that families with young children have  
12 increased access to the amenities they need. I'm  
13 pleased to report that, in accordance with Local Law  
14 56 of 2023, we have installed these new amenities in  
15 every park restroom where a changing station can  
16 feasibly be installed, several years in advance of  
17 the deadline.

18 Of course, as the temperatures rise, we  
19 are gearing up for the opening of our public beaches  
20 this coming weekend. We're fortunate that we've been  
21 able to open all our pools and beaches in recent  
22 summers, unlike a lot of other cities across the  
23 country, and we're committed to doing that again this  
24 summer, despite a very challenging hiring  
25 environment. As we have shared with Council

2 previously, we have worked tirelessly to find ways to  
3 recruit new potential lifeguards and encourage more  
4 lifeguards to return and help keep our beaches and  
5 pools safe for all New Yorkers to enjoy. Though it's  
6 premature to speculate about final staffing levels,  
7 we're extremely proud of our intense and focused  
8 effort to recruit and retain these vital members of  
9 the Parks team.

10 At the Preliminary Budget hearing, we  
11 spoke about our Let's Green NYC initiative, which  
12 encourages New Yorkers to get out in their green  
13 spaces and help beautify them through service  
14 projects. Today, we're thrilled to announce that we  
15 officially surpassed our previous record, with over  
16 500,000 New Yorkers participating since the  
17 initiative began in 2023. It's so rewarding to see  
18 that New Yorkers feel as passionate about our city's  
19 green spaces as we do, and we look forward to  
20 encouraging even more volunteers to get out and get  
21 involved as the initiative continues.

22 Turning to the specific topic for this  
23 hearing, the Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Budget  
24 reflects the Administration's ongoing commitment to  
25 fiscal responsibility amid the ongoing economic and

2 fiscal challenges facing the City, while maintaining  
3 critical services for all New Yorkers and investing  
4 in a greener, healthier city. New York City Parks'  
5 Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Operating Budget is 582.9  
6 million dollars. We're pleased to note that the  
7 agency did not have to implement an additional 5  
8 percent reduction as had been originally envisioned.  
9 The Executive Budget also reflects salary increases  
10 for our invaluable Parks employees, which were the  
11 result of the City's recent contract agreements with  
12 various unions, negotiated through collective  
13 bargaining. We know these are difficult economic  
14 times, and we're grateful to be able to support our  
15 critical existing staff so they can continue all the  
16 hard work they do every day.

17 In closing, I want to thank Mayor Adams  
18 for granting me the incredible privilege of leading  
19 this agency and the opportunity to work with each of  
20 you to continue improving our parks and open spaces  
21 for all New Yorkers. Many of you are already familiar  
22 with our experienced, responsive Borough  
23 Commissioners and their District teams who work  
24 alongside our Central Agency Division staff to  
25 deliver for New Yorkers every day. We are always

2 available to answer questions and address concerns  
3 from your offices and are happy to hear your thoughts  
4 on any topic, whether it regards a local park in your  
5 District or a citywide agency policy. New York City  
6 Parks looks forward to continuing our close  
7 partnership with the Council to create a bright,  
8 green future with a more equitable, inclusive, and  
9 resilient park system. Thank you for the opportunity  
10 to testify today. We would now be happy to answer any  
11 questions that you may have.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,  
13 Commissioner. We've also been joined by Council  
14 Members Brooks-Powers, Ung, and Paladino.

15 There were a number of proposals that the  
16 Council called for in our response to the PEG, such  
17 as the restorations of the Second Shift, headcount  
18 PEGs, and a variety of Parks programs. However, as I  
19 mentioned before, none of these were included in the  
20 Executive Budget. Has your agency had any discussions  
21 with OMB regarding the restorations of these  
22 programs?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
24 Member Brannan, for the question and, yes, those  
25 discussions are ongoing, absolutely. As I said in my

2 testimony and as the Mayor has said these have been  
3 challenging economic times, and so difficult  
4 decisions had to be made but, yes, there are ongoing  
5 conversations, absolutely.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And for the  
7 unanointed, can you explain what the Second Shift is?

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.  
9 It's a new initiative that we developed last year  
10 that essentially places our workers in parks in a  
11 later afternoons' shift and working over the weekend  
12 so a shift that's Thursday through Monday, and so it  
13 affords the ability to have staff in the parks later  
14 in the afternoon when they're often busiest and be  
15 able to help us to maintain facilities such as our  
16 public restrooms.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And tell me,  
18 let's talk about staffing. What is the budgeted and  
19 actual headcount for Parks Department staff who cut  
20 grass?

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Specifically for M  
22 and O, just bear with me, so our overall budgeted  
23 staffing is 4,101 employees. That's our FY25  
24 Preliminary Budgeted staffing but, for M and O  
25 specifically, that number is 3,091.

1  
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And what's been  
3 the budgeted versus actual numbers for these  
4 positions since FY21, or as far back as you have?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: For specifically  
6 for M and O?

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah.

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Just bear with me  
9 one sec. I'm not sure if we have that broken out  
10 specifically for M and O, but we can absolutely, but  
11 I have the overall staffing from FY21 but not  
12 specifically broken out by M and O, but we can  
13 certainly get that to you.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Obviously, all  
15 these positions are vital, but wouldn't you say that  
16 M and O positions are, have more, PEGs to M and O  
17 positions have more of an exponential impact than  
18 other?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the  
20 question, and M&O certainly makes up the bulk of our  
21 agency staffing, absolutely, and it is a testament to  
22 our focus on clean and safe parks.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Which PEG has had  
24 the greatest impact on operations for the Department?  
25

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As I said in my  
3 testimony, given the difficult fiscal environment and  
4 financial environment, none of these are reductions  
5 or PEGs that were taken lightly, and it was from  
6 having not a lot of choices. They're all difficult to  
7 make. There's no doubt, and PEGs impact our agency  
8 across the board. Given what we just discussed and  
9 that Maintenance and Operations makes up the largest  
10 part of our workforce, that likely has the greatest  
11 impact.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. I want to  
13 talk about hiring. I know Parks contends that there  
14 isn't a hiring freeze, but can you explain to me what  
15 the arrangement is right now for hiring? For every  
16 one person you lose, how does that work?

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So while other  
18 agencies did have a replacement or allowed to hire  
19 one for two, the Parks Department, in order to meet  
20 our budget PEGs, we actually put forward an attrition  
21 PEG, and so as people leave, we are not able to hire.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So I guess, isn't  
23 that technically a hiring freeze?

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It does create an  
25 inability to hire if someone leaves.



1  
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. We want to  
3 help. Have you spoken with OMB about that current  
4 arrangement?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.  
6 There've been ongoing conversations, and those will  
7 continue.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Are there any  
9 positions that are exempt from that equation?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. At present,  
11 it is PEP and capital that is exempt from that and  
12 recreation.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Are there any  
14 positions that could have a more negative impact if  
15 they are not filled than other positions?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As stated in my  
17 testimony, difficult choices had to be made for sure,  
18 and the impacts are across the agency.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Since  
20 adoption, there's been a decrease of 55.3 million  
21 dollars in the Parks budget. Can you walk us through  
22 a little bit more granularly through the major  
23 changes that have taken place to cause such a  
24 significant decrease?  
25

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.

3 There were two PEGs that were announced, one that was  
4 part of the November Plan and one that was part of  
5 the January Plan, and so, as part of the November  
6 Plan, we had first a one-year delay in new needs and  
7 we took vacancy savings and attrition hiring  
8 reduction. Those two PEG reductions were 10.9 million  
9 and then 18.7 million respectively and, in the  
10 January Plan, we needed to eliminate those new needs,  
11 which was 10 million. We took down tree stump  
12 removal, 600,000, and then the attrition hiring  
13 reductions created a savings of 8.6 million.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Did the  
15 Department notice any decreases in service as a  
16 result of the PEG?

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: At this point, the  
18 answer is no. Because it's attrition savings, there  
19 will be, as we move forward and we're not able to  
20 replace people, that's when you'll see the impacts  
21 more.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Talking  
23 about Capital Budget for a bit, the FY25 Executive  
24 Budget Message of the Mayor mentions the continuation  
25 of full-time positions in the Capital Projects

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2 Division for the design and construction of hundreds  
3 of parks projects. How many full-time staff does that  
4 Division employ for construction?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Just bear with me  
6 one moment. Do we have a number there? Thank you for  
7 the question, Council Member Brannan. It's 440 people  
8 in the Capital Division.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We have to swear  
10 you in if you're going to.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: State your  
12 name, please.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: Therese  
14 Braddick.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: Thank you. Do  
16 you, do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole  
17 truth, and nothing but the truth before this  
18 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member  
19 questions?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: I do.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: Thank you.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Could you tell us  
23 what are the titles for those 440 people in that  
24 Division?

25

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: The titles range from landscape architect, architect, engineer, surveyors, construction project managers. There are a whole host of titles.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. The FY25 Executive Capital Commitment Plan includes a decrease of 23.7 percent in FY26 which pushes projects' funding into the outyears. What's the cause for the roll into the outyears?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: Thank you for the question. Essentially, what we try to do is we properly forecast the funding into the individual Fiscal Year in which the funding is needed and, no, there are not any cases where we push the money out into outer years where it is actually pausing a project or causing a project not to continue.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And why was funding specifically taken from FY26 and not '25 or '27?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: Again, it is just a matter of forecasting based on when the funding is actually needed for the project to continue.

1  
2 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I've noticed the  
3 capital projects are moving much quicker than they  
4 have in the past, which is great, obviously. Why is  
5 that happening? What did we figure out?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: Thank you.  
7 I'd like to record that statement.

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Exactly. for the  
9 record.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I mean I'll say  
11 it all day.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: I'm not  
13 sure that I've ever heard that.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Look, I've made  
15 it, when I got elected, I realized that most of the  
16 playgrounds and parks in my District hadn't been  
17 renovated since I was a kid so I basically am doing  
18 just about every park and playground I'm trying to  
19 renovate, and I'm getting there, but I'd like to be  
20 able to tell my constituents that their kids won't be  
21 in Yale by the time the playground is finished, but  
22 it's certainly gotten better, and I'm trying to  
23 figure out if that's just I got lucky because you got  
24 a crew from a different place or are we now basically  
25

2 about 11 to 12 months soup to nuts? Is that what  
3 we're at?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: The total  
5 time frame has definitely decreased. Thank you very  
6 much, Council Member, for recognizing that. There are  
7 a lot of different reasons why that has started to  
8 happen, and recognizing that capital projects span  
9 over a series of years has taken us a while for you  
10 to actually feel those differences. A lot of that,  
11 this particular Administration in particular created  
12 a Capital Process Reform Task Force immediately at  
13 the beginning of the Administration and collectively  
14 worked with all capital agencies to come up with some  
15 really good recommendations on how to shorten the  
16 time frame for capital projects, and the Parks  
17 Department in particular has employed, for a long  
18 time now, we worked collectively internally to come  
19 up with reforms to decrease those timelines so a few  
20 examples for things like that is we're now starting  
21 to use a lot more pre-qualified lists, which shortens  
22 the timeframe by one to three months to find a good  
23 qualified contractor. We're really focusing quite a  
24 bit on M/WBEs and, in particular, using the M/WBE  
25 small purchase method which that method just recently

2 increased up to 1.5 million. We use that as a default  
3 for all of our projects and that has helped us. We  
4 are working very closely with City Hall to better  
5 coordinate things with utility companies. That is  
6 also something that has kept our projects from moving  
7 forward when we can't get our utilities connected,  
8 but we're also working with each other, particularly  
9 just in general, on permitting with our sister  
10 agencies, whether that be DEP or DOB. We're working  
11 collectively and collaborating on how to shorten the  
12 time frame for everyone so it's a combination of all  
13 of those things collectively that has helped us.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: That's great.  
15 Okay. I'm going to turn it over to Chair Krishnan,  
16 and we'll be back. Thank you.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you so  
18 much, Chair Brannan. I just have some questions on  
19 different topics, and then we'll turn it over to our  
20 Colleagues.

21 Taking a step back for a second, looking  
22 at the Parks budget overall, two years ago, we worked  
23 to ensure that we had the largest budget for our  
24 Parks Department in New York City's history. Instead  
25 of building on that, what we've seen every year are

2 cuts since then that we've had to fight as a Council  
3 to restore each and every time. Commissioner, my  
4 question for you just to begin with is if you had  
5 more resources for the Parks Department whether it's  
6 1 percent, as the Mayor campaigned on, or even just a  
7 larger budget restoring what we achieved two years  
8 ago, if you had more resources for the Parks  
9 Department, how would you use them? What is your  
10 vision personally for the Parks Department?

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Chair  
12 Krishnan, for the question and, as I said in my  
13 testimony, first of all, that the budget conversation  
14 is ongoing. We look forward to continuing to work  
15 with the Mayor, OMB, and the Council to shape the  
16 final FY25 budget as the process continues.  
17 Obviously, as a Commissioner of an agency, I'd always  
18 welcome having more resources and additional staff.  
19 What we talked about earlier, the second shift has  
20 proven to be very effective. We know that we want to  
21 have people in our parks when they're most heavily  
22 utilized. That's in the afternoon, evenings, and on  
23 weekends so that's why we developed the initiative  
24 when I came into the agency, and we've seen it's  
25 beneficial, but as I said the cuts impact across the



2 board. So, absolutely, things like second shift are  
3 important, more resources for all that we do, for  
4 greening, for tree planting are all really important,  
5 and we have an incredibly dedicated, hardworking  
6 staff at the Parks Department that we are so proud  
7 every day of the work that they do, and so it's just  
8 supporting them in their roles is really important.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I'm hearing  
10 collectively more funding for maintenance, for  
11 keeping our parks clean, for caring for our trees,  
12 planting more trees, all to do with maintenance of  
13 parks and green spaces, which I agree is very  
14 important. In your opinion, what is the staffing of  
15 the Parks Department? What is the headcount that you  
16 would need to be able to ensure that all of the parks  
17 are cleaned with second shifts, that the trees and  
18 forestry division has the resources they need? In  
19 your ideal picture, what would be the headcount that  
20 you would need for the Parks Department?

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
22 Member, for the question and, as I said, we talked  
23 about our budgeted headcount is today. There is no  
24 doubt, as I said, as a leader of the agency, having  
25 more staffing would be beneficial in order to be able

2 to just do more in every park across the five  
3 boroughs.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But can you give  
5 me a number as to what you think would be an adequate  
6 level of staffing for the Parks Department in terms  
7 of headcount?

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It's really  
9 difficult to say what would be optimal, just that  
10 obviously more resources would allow us to get more  
11 work done.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it, okay.  
13 What is the current budgeted headcount for the Parks  
14 Department?

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: The current  
16 budgeted headcount is 4,101 employees.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And that's for  
18 the upcoming new Fiscal Year, correct?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Exactly, yes.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So 4,100  
21 budgeted. What is the actual headcount on the books  
22 that you have right now for the Parks Department?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It's about 4,500  
24 employees.

CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: 4,500. So between what you currently have in actuality versus what the Mayor has proposed for the next Fiscal Year, I'm seeing there's a 400-position reduction in the Parks Department budget. Is that correct?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That is the attrition PEG and, so as people leave, we will get closer to that headcount.

CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: That was my next question. In addition to a reduction by 400 positions, you also are facing a hiring freeze, and that's exactly what it is and we'll say that, where you're not able to hire as people leave and there are vacancies created, you are not going to be able to hire to fill those vacancies, correct?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely. That's the attrition PEG.

CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it. Do you feel that a Parks Department headcount of 4,100 is adequate to fully staff all operations of the Department?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As I said, and thank you for the question Council Member, there are difficult decisions that needed to be made and we

1 have an incredibly hardworking and dedicated staff.  
2  
3 They are doing as much as they can. They're doing  
4 what they can with the resources that they have.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Looking at the  
6 numbers here, a 400-person reduction, but the main  
7 issue that we're always hearing about, and I think  
8 all the Council Members can attest to this would be  
9 the need to clean our parks, the trash overflowing in  
10 our parks, bathrooms that need to be cleaned even  
11 much more often and overgrown trees, whether on the  
12 streets or in the parks, that need to be maintained  
13 and, as hard as your workers are working to keep up  
14 with the need, you're telling me that in the proposal  
15 right now, there's a 400-person reduction in  
16 headcount to address those current needs and to  
17 address the larger vision that you have for the parks  
18 department, which is also, again, maintenance and  
19 cleanliness. Do I have that right?

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. My next  
22 question is looking at the Second Shift Program that  
23 we spoke about, what is the cost and necessary  
24 headcount needed to have a second shift at every park  
25 in the city?

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID WASTE JOINTLY WITH  
1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 133

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Our Second Shift  
3 Program that we implemented, Council Member, included  
4 240 positions and the cost was 13.8 million.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: 13.8 million.  
6 That would be the cost it would take to have a second  
7 shift at every park?

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: To restore the,  
9 no, that's to restore the existing second shift that  
10 was a hundred hotspots across the city.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay, so let's  
12 break it down for a second, but I think the  
13 restoration for 100 hotspot parks is 13.8 million,  
14 right?

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Right.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: What would it  
17 cost to have a second shift at every park in the  
18 city?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So essentially the  
20 reason for the second shift and that we break it out  
21 by hotspots is we identify those difficult areas,  
22 really busy areas in each park where there's active  
23 barbecuing, where there is a lot of activity  
24 happening throughout the day, and so we identified  
25 the 100 hotspots. In order to expand that, we would

2 have to do an analysis of where are the additional  
3 spaces like that, that have active barbecuing, that  
4 are heavily utilized at certain hours of the day so  
5 that would be based on further analysis and then we  
6 could come back to you with the answer.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. Do you  
8 have, I guess to ask another way, do you have a cost  
9 per park for Second Shift?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We do not have a  
11 cost per park for Second Shift, no.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: If you could get  
13 me that information, that'd be very, very helpful.  
14 Wouldn't you agree that especially in the summer  
15 months the Second Shift Program would be important to  
16 have for our parks across the city?

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: There is no doubt  
18 that we saw that it was beneficial, yes.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: And wouldn't you  
20 agree that every park could benefit from having a  
21 second shift of cleaning from Thursday to Sunday in  
22 its most heavily used times?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: In the most  
24 heavily used parks, absolutely. There are some  
25 passive areas, natural areas that don't have that

1 same level of activity that we don't actually want or  
2 encourage things like barbecuing, it's not allowed,  
3 but absolutely in those busy areas, it is helpful.

4  
5 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. If you get  
6 me that information, that'd be helpful on what the  
7 cost would be.

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Could you  
10 provide the five parks with the greatest cost in  
11 terms of Second Shift services they receive or the  
12 top five high needs, high neediest parks in the city  
13 that are part of the Second Shift Program?

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I don't know if we  
15 have it broken down by high need. We don't have that  
16 in front of us, but we can absolutely get that to  
17 you.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. That'd be  
19 helpful.

20 Moving on now, the Mayor in his 2025  
21 Executive Budget Message for the City includes an  
22 expense budget highlight for the Parks Department,  
23 and that highlight says, and I'm quoting,  
24 "maintaining the city's parks, playgrounds,  
25 infrastructure, and safety equipment while ensuring

2 acceptable ratings for the cleanliness and overall  
3 condition of parks." In your opinion, are there any  
4 highlights in this Expense Budget that you can point  
5 to that would help achieve that goal because to me,  
6 it doesn't seem like it's just a highlight, it seems  
7 like a necessary part of the role of the Parks  
8 Department. Can you point to anything in this Expense  
9 Budget that would help to maintain the city's parks,  
10 playgrounds, and safety equipment while ensuring  
11 acceptable ratings of cleanliness? Do we have any  
12 increases to any maintenance and operations to do  
13 that?

14 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the  
15 question, and I would highlight the POP programming  
16 is coming over to the Parks Department. That program  
17 will now be administered by Parks which we feel like  
18 will be beneficial to us as an agency and also to the  
19 cleaning and maintenance of our parks.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: POP program.  
21 That was also cut in the first budget in the fall,  
22 correct?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Correct.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: That had to be  
25 restored?



2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Correct.

3 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it. Okay, my  
4 next question is the only new needs that I'm seeing  
5 in the Expense Budget, as I mentioned before, is to  
6 hire an exterminator team of five employees in  
7 Brooklyn, three exterminators, two support staff.  
8 That's the only new expense I'm seeing in the budget,  
9 correct, the new increase?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Correct.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Do you feel that  
12 a team of five exterminators for the Borough of  
13 Brooklyn can help address the Mayor's highlight of  
14 keeping parks well-maintained and clean across our  
15 city?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
17 Member, for the question. We will be relying on our  
18 existing staff to make sure we're meeting our core  
19 mission. We also have a fully funded seasonal program  
20 that we are presently hiring for. We'll have 3,000  
21 seasonal workers that will come in to help buttress  
22 our staff in the summer months so that will  
23 absolutely be helpful in terms of meeting our core  
24 mission.

25

CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Do you even feel that five exterminators in Brooklyn will help address the needs for rodent extermination across the borough of Brooklyn?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It will be additive for addressing the needs, absolutely.

CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: My final few questions before I turn it over to my Colleagues are the lifeguards, because putting aside all of the other cuts that we're seeing to the Parks Department, reduction in headcount, and all these other concerns that we share about unclean parks and bathrooms in our city during the summer months, we're facing a lifeguard crisis. How many lifeguards does it take to fully staff our beaches across New York City?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Historically, and thank you for the question, Council Member, we've said between 1,200 and 1,400 lifeguards to fully staff.

CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: What is Parks projecting to have in terms of staff for lifeguards this summer?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Due to a lot of really hard work from our First Deputy Commissioner

2 and her team, we're projecting to be similar, if not  
3 to slightly above, where we were last season.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Which is what?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: An incredible  
6 amount of recruitment that has gone on. Close to 900  
7 lifeguards.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: 900. I thank  
9 you, Commissioner and First Deputy Commissioner. I  
10 know the work that you all are doing to aggressively  
11 recruit lifeguards, but what I'm seeing here is a  
12 number that is about 60 percent or so of where we  
13 need to be the same as last year. I think the same,  
14 or maybe a bit better than the year before, but we're  
15 stagnating at a time when the overall need for  
16 lifeguards across the city is much higher and isn't  
17 being met. Do you think more resources for the Parks  
18 Department would help ensure that we have lifeguards  
19 to hire?

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
21 Member, for the question and, as I said earlier,  
22 we're really proud of the work and the recruitment  
23 that has gone on. This is a national issue. We're not  
24 alone in facing a lifeguard shortage. It's happened  
25 in municipalities across the city, and we're really

2 proud of the fact that versus other cities, we've  
3 actually been able to open all of our pools and  
4 beaches, and we anticipate we will do that again this  
5 year. It's more of a hiring challenge and, despite  
6 all of the good work, there's been a significant  
7 change in just the workforce, but we're doing all we  
8 can to address that, including, as I said when I was  
9 here last time, we were really pleased to negotiate a  
10 new salary for the lifeguards, up to 22 dollars an  
11 hour, making us competitive with the state level.  
12 There's also a 1,000-dollars retention bonus for  
13 those returning so there's been a good deal done to  
14 both incentivize returning lifeguards, bring in new  
15 ones, and Commissioner Rodriguez-Rosa has worked  
16 really hard on making it so it's as easy as possible  
17 to train for, to be ready for passing the qualifying  
18 tests, taking the training, making more sites  
19 available so extensive amount of work that has been  
20 done so that we are seeing increases, especially in  
21 the area of new recruits, which is what we need, but  
22 we are dealing with a national crisis and just a very  
23 different and challenging hiring environment,  
24 particularly for this group of workers.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Understood.

3 Well, when was the last lifeguard, are you testing  
4 actively right now for lifeguards, or when was the  
5 last test for lifeguards administered, the qualifying  
6 test?

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So the work that  
8 we do starts in early December, almost right as soon  
9 as the lifeguard season ends. The certification,  
10 which is the first thing that has to happen starts in  
11 December and runs through end of March, and we  
12 actually increased the number of qualifying tests by  
13 42 percent in the last year. We went from 47 to 67  
14 different qualifying tests. We offered those tests in  
15 more sites across the city to make it very available.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: But wasn't the  
17 last qualifying test in February?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yep, it was.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: So has the Parks  
20 Department given any consideration to... in early  
21 March?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Early March.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Has the Parks  
24 Department given any consideration to expanding its  
25 testing into later months because it seems to me,

2 especially if you're hiring students in college, high  
3 school as they firm up what they want to do over the  
4 summer, it will take past February and early March,  
5 and it seems to me that the Parks Department should  
6 be doing in every way possible, all it can, to  
7 maximize opportunities available for lifeguards and  
8 for hiring. Has the Parks Department given thought to  
9 offering testing beyond February into later months,  
10 into the later spring?

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely,  
12 and I'll let my First Deputy jump in here. Just want  
13 to offer the reminder that the reason why we have to  
14 get the certification done early is we have to allow  
15 a good amount of time for training. This is a very  
16 difficult test to pass. It's a 16-week training  
17 program so in order to have lifeguards ready to go  
18 for this week, which we need and for when our pools  
19 open in late June, we have to make sure there's  
20 enough time for training, but the First Deputy has  
21 worked to implement a program where we could do a  
22 faster training process that she'll discuss.

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:  
24 Yes. So, it's wonderful. I mean, what we try to do in  
25 terms of the qualifiers and the reason why we have it

2 from December 2nd to March 1st is actually the  
3 opportunity for these students or college students  
4 that come in for the holidays and things like that to  
5 come and test and qualify, to be able to give them an  
6 opportunity to be able to come to the classes and, as  
7 the Commissioner mentioned, it's a very stringent, we  
8 do use the Red Cross manual, but it's also  
9 implemented during the curriculum that we have and  
10 it's a very intense curriculum. I mean, we're talking  
11 about the City of New York does have the 14 miles of  
12 beaches so we want to make sure that these particular  
13 lifeguards are ready to be able to exercise their job  
14 at our beaches and pools so 16 weeks does give them,  
15 as the Commissioner mentioned, gives them the  
16 opportunity to be able to condition so, even though  
17 we extended the, instead of 35 seconds to 45 seconds  
18 for the qualifiers, they still have to be able to be  
19 consistent because now when you have the qualifiers  
20 and you also have to train and, at the end of it all,  
21 you have to do the CPR test and then you have to do  
22 an exam, and then you have to do an extensive exam to  
23 be able to retrieve something in the water as if it  
24 was a person so it is quite complicated. We're  
25 looking at many ways and, as the Commissioner, this

2 Administration has allowed us to be able to do is to  
3 be able to do some modifications to be able to allow  
4 more people to qualify for the lifeguard training  
5 program. So when we talk about the accelerated aspect  
6 of it, we tried something last year, we're trying  
7 something else this year where we're inviting some of  
8 the individuals that did qualify during those three  
9 months to be able to come and now do more of an  
10 accelerated portion of it to be able to come back so  
11 that hopefully it'll generate maybe hopefully another  
12 30 potentially lifeguards.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Well, I would  
14 say I look forward to more conversations with you all  
15 to find ways to expand qualifying testing beyond  
16 February. There are a lot of swim groups across the  
17 city who are ready to help in this effort who have  
18 people they've trained as well who would definitely  
19 participate in later tests, and I think it's a good  
20 idea and I hope that we can continue to work towards  
21 that goal. It does strike me that to do so, you'll  
22 need more staffing and resources to bring people back  
23 to do that training, right, and, to me, that seems  
24 yet another reason to be increasing the Parks budget  
25 than decreasing it especially if lifeguards is a



2 topic that Mayor Adams has spoken on some shockingly  
3 in my opinion if he really wants to solve the  
4 lifeguard crisis, perhaps these are constructive ways  
5 to start.

6 Thank you so much, Chair Brannan, and  
7 I'll turn it back to you.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, we've been  
9 joined by Council Members Narcisse and Holden.

10 We're going to start questions with  
11 Council Member Williams followed by Nurse.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you.  
13 Hello, Commissioner. The question that I have is  
14 around park rangers. In Fiscal 2025 Preliminary  
15 Budget Response, the Council called on the  
16 Administration to include a restoration of 11.2  
17 million dollars for 50 urban park rangers, forestry,  
18 and natural areas, maintenance, tree stump removal,  
19 and the Green Thumb program. Have you had any  
20 conversations with the Administration regarding the  
21 restoration of those funds?

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
23 Member Williams, for the question and, absolutely, as  
24 I said earlier, these conversations are ongoing. We  
25 so appreciate the Council's support with these one-

2 shot funding for our urban park rangers, for forest  
3 restoration, all elements of the Parks Department  
4 that are so important, and so we are absolutely in  
5 ongoing conversations with the Administration  
6 regarding this funding.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: And if the  
8 funding is not restored, do you have a sense on what  
9 the impacts will be for the forestry and natural  
10 areas?

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely. I  
12 mean, if the funding is not restored, we would do  
13 what we could to keep people's lines engaged, keep  
14 people on board through seasonal hiring, that type of  
15 thing, and we'd work hard to be able to continue to  
16 move forward that program.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: And the tree  
18 pruning list, is it still behind?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We conduct tree  
20 pruning. We have a block pruning program where we  
21 prune trees on a seven-year cycle. That is industry  
22 standard and then, individual tree pruning, we do  
23 that, we have in-house teams that help us with that  
24 and you know, we have people who go out.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: No, I was told  
3 there was a backlog on the tree pruning list. I just  
4 wanted to get on the record whether or not there's  
5 still a backlog because we're talking about funding  
6 for this program and the inability for you all to  
7 actually properly prune. I just want to make sure  
8 that's on the record that there's still a backlog.

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
10 Member, for the question and, yes, we had some  
11 challenges with our contracts in the last year, and  
12 that did create a delay in our tree pruning, and so,  
13 yes, there is a backlog that we're working hard to  
14 get caught up on.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. Just  
16 one more question. It's a local question. Can you  
17 give us an update on the Roy Wilkins funding for the  
18 reconstruction of the Capitol projects, both for the  
19 new community center and the existing center with the  
20 pool and locker rooms? What is the timeline from  
21 start to finish, including design and construction,  
22 and has OMB issued the certificates to proceed?  
23 Because we saw that the funding was pushed back. We  
24 see that it kind of moved up, but wondering status  
25 because these are active projects. DDC came to the

2 community so people are looking forward to these  
3 projects so just wanted to know if OMB has allowed  
4 you all to move forward, both on the new community  
5 center and the existing work that we allocated some  
6 of the 90 million to.

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
8 Member, for the question and, Commissioner Braddick,  
9 to address more specifically. I was just on the phone  
10 with the DDC Commissioner this morning talking about  
11 Roy Wilkins. It's proceeding apace. It's in design,  
12 moving actively forward for that new center, and I  
13 know there's been conversations with the community  
14 and with all of you on it, and so we're really  
15 pleased, and the funding and the work on the existing  
16 center is also in design, and it's moving forward.  
17 They are not paused. They are actively moving  
18 forward.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. I don't  
20 know if you had anything else to add, Deputy  
21 Commissioner.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: No, nothing  
23 else to add, except that I look forward to our  
24 upcoming site visit.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Thank you. Me  
3 too. Thank you.

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I know you had a  
5 conversation with Commissioner Braddick recently on  
6 this.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Yes, very  
8 helpful.

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Good.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: We have to get  
11 DEP together, though, but that's another  
12 conversation. Thank you, Chairs.

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, Council  
15 Member Nurse followed by Brooks-Powers.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you, Chairs.  
17 I just wanted to thank you, Commissioner, for the  
18 followup from the March hearing. I was really excited  
19 to see a potential long-term infrastructure fix for  
20 the park behind Bushwick Campus so thank you very  
21 much for that.

22 I just have a few questions. I mean trees  
23 and sidewalks is a huge thing. It's a big constituent  
24 complaint. I've had a lot of folks come to my office  
25 you know, their sidewalk is busted up, and they get

1 tons of fines. Can you, just for the record, state so  
2 that I can share this with my constituents when a  
3 tree damages the sidewalk and they take care of it,  
4 who can they send the bill to?  
5

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
7 Member Nurse. I know you did a site visit with  
8 Borough Commissioner Maher recently to look at your  
9 issue that you raised at the last Council hearing,  
10 and we appreciate your support on addressing that. I  
11 know it's an issue with a fence line and gate so  
12 thank you for that.

13 As far as trees and sidewalks, we do have  
14 a tree and sidewalk program and it is not... a  
15 homeowner should not be fined if it is a situation  
16 where the tree is impacting the sidewalk and raising  
17 it so they should not be assessing fines if that's  
18 the case, if it's due to the tree, and they can put  
19 forward an application for our trees and sidewalks  
20 program for us to address it.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: And so if the wait  
22 time is very, very long and they go ahead and take  
23 care of it, how do they get compensated for that work  
24 that would ideally be on the City or is supposed to  
25 be on the City?

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely,  
3 and they can file a claim with the Comptroller for  
4 that.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay, because a lot  
6 of folks say their claims are being denied.

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Okay.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Which is a big  
9 issue, and it's several people, so I'd like to follow  
10 up with you directly on that because people are  
11 spending a lot of their own money.

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely, we can  
13 follow up on that.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: I just have two  
15 other questions. One is a local issue. Just wanted to  
16 check if Highland Park would be included in the  
17 hotspots for your summer program. I know last summer  
18 we had a Second Shift with PEP, which was greatly  
19 appreciated but just want to double-check if that  
20 will be the case this summer.

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.  
22 That would be a hotspot site, and it would have that  
23 same, yes.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay, great. My  
25 last question is related to the Portland Loo, we get

1 one. We're the only one in Brooklyn. I'm so excited  
2 to have that here. What is the cost of that program  
3 installation, and then how long are you all going to  
4 do kind of an evaluation to see if this is something  
5 to move forward with?  
6

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
8 Member, for raising. We're excited about the Portland  
9 Loo as well. There's going to be one in each borough.  
10 They are a million dollars each, and we're excited  
11 about the one in Brooklyn as well, and then it is  
12 just one of many different innovative solutions that  
13 we're piloting, that the Capital Division has been  
14 piloting to address both cost and timeliness of  
15 public restrooms so that we can deliver them quicker  
16 and for less dollars, and so the Portland Loo is one.  
17 We're looking at trailers. We're looking at modular  
18 installations so we'll be assessing all of those  
19 different new innovations to see how they function in  
20 a New York City park.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: And how long will  
22 that evaluation period take place?

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah, we'd usually  
24 put something in place like that for an evaluation  
25 over the course of a year.



1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Okay. I'm very  
3 excited for it, and thanks for putting it in my  
4 district. I'm looking forward to the results. Thank  
5 you so much, Chairs.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Questions  
7 from Council Member Brooks-Powers followed by Brewer.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you,  
9 Chairs, and hello, Commissioner, and to the Parks  
10 team that is here. Thank you for your testimony  
11 today. I know we've been seeing a lot of each other  
12 lately with a lot of recent announcements.

13 Just a few brief questions. One,  
14 obviously, you all know how strongly I feel about the  
15 newly stood-up office in terms of marine debris that  
16 came as a result of legislation sponsored by Council  
17 Member Areola and myself. I just want to have an idea  
18 in this budget if you feel that sufficient funds have  
19 been designated for this office, particularly to have  
20 the removal of the barge that is in Jamaica Bay  
21 within my District that we have tirelessly been  
22 trying to have removed, and also wanting to know what  
23 the projected timeline is for that. As I mentioned  
24 before, there is a lot of debris around that barge,  
25 including potentially oil spilling into the Jamaica

1 Bay, which is now a major hazard, and so it's been a  
2 lot of finger-pointing in terms of who truly has  
3 jurisdiction, whether it's the federal government,  
4 the State, or the City but, similarly to when  
5 homeowners or other New Yorkers are not fulfilling  
6 things that create a safety risk, the City steps in  
7 and then goes back for reimbursement and, now that we  
8 have this office, I think that it's ideal for the  
9 Parks Department to be able to remove this vessel and  
10 so wanting to understand, one, is there sufficient  
11 funding right now in this budget, recognizing that  
12 we're all aware of this problem, has the Parks  
13 Department requested sufficient funding and guidance  
14 to have this removed, what that looks like, and what  
15 the timeline is for removal.  
16

17 Also, I'm glad that my Colleague, Chair  
18 Krishnan, brought up lifeguards. As you know, that's  
19 critical, literally, in my District, and just wanting  
20 to know, he already asked in terms of the status of  
21 it, but is there anything that the Parks is doing in  
22 terms of recruiting former lifeguards or trying to  
23 kind of think outside of the box to shore up the  
24 coverage that we have on the parks?  
25

2 My last question is around sidewalk  
3 repair, which Council Member Nurse touched on, so  
4 clearly it's an issue for many Districts. We've  
5 submitted a number of requests in terms of the  
6 sidewalk repair because the tree branches often  
7 raising the sidewalk, creating safety concerns. I've  
8 sent videos to the Parks Department where people  
9 walking by have literally fallen on them, only to be  
10 told that it couldn't be removed. How is the Parks  
11 working to address that more quickly as opposed to  
12 waiting for an entire year at a minimum to have  
13 situations like this addressed, and when is the last  
14 time that the standards were updated because I know  
15 there's a metric that forestry goes by in terms of  
16 what is eligible for removal and so what maybe 10  
17 years ago may not have been a safety concern, now has  
18 become one, but I am thankful for the work and the  
19 progress we have done in Rockaway. I know there's a  
20 tree that's supposed to be taken out this year, which  
21 we got on the list last year. but there are several  
22 other conditions like that, and I know in talking to  
23 my Colleagues, we often have very similar issues so  
24 maybe it's time that the Parks Department look at the

standards and the metrics in which it's using to have these addressed and thank you in advance.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council Member, for your questions.

First off, the marine debris removal. We're really thrilled about that new office, and I have to give a shoutout to the First Deputy Commissioner and Nate Grove..

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Who is amazing, but yes.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Have done an incredible job getting that up and running. I will state that it was really primarily set up for recreational vessels and so I know there's been a lot of discussion, a lot of back and forth on the barge. Really the size and scale of it is outside of this program in that the funding that it requires is much more than what is in this program.

COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: I'm sorry, Commissioner, just to interrupt really quickly. Just to explain, the spirit of the bill had that vessel in mind so, as a co-prime sponsor on that, I just want to clarify on the record that the spirit of the bill was to include the barge removal as well.

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Got it. Okay.  
3 Thank you for that clarification and appreciate it.  
4 The Division has a million dollars in funding and so,  
5 right now, we don't have the money in place in that  
6 budget to be able to address the barge, but I know  
7 we're looking at grant funding. We've been in  
8 conversations with the Army Corps of Engineers to try  
9 and specifically be able to address that.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Do we have  
11 a dollar amount yet that it costs for it?

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No, unfortunately,  
13 not yet.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: So what  
15 steps has Parks, because we've been talking about the  
16 barge for three years now, so what steps has Parks  
17 Department taken to address it?

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: First Deputy is  
19 going to jump in.

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:  
21 So these barges, as you know, could be a football  
22 field in length, and I mean, they're huge and they're  
23 very deep, and it takes quite an extensive amount of  
24 work to be able to try to remove these kinds of  
25 barges so right now in the spirit and you're correct

2 Council Member, the spirit of, we're trying to remove  
3 all kinds of debris, whether they're recreational  
4 vessels or a barge, but we have to look at the impact  
5 and the magnitude of these barges are just huge so we  
6 want to make sure that we're very clear in terms of  
7 what is required to be able to remove this so we're  
8 looking at agencies such as the Army Corps of  
9 Engineers and other institutions that have done  
10 similar removals to be able to obtain what's the  
11 dollar amount that it would take, what is the process  
12 that it would take to be able to remove them so we  
13 are committed as an agency to be able to try to  
14 address this particular aspect of the barges, but  
15 right now we're dealing with the many, many  
16 recreational vessels that are throughout the city.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And I could  
18 appreciate that. I would be curious to know if any  
19 place as huge as of a safety dynamic as this one,  
20 again, considering the oil in the Jamaica Bay and how  
21 the Jamaica Bay in itself and the water streams and  
22 what those impacts to the local community can be,  
23 especially predominantly a black and brown community  
24 and environmental justice community so it's really  
25 hard to hear that in three years, we don't even have

2 a cost for it to say, well, let's go half on it or  
3 what have you so making it makes me feel like it's  
4 not a priority, unfortunately, for the Parks  
5 Department. We've had significant calls led by at  
6 sometimes Senator Sanders office, sometimes  
7 Congressman Meek's office. We've had meetings at  
8 nauseam with all levels of government, heard a lot of  
9 finger-pointing but I haven't seen anything tangible,  
10 and then when we moved this bill forward is with the  
11 hopes that we can finally get something resolved  
12 here, and I still don't hear the will to get it done,  
13 but what it is doing is continuing to diminish the  
14 quality of Jamaica Bay. It's also diminishing the  
15 quality of life for the residents that live in the  
16 surrounding blocks where this barge is located and,  
17 when we have weather events, it shifts and moves, as  
18 you know, to different properties, and we don't know  
19 how that could down the line impact someone because  
20 if it was to hurt someone, we are on record a few  
21 years now on this barge, so I think it needs to be  
22 treated with the severity that it presents to us, and  
23 I think that it needs to be prioritized more within  
24 this budget to make sure that it gets resolved in  
25 this Fiscal Year.

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2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
3 Member, and we absolutely agree with you in terms of  
4 the importance and the severity of the situation. For  
5 us, it was a huge step forward to get the office set  
6 up and to hire the folks that are needed to get this  
7 in place. We're thrilled that we now have that and we  
8 now have a team that can be dedicated to it, and we  
9 just launched the creation of that office a couple of  
10 months ago with you and that's an important step  
11 forward and we'll continue to work with Army Corps,  
12 work with requisite other entities in order to be  
13 able to speed this. We know it's an important  
14 priority.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And I hear  
16 you and I just want to emphasize the type of  
17 community because I know our announcement was done in  
18 Minority Whip Inna Vernikov's district, right, and  
19 while I'm not familiar with the makeup of her  
20 District, but I'm sure it has a lot more resources  
21 than Rockaway and attention that Rockaway is getting,  
22 and so while I want to see all of the waterways  
23 cleaned up, I don't want Rockaway to be forgotten.

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.  
25



2 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: We had two  
3 Rockaway elected officials that pushed this bill  
4 forward and to be overlooked and not prioritized is  
5 not okay.

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely, and I  
7 can assure you that that is not the case and that we  
8 are working closely on it. As I said, we've hired the  
9 folks, we have people in place and a team in place to  
10 be able to address it, absolutely.

11 And then to go on to your other question,  
12 so lifeguards, you asked about what we're doing to  
13 expand recruitment, and that's an area where the  
14 First Deputy and our team have worked extensively. We  
15 added more tests in more locations in all boroughs.  
16 We work with DOE. We had testing at our rec centers,  
17 at DOE schools. We had an extensive marketing and  
18 outreach campaign. They attended PSAL gatherings and  
19 swim meets and so really did all we could to expand  
20 recruitment opportunities. We also allowed people  
21 coming in for a test that could provide a letter from  
22 a doctor in place of taking the eye exam there so a  
23 whole lot of different elements that we looked at in  
24 order to have more people be able to come in and  
25 qualify and test, and we saw the difference. We have

1 increased the number of recruits from last year, and  
2 we're looking at continuing to think of ways that we  
3 can augment our process to bring in more people.

4  
5 And then in terms of the sidewalk repair,  
6 as we discussed earlier, we do look regularly at  
7 standards and assess standards for sidewalk repair.  
8 As I said earlier, the homeowner can apply to our  
9 Trees and Sidewalks program and should not face fines  
10 for those if there are repairs that are needed.

11 And the last part of your question, but  
12 we're...

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: About the  
14 standards.

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah, we're  
16 absolutely aware of and concerned about hazards and  
17 sidewalk hazards. That's why we work closely with our  
18 sister agencies like DOT to be addressing these as we  
19 can.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: But also  
21 the sidewalk claims are being denied so that's why I  
22 was emphasizing maybe revisiting so I just want to  
23 underscore that piece because they are clearly safety  
24 issues when we're seeing people fall.

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: And they're being  
3 denied by the Comptroller's Office?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: They're  
5 being denied by, I would imagine it's through the  
6 Forestry because it goes into 3-1-1 and then they're  
7 being told that it's being denied when they're  
8 requesting for Parks to come and address the tree.

9 CHIEF DRURY: To clarify, Council Member,  
10 those are requests to be included into the Tree and  
11 Sidewalk program and, if I understand correctly,  
12 that's separate and apart from whether an individual  
13 seeks to advance the repairs themselves and seek  
14 restitution by filing a claim against the City with  
15 the Comptroller.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Right.  
17 Yeah, let me clarify. No, I'm familiar with the two  
18 and, no, they are not working to do it themselves.  
19 They are looking for the City to address the  
20 situation.

21 CHIEF DRURY: Right. In most instances,  
22 these are seniors.

23 CHIEF DRURY: For sure, and it may be, and  
24 that's all, as the Commissioner noted, that's sort of  
25 done on a case-by-case basis and, if the level of

2 severity of damage is high enough, that's when it's  
3 included in the program. There are many cases where a  
4 request where the severity, and it's all relative  
5 because you have a universe of sites and finite  
6 funding, so a certain number meet that metric and  
7 others, unfortunately, don't.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And my  
9 staff just also added that the Comptroller has also  
10 been denying so in those instances, what happens  
11 there?

12 CHIEF DRURY: Sorry, say again?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: In the  
14 instance with the Comptroller denying, what happens  
15 in that regard?

16 CHIEF DRURY: Yeah, I don't believe we can  
17 speak to the Comptroller's processes of decision-  
18 making.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Okay. Well,  
20 thank you for that.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. Next  
22 is Council Member Brewer.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very  
24 much, and I really want to thank Tricia Shimamura and  
25

2 Steve Simon from the Manhattan office, and also thank  
3 you for Soldiers and Sailors.

4 All right, so lifeguards. I'm still  
5 focused on the lifeguards. I know you said 900, so  
6 are they the ones who are certified and ready to be  
7 deployed at the beaches, and was that the certified  
8 number last year because I know you said it was about  
9 the same so I just wanted to understand, was it 900?  
10 Also, are there still lifeguards enrolled in  
11 lifeguard school and, if so, how does that compare to  
12 last year, and do they train with the fire and police  
13 because I think they sometimes do respond to the same  
14 kinds of crises that the lifeguards do. That's  
15 lifeguards.

16 Tree budget. I want to know, we work hard  
17 to try to put money in for our trees, street trees.  
18 What's the budget, and then the Borough President ran  
19 around and said they're going to do a million trees.  
20 I haven't seen any of those trees so I'm just  
21 wondering, what's the budget for the trees and how  
22 does it compare to what else I'm hearing?

23 On the bathrooms, I appreciate they're  
24 trying to come up with some new ideas. We have in  
25 Riverside Park, (INAUDIBLE) put money in for the

2 renovation of the park, but it's 11 million to  
3 renovate the bathrooms which, of course, we don't  
4 have so citywide, what is your projected, even though  
5 you don't have the money, how many bathrooms need to  
6 be fixed up and what's that number?

7 On garbage, I didn't know how many  
8 garbage trucks Parks has and how often is the trash  
9 picked up? I often hear that it's not picked up on  
10 the weekends which, of course, is great for the rats  
11 so is it seven days a week, all year long? What's the  
12 status with the pickup of the trash?

13 And then 79th Street Boat Basin, what's  
14 the status with the dredging and then, of course,  
15 thank you for the boathouse, because it went down in  
16 size and I think actually people are happy. That's  
17 amazing. Also, I want liveboards to come back to the  
18 boat basin. Those are my questions.

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Okay. Thank you,  
20 Council Member for the questions. I'm going to start  
21 with lifeguards and hand it over to the First Deputy  
22 Commissioner. 900 is the number from last year. Right  
23 now, we have three training classes going on so we  
24 don't have a final number. We have both training  
25 classes happening and then lifeguards coming in to

2 recertify so we are still very much in the process  
3 but, as I said, we did well with recruitment. We have  
4 more lifeguards in training than we have in past  
5 years so we are very much hoping that we will get to  
6 or surpass the number from last year.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Do you know how  
8 many in the training classes. Even though they may  
9 not all make it, do you have some sense of how many?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: How many?

12 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:  
13 Last year we had 375 that actually were in the class.  
14 This year we actually have 561 that are actually  
15 going into the training classes, which is really a..

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Congratulations.

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:  
18 Wonderful increase. We also had added another class  
19 because we only had two training classes last year.  
20 This year, we were able to add a third class that  
21 actually the Department of Education allowed us to be  
22 able to use Fort Hamilton High School to be able to  
23 do that so we continue to increase and to try to  
24 provide the standards necessary and to try to provide  
25 locations that this can happen so we're very excited

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2 about these opportunities and we continue to try to  
3 engage and do that. Of the lifeguards that come to us  
4 are 70 percent from last year, from the previous  
5 year, so that's the average of what we've been  
6 seeing.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: 70 percent of 900  
8 plus 561 is sort of what you...

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:  
10 Hopefully 561.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Whatever, some  
12 percentage of 561 and 70 percent of the 900.

13 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:  
14 Yeah.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You still need  
16 more, but that's a good beginning.

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:  
18 Absolutely.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, trees.  
20 Trees.

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. It takes  
22 forever to plant a tree too.

23 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, so in terms  
24 of, we have baseline 10 million dollars in Mayoral  
25 funding.



2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Per year.

3 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, that's  
4 baselined, but we have a total of 44 million in  
5 Mayoral funding for tree planting in FY24 and an  
6 additional 7.85 million. We are really pleased with  
7 the fact that we have been planting record number of  
8 trees. Last year, it was over 14,000 trees. and we're  
9 expecting to meet or exceed that number this year so  
10 we are well on our way. This is more tree planting  
11 than we've done since FY17 so we're planting more  
12 trees and we'll continue to do so.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and that  
14 includes whatever the Borough President's million-  
15 dollar trees? I think they're just counting your  
16 trees.

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, I would  
18 imagine that number... Oh, do you mean what the Borough  
19 President's announced?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes. I didn't see  
21 any tree. I just heard an announcement.

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No, that was just  
23 an announcement. There was not funding.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

25

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2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. And then in  
3 terms of bathrooms, as I said earlier, our capital  
4 division has done a whole lot of work in developing  
5 new innovations so our bathroom renovations and new  
6 buildings proceed more quickly and at lower cost. We  
7 talked about the Portland Loo. We talked about in  
8 Staten Island we just put a new modular restroom.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's where you  
10 don't have a bathroom, right, but I think in many  
11 cases you've got a Riverside Park and other parks  
12 that are landmarked and they need to keep their  
13 current bathrooms, I would assume, so how are we  
14 handling that? Do we have a list of all the bathroom  
15 problems that you have?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I don't at  
17 present.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Not now, but can  
19 you get it to us?

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely, we can  
21 get you a list.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So what happens  
23 when you have 11-million-dollars' worth of bathrooms?  
24 It's a very small building.

25

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So you do mean that you have a bathroom that is 11 million dollars to renovate?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, so I'm sure there's a variety of reasons for that, where the sewer line is, the connections, the pipe, the RPZ that's required, the age.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But what I'm trying to say is, I know this seems like maybe low on the totem pole, but bathrooms are really important, and I don't know what your vision is. I know you have capital challenges, but I just would love to see more of a process, strategy, etc., for the bathrooms.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely..

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: If it's 11 million dollars, it's 11 million dollars. You can't do much about it.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No, we absolutely agree with you, and the bathrooms are really important and, as the overseer of over 1,600 bathrooms across the city, we take that responsibility very seriously, and that's why we've worked hard to be able to develop new innovations, to

1 be able to add more and add more quickly, add more in  
2 tight spaces where otherwise we couldn't, and the  
3 capital team has done a great deal of work in looking  
4 at ways that we can both speed the creation of new  
5 ones and bring down costs and timeline for  
6 renovations. The specific bathroom that you  
7 mentioned, is that?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Dinosaur  
10 Playground, Riverside Park, 11 million dollars.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: Okay,  
12 sorry, Council Member, that's not really ringing a  
13 bell, but we promise to look into that and we'll get  
14 back to you.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: There are people  
16 in the audience who know all about it.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: Okay.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: We also  
20 just want to say, because we're doing, as the  
21 Commissioner said, there are a lot of bathrooms in  
22 construction right now. We have 31 reconstructions in  
23 the pipeline at a dollar value of 73 million dollars,  
24 and we have 20 brand new bathrooms in the pipeline  
25

1 with about a similar price tag so we've got quite a  
2 lot of bathrooms.

3  
4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Unfortunately, you  
5 need a lot more if you've got 1,600.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BRADDICK: Yes, we do.

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We have 1,600  
8 existing, and then this is an additional almost 50.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's great, but  
10 you have to fix up the ones that you have. That's the  
11 problem.

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely, yeah.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So I'd love to see  
14 a list at some point as to what has to be fixed up.  
15 New is great, but fixed up. And then boat basin and  
16 garbage.

17 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. Your question  
18 regarding garbage trucks was how many do we have?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: How many do you  
20 have, and then just how many times are they deployed  
21 or whatever it is, because it's my understanding that  
22 the garbage is not picked up every day and, of  
23 course, you know what happens.

24

25

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely.  
3 I'm going to hand that question over to our Deputy  
4 Commissioner Mark Focht.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Thank you.  
7 Good afternoon. Thank you for the question. We have  
8 over 100 vehicles. I will get you the exact number,  
9 100 packers in two different sizes. We also, when  
10 needed, use our pickup trucks to pick up bagged trash  
11 if it's on a route or at a place where we can't get a  
12 packer two. During our peak season, which generally  
13 runs late April through middle of October, we service  
14 our heavily used sites seven days a week so we have  
15 staff working seven days, and we have packers out  
16 running seven days a week picking up. That doesn't  
17 mean we pick up at every site. If it's a small  
18 triangle that may have one trash can at it that's not  
19 an active, busy site. Those will be maintained less  
20 than every day, but our busy sites, our big parks,  
21 our playgrounds, certainly our pools, our spray  
22 showers are maintained. Trash is picked up seven days  
23 a week from late April through the middle of October.

24

25

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And then the other  
3 times of the year, it's less often. It could be  
4 depending on what?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: During the  
6 winter months when we have shorter daylight and less  
7 use, we have less trash, and so we go to from a  
8 seven-day-a-week operation to a five-day-a-week  
9 operation.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I have to  
11 say, I understand, but I'm just letting you know in  
12 my neighborhood, because you still have a lot of  
13 people out, they don't seem to stop, that weekends  
14 are usually the ones where they're not picked up five  
15 days a week, meaning Monday to Friday, and then you  
16 do have a lot of trash, and then you have the rats so  
17 I just think it's something to look at because I  
18 think with no more snow and climate change, and it  
19 ain't going to be cold anymore so I'm just pointing  
20 out that that five-day may be a problem.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Certainly, if  
22 there are specific sites you'd like us to look at,  
23 we...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Riverside Park.  
25

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Well, we know  
Riverside well, yes. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I need to have  
more trash pickup. And my boat basin and my  
liveboards.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. In terms of  
the 79th Street boat basin, as you know, there's 90  
million in Mayoral funding..

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That has been  
allocated for full dredging and reconstruction of the  
marina. The dredging will happen concurrent with the  
reconstruction, and that is anticipated for a 2027  
reopening.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And  
liveboards will be allowed? I have 52. I only have  
nine people there, but I want 52 liveboards.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That is a question  
we'll have to get back to you on. I'm not exactly  
positive, but happy to get back to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. Thank  
you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, let's go to  
the Bronx with Council Member Sanchez.



2 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you,  
3 Chairs, and good afternoon to the Parks Department.  
4 Hey, Deputy Commissioner Rodriguez. To me, she will  
5 always be the Commissioner because she was the Bronx  
6 Commissioner first.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: (INAUDIBLE)

8 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Whoa, whoa, whoa.  
9 We've had her for longer, so I just wanted to start  
10 off by thanking the staff for their responsiveness.  
11 Commissioner Aponte in the Bronx and Matt, thank you  
12 for answering my texts at all kinds of hours. I just  
13 really appreciate you all.

14 I'm going to ask my questions in a list  
15 as do many of the Members in the interest of time and  
16 see what we can get to. The first is we're excited  
17 that St. James is opening, the Recreation Center,  
18 which was closed during Hurricane Ida in fall of  
19 2021, is reopening, but we haven't gotten a firm  
20 timeline. Can you update us on the reopening date?

21 Second, I know that Chair Brannan, in his  
22 line of questioning, was remarking on the  
23 Department's improvements in capital projects, but I  
24 just want to highlight frustration at the Fort Four  
25 Playground and the comfort station construction that

1 is happening there, and a couple questions in  
2 connection to that. One, it has a very large  
3 footprint. The construction site has a very large  
4 footprint. Are there steps that the crews take to  
5 minimize that, especially over time as work is  
6 completed, because we have line of sight issues,  
7 parents who have kids of multiple ages can't watch  
8 their kids, so just what is the Department's sort of  
9 policies on that? Second, one of the questions that  
10 Matt and Commissioner Aponte answered me within hours  
11 about was that my toddler was playing at one of our  
12 parks, and I caught him about to lick his hand, and  
13 it was full of paint. It was just full of paint from  
14 the play equipment so the question is how often is  
15 the play equipment inspected for peeling paint? I  
16 know there's no lead hazards, at least we hope, I  
17 believe, but it's very concerning to see that.

19 I won't hark too much on the sidewalk  
20 repair contracts since three of my Colleagues have  
21 already asked about it but just to say that this is a  
22 concern as well, and we know that the Bronx went for  
23 several years without a master contract for sidewalk  
24 repair so, if you could share, what is the backlog of  
25

2 sidewalk repair work or demand, right, the need by  
3 Borough or District, that would be helpful.

4           Lastly, let me try to shorten this. The  
5 statement that advertising for seasonal jobs would be  
6 helpful to have in multiple languages, not just in  
7 English, and I'm sure in many communities.

8           My last question is on syringe litter. We  
9 have several higher needs Districts in the Bronx that  
10 have individuals struggling with addiction so can you  
11 just share how Parks approaches servicing parks that  
12 have a lot of syringe litter and what would you need  
13 to be able to meet the demand at all these centers?

14 Thank you, Chairs. Thank you, Parks.

15           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
16 Member, for your questions, and we'll go through  
17 them.

18           In terms of St. James, we agree it's very  
19 exciting, and it will be reopening in June. I don't  
20 have an exact date, but we will get that for you.

21           In terms of our capital projects, we do  
22 try very hard, especially if it's a playground, to  
23 limit the size of the construction fencing we put up  
24 and to limit the footprint. We realize that these are  
25 important spaces, but getting the construction done

2 in a timely manner is also really critical, so we're  
3 always trying to balance that, the need to get the  
4 work done with making sure there are sight lines,  
5 making sure that they're safe. If there's an  
6 individual project that you want us to look at, we do  
7 have, of course, our resident engineers, people on  
8 the ground. We can look at a specific site for sure.

9           Then, as far as paint on the play  
10 equipment, I'm so sorry to hear that. Since we are  
11 trying to keep up and make sure that we're painting  
12 and keeping our sites in good order, especially at  
13 this time of the year, we're trying to get them ready  
14 for the busy season but, in terms of inspecting for  
15 peeling paint, lead, that's done on a monthly basis.  
16 We are very, very proactive in looking at inspecting  
17 and making sure that our playgrounds are safe for  
18 kids.

19           In terms of backlog of sidewalk repair by  
20 Borough, that's something that I don't have at hand  
21 but happy to follow up with you and give you that  
22 specifically.

23           We do advertise in multiple languages.  
24 All of our postings are in multiple languages. We've  
25 had a great deal of success with our seasonal hiring

2 this year. It's been terrific. We're using QR codes.  
3 We're trying to get as much information out there to  
4 people as possible. Good jobs, great way to start a  
5 career with the Parks Department, so we want to make  
6 them as accessible as possible, including having our  
7 Council Members help us distribute information so we  
8 do try and get that out when we're hiring, when we're  
9 looking for lifeguards, when we're hiring for  
10 seasonals so we'd love to send you the flyers and  
11 have you help us distribute that information. We know  
12 it's really, really important and we're looking for  
13 great people to join Parks.

14 We are very focused on syringe litter.  
15 It's something that we monitor regularly. Our PEP  
16 officers are deployed in specific areas to make sure  
17 we're addressing issues of syringe litter. Margaret,  
18 do you want to talk specifically? I know we work with  
19 some other groups, too, about...

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We'll need to  
21 swear you in.

22 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Oh, so sorry, yes.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: State your  
24 name, please.

25

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Margaret  
Nelson.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: Do you affirm  
to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but  
the truth before this Committee and to respond  
honestly to Council Member questions?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: Thank you.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: As the  
Commissioner said, we are tracking syringe litter so  
every time a syringe is picked up by our staff, it is  
going into an application and we are tracking that so  
we have data by park on what we're seeing on a  
monthly basis, and we do use that information, as our  
Commissioner said, to look at PEP deployment in terms  
of trying to provide some increased security  
presence, but I would defer to our Commissioner Focht  
in terms of staffing for the syringe litter pickup.  
Again, we do have kiosks that we install in certain  
parks with the idea being that any syringe that is  
put in a kiosk is one syringe that our staff don't  
have to pick up off the ground, but I know our staff  
does a tremendous work across all the boroughs in

2 terms of trying to get to syringe litter as it falls  
3 down or is put on the ground so.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: I would just  
5 add that all staff in areas where we've had hotspots  
6 for syringe litter, which have historically been  
7 South Bronx, Northern Manhattan, and some other  
8 select places around the city, all the staff that  
9 maintain those parks have been trained with  
10 bloodborne pathogen training and they're outfitted  
11 with highest standard PPE gloves and equipment so  
12 basically any M and O staff can deal with a discarded  
13 syringe. It's not a specific type of staff member,  
14 it's not a specific number. It's any M and O staff is  
15 trained with bloodborne pathogen training.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Got it. Thank  
17 you. That's really helpful.

18 Commissioner, just to take you up on the  
19 offer, at Fort Four, if we could shrink that further,  
20 it looks like they're nearing to the end of the  
21 construction of the comfort station. That would be  
22 really helpful for the families there. My office has  
23 requested certain flyers in Spanish, and we haven't  
24 received them so I'll be following up with you all to  
25

1 make sure we can be good partners in getting District  
2 14 folks up there, and that is it. Thank you so much.

3 Oh, actually one last point at St. James  
4 Park. I think a kiosk would be helpful there. I  
5 started the conversation with Commissioner Aponte in  
6 the Bronx but just want to make sure to mention it  
7 here. Thank you so much.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: And I also  
9 just wanted to add, which I think the Commissioner  
10 was alluding to, we also work very closely with our  
11 partners, Department of Health, who fund syringe  
12 service providers who are doing outreach in our parks  
13 to people who might be using drugs in our parks so we  
14 have very close working relationships with them as  
15 well and meet with them on a regular basis.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Council  
18 Member Hanks followed by Ossé.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Thank you, Chairs.  
20 Good afternoon. I also want to thank you for the  
21 significant capital project in Lopez Park in my  
22 District, utilizing the modular construction.

23 I have two questions. One is general. In  
24 Fiscal 2024, we did a cursory analysis of initiatives  
25



1 and what other boroughs had at least 12 to 18 park  
2 rangers per borough, being from the Borough of Parks,  
3 Staten Island, we only have eight, so is there a  
4 reason for this disparity? As my Colleagues and I  
5 today fight to restore staffing levels, how is the  
6 Parks Department going to make sure that there is  
7 staff equity throughout all of the boroughs in the  
8 City of New York?  
9

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
11 Member, for the question, and it is something that we  
12 do look at and assess and do our best to equitably  
13 distribute the resources that we have, including  
14 rangers, and that's based on programming, that's  
15 based on activity in park, that's based on just  
16 making sure that we can distribute them as evenly as  
17 possible across the boroughs.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Okay. Thank you. I  
19 think we'll dig into that a little bit more on a  
20 personal level.

21 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: You know, one-on-  
23 one.

24 Okay. So in the City Council's Fiscal  
25 Preliminary 2025 Budget Response, we noted that the

2 Parks and Recreation Park Maintenance needed to be  
3 restored to prior levels. The Budget Response also  
4 called on the Administration to add 59.7 million. The  
5 Executive Plan does not include any additional  
6 funding for the Council's priorities, and so I say  
7 that to say that we have repeatedly called for the  
8 dredging of Allison Pond Park, which is a vital link  
9 to flood resilience in the North Shore Runoff  
10 Drainage Plan and, because this dredging has not  
11 taken place, several flooding incidents have occurred  
12 in this year in Randall Manor and Livingston  
13 neighborhoods. What is the plan to dredge this  
14 important parkland and relieve my District of some of  
15 this persistent and consistent flood concern?

16 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you,  
17 Councilwoman, for the question, and we are very much  
18 focused on enhancing the resiliency of the city and  
19 utilizing green infrastructure initiatives, a number  
20 of opportunities to enhance the resiliency of the  
21 city. We're very much concerned about flooding.  
22 That's why we're planting as many trees as we can.  
23 That's why we're very focused on our wetlands  
24 mitigation and wetlands management framework. The  
25 dredging at that particular location, I don't think I

2 have a specific timeline on, but happy to address  
3 that offline.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: We'll also... I don't  
5 know if you have anything to add to that. You look  
6 very like you had something to say.

7 CHIEF DRURY: No, not at all.

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We'll get back to  
9 you.

10 CHIEF DRURY: Exactly.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: One more question.  
12 I kind of wanted to also go back to Council Member  
13 Nurse's comment about the planting of trees because  
14 you want to do this flood resilience, and what's  
15 happening in Staten Island is that we're planting  
16 them on residential blocks and, once they're planted  
17 and the roots begin to grow and they break up the  
18 sidewalk, then the City of New York gives a parting  
19 gift of a bill that my constituents and I would  
20 imagine other of my Colleagues may have the same  
21 concern, but how can a constituent or homeowner ask  
22 for a tree that they know that they're going to care  
23 for as opposed to it being there and not really  
24 understanding what their financial responsibilities  
25

2 will be once the tree grows and prospers and breaks  
3 up the concrete in which they have to pay for?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes. Thank you,  
5 Council Member, for the question, and we've done a  
6 number of things and made a number of enhancements to  
7 our tree planting protocols over the last few years.  
8 We're planting a great variety of trees, over 100  
9 different species, and we're looking at things like  
10 how it's going to impact, how the roots are going to  
11 impact underground, the sidewalks, so really trying  
12 to plant the right trees for the right location to  
13 minimize impact. We're also expanding the tree bed  
14 that we're planting in so that gives the roots more  
15 room to grow and creates less impact on the sidewalk  
16 so there's a number of things we've implemented on  
17 the Forestry side to help smooth that process so  
18 people will welcome the trees and understand their  
19 importance in terms of enhancing the resiliency of  
20 the city without causing the negative impacts.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Thank you, and so  
22 that's the bottom, but the top, now where we wanted  
23 to talk about clean energy and solar panels and the  
24 trees create shade so that's the second big issue,  
25 which is they're investing in solar energy and the

1 trees are covering, and now during certain times of  
2 the month or the year, it's just become one of those  
3 things that we're not really understanding sometimes  
4 what we're asking for. Of course, we want more trees,  
5 we want clean energy, but these things often collide  
6 in a way that when we talk about urban planning in  
7 the public realm that we should be taking that into  
8 consideration for better planning. Thank you.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member  
11 Ossé followed by Carr.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Hi, Commissioner.  
13 Good afternoon. Nice to see you.

14 I do have a couple questions, some budget  
15 related, some constituent-service related. I do want  
16 to start with the tennis courts at Jackie Robinson  
17 Playground, as we've spoken about before. Coach  
18 Frances, who I know you are aware of, is a beloved  
19 tennis instructor in my District who championed the  
20 renovations of those courts. Yet, due to the City's  
21 current concession process, she did lose her  
22 concession to use the courts to someone outside of  
23 our District and now has difficulty finding time to  
24 use these courts to teach necessary lessons for a lot  
25 of our youth who want to learn how to play tennis. In

2 your words, can you describe the concession process,  
3 please?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, absolutely,  
5 Council Member, and thank you for the question, and I  
6 know you and I have spoken a couple times about this.  
7 Our concession process is a very public, open  
8 process. We list what is available. This is for  
9 tennis professionals to bid on certain courts across  
10 the city. We follow the City's public rules and  
11 regulations around bidding out public concession, and  
12 the coach that you mentioned won this in the very  
13 same process five years ago so she entered into the  
14 same process, won the ability to give lessons on the  
15 same court five years ago. This year, we went through  
16 that. Every five years, we put this out to bid. This  
17 year, she went through that same process and did not  
18 win, and that process is essentially based on putting  
19 forward the fee for the courts. It's a public  
20 process, and it's based on the other bidders that are  
21 out there. She did not win the bid for this  
22 particular court. She did win the bid for another set  
23 of tennis courts in this same process this year so,  
24 as I said, I think the winning bidder is willing to  
25 have a discussion and talk about ways that they could

2 continue to partner, but it is essentially, with all  
3 of our concessions, it follows a very public, a very  
4 stated and highly regulated process.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: So the concession  
6 goes to the highest bidder, correct?

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: So the reason that  
9 Coach Frances was able to secure this bid five years  
10 ago, five years ago in Bed-Stuy, it was a very  
11 different Bed-Stuy than it is now. Even the shape of  
12 the courts were in worse conditions five years ago so  
13 many people didn't even want to be on those courts,  
14 but she did. She was able to rally a lot of support.  
15 They even painted the courts purple because of her  
16 advocacy, and they got the much-needed love that they  
17 deserve. Is there anything that your office is doing,  
18 you're doing under your time at Parks, where you're  
19 looking into how to make this process more fair to  
20 include legacy or grandfather in long-time community  
21 residents who do not have 30,000 to 40,000 dollars to  
22 spend on a concession to allow them to continue doing  
23 the work that they've been doing in the community for  
24 some time?

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: As I said, Council  
3 Member, we do follow a very public process and very  
4 highly regulated process that looks at just specifics  
5 and is not subjective. It's just following a specific  
6 set of criteria. Our concessions for our tennis  
7 professionals for individual courts is different than  
8 our wider public, when we put out an RFP and a bid  
9 for a larger facility, and that does take into  
10 account things like past experience, legacy, those  
11 kinds of things, but for individual courts, we don't  
12 typically do that. It is something that we can look  
13 at assessing, but essentially right now we're  
14 following a very specific citywide process.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Sure. I would love  
16 to have some future discussions about reassessing  
17 that, but I do want to push a little bit more because  
18 while there may not be a process where we could  
19 change the contracting process in this current form,  
20 I do know that the tennis courts at Fort Greene do  
21 not offer concessions, and I would love to know what  
22 the process is in making that happen at Jackie  
23 Robinson Playground.

24 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Not understanding  
25 the question, don't offer concessions?



1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: I believe at Fort  
3 Greene tennis courts, this process doesn't exist. I  
4 believe that the courts are a bit more open, allows  
5 for more access to as many people. I'm wondering how  
6 that process can be implemented at Jackie Robinson  
7 Playground tennis courts as well.

8 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: So essentially not  
9 having a designated coach that's set up for that  
10 location?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Yes.

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: It's something  
13 that we can look into, absolutely.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Okay. We'd love to  
15 hear about what that looks like. Chair, can I ask a  
16 couple more questions in relation to...

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you so much. I  
19 do want to speak about just staff and cleanliness at  
20 some of our parks. I know that there is a hiring  
21 freeze as Chair Brannan has highlighted during this  
22 hearing. I wanted to ask how many times a day are  
23 park attendants cleaning up litter in my District, in  
24 the 36th?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: I'm going to throw that over to our Deputy Commissioner for Operations.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Every site in the agency is assigned what's called a Service Level Agreement, and SLA. Heavily used sites are maintained five to seven times a week. Medium use sites are three to five times a week. Minimally used sites are one to three times a week. I don't know how many of each of those types are within your District, but we could get you that information.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: I definitely would love to see some numbers on Herbert Von King Park, Brower Park, and Jackie Robinson Playground as well as Raymond Bush Playground. How many attendants are in a park to do enforcement? Is there a specific number of park employees that go to these specific parks or is it just whoever has time?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Sorry, it's the question regarding PEP officers, park enforcement, or maintenance and operations.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: PEP, PEP.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: PEP is deployed across the boroughs. There isn't a set number designated to specific parks. Normally, we allocate

2 PEP staff and PEP resources as available across the  
3 five boroughs.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Okay. Those are all  
5 the questions I have. Thank you so much.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: All right.  
7 Questions from Council Member Carr followed by  
8 Restler.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you, Chair.  
10 Commissioner, always great to see you. I want to  
11 thank you and your team and everyone in Borough  
12 Operations for all the work that you do in our parks.  
13 Really appreciate it.

14 I want to talk a little bit about the  
15 maintenance levels in terms of staffing, because when  
16 you're blessed with such ample amount of playgrounds  
17 and parkland, as I am on both sides of the bridge in  
18 my District, when that staffing cut happens, you feel  
19 it, right, very really, and so I want to start with  
20 PEP, like my Colleague was just asking about. How  
21 many PEP officers are stationed in Brooklyn, in the  
22 southwest Brooklyn right now, and Staten Island? And  
23 when was the last PEP class? And when are you  
24 expecting the next one to be called?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council Member, for the question. Our staffing in Brooklyn is 59 PEP officers baselined for Brooklyn, and in Staten Island, it's 37. We have an academy class, help me out here, Margaret, that is just finishing, I believe. They just finished. We have an academy class that just finished, and we're looking at starting another one shortly.

COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Okay. In terms of maintenance and operation, we have two concessionaires, two major concessionaires in our District, La Tourette and Diker Beach Park. What are we doing, particularly as you're looking at maybe doing more with less, how we can get our concessionaires to live up to the concession agreements and the operational and maintenance obligations they have, because I hear a lot of complaints, particularly about Diker Beach Park and what the concessionaire should be doing and isn't. I will say La Tourette has had steady improvements, even before the turnover in concessionaires, and that continues to be the case so that's great news.

And then the last set of questions I want to ask about is tree and sidewalk. My Colleagues are

2 absolutely correct to be frustrated with the rate of  
3 denial from the Comptroller, because it is zero. It  
4 has always been zero, always will be zero. You know,  
5 Matt and I did a lot of work on this when I worked  
6 for my predecessor, Minority Leader Matteo, so I'd  
7 love for us to reimburse the folks who have the money  
8 to front those expenses, and that's a conversation to  
9 have down the road, but I would love to know what  
10 you're looking to do in the coming Fiscal Year for  
11 those that you are going to do. What level of rating  
12 are you looking to do in terms of Staten Island and  
13 Brooklyn and other boroughs, and what would you need  
14 in order to do more? Like, how many square miles of  
15 sidewalk? What's the dollar ratio? So that we know as  
16 a Council if we get you X dollars more, that means Y  
17 more sidewalks repaired.

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
19 Member, for the question. First off, in terms of the  
20 concessionaires, I'm glad to hear about La Tourette  
21 and that you're seeing an improvement there. As you  
22 know, we recently re-did all those contracts, and  
23 Diker Beach included, and so part of that's a 20-year  
24 agreement, and we'll be looking very closely at their  
25 ongoing operations and making sure that they are

2 doing what they need to do to keep up the facilities,  
3 absolutely. I'm glad to hear that's happening at La  
4 Tourette, and, Diker, we will make sure we stay on  
5 top of that as well. Our concessionaires provide a  
6 valuable service, as you know, and do contribute to  
7 the livelihood of the park, and we want to make sure  
8 that they are living up to their contract and doing  
9 what they need to do so that's something that our  
10 Revenue and Concessions Division is very much on top  
11 of, and will continue to be and, especially, we'll  
12 take a look at Diker and make sure that is the case.

13 Then in terms of trees and sidewalks,  
14 with our current level of funding, we can address  
15 sites rated 85 and above. Was there a follow-up?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Well, I guess what  
17 would you need to sort of improve that? What would it  
18 take you to get you to 80? What would it take you to  
19 get you to 75, 70?

20 CHIEF DRURY: So actually, you actually  
21 raised this at the last hearing, and we provided your  
22 office, sorry, just a couple days ago, we were able  
23 to pull that together. I actually don't have a  
24 printout of it, but we did share it with your office  
25 a day or two ago. I apologize. We did have that. We

1 did actually give it to your office so I think I just  
2 need to circle back, and we gave you a breakdown of  
3 what it would look like at 75 or above, 70 and above,  
4 and so on and so forth.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CARR: Thank you. Okay, I  
7 hadn't heard that, but that's great, and I think 85  
8 is a really high number, and that's not going to get  
9 you much of a dent in the backlog that you have so  
10 thank you. Thank you, Chairs.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member  
12 Restler followed by Paladino.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Great. Thank you,  
14 Chairs Brannan and Krishnan. I really appreciate your  
15 advocacy, especially for our parks. It's good to see  
16 you, Commissioner and team. Thank you all for your  
17 hard work.

18 You know, I am impressed by how much the  
19 Parks Department does with such little resources, and  
20 many of us on the dais today, when we ran for office,  
21 committed to supporting 1 percent for Parks. I think  
22 there's a gentleman across the hall with a corner  
23 office who did the same but, of course, the Mayor has  
24 slashed the Parks budget. Unfortunately, the cuts  
25 that we're talking about today are the worst cuts

2 yet, and so while there are a lot of good things that  
3 I could highlight that are happening in District 33  
4 and I'm appreciative of your team's partnership with  
5 us and we're finally going to see Anchorage Plaza  
6 turned into a park space under the Brooklyn Bridge,  
7 we just celebrated the completion of the Cabin Plaza  
8 North Oval, which was great, we've seen improvements  
9 at Taffy Playground in Bed-Stuy, Sarah J. Tompkins in  
10 Williamsburg, and I'm really excited to work with you  
11 on Columbus Park, which I hope we're going to be  
12 chatting about soon, and McCarran Asphalt Lot.

13           There are good things happening, but I am  
14 profoundly concerned about what we are about to  
15 witness in the conditions of our parks. As Chair  
16 Brannan, and I thought artfully asked earlier, we're  
17 looking at a staffing reduction from about 4,500 to  
18 about 4,100. Is that right?

19           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, that is  
20 correct.

21           COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So that's about a  
22 9 percent cut in the Parks budget, this hiring freeze  
23 that would be in place until 2026?

24           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yes, until the end  
25 of 2026.



1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So I'm just going  
3 to ask a few questions, and you can help me just to  
4 make sure I understand it, because I think it's  
5 helpful for my constituents to understand what the  
6 impacts of these cuts would be, so that means we  
7 would anticipate 9 percent fewer groundskeepers  
8 between now and 2026?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
10 Member, for the question, and the impacts are agency-  
11 wide, the reductions are agency-wide, so it would not  
12 necessarily be a specific 9 percent reduction in  
13 groundskeepers.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But  
15 approximately, that's the goal across the board,  
16 right? So groundskeepers, maintenance staff, folks  
17 who clean the bathrooms, gardeners, folks in our rec  
18 centers, all of them, we would, on average, see a 9  
19 percent cut across the board. Not the rec centers?

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Not the rec  
21 centers.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And not the  
23 lifeguards?  
24  
25

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No, not lifeguards. Those are seasonal, and they are funded, yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But for all the other positions we mentioned, it would be approximately a 9 percent across-the-board cut but, of course, when you have a blunt instrument like a hiring freeze, you don't actually get to determine so, if we see a greater departure from the agency amongst groundskeepers, then we just have to do more with less or try our best to maintain conditions to the best we can in our parks or clean fewer bathrooms. Is that right? You don't have any control. It's whoever leaves, leaves, and we have no ability to replace them.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: That is correct. Our PEG that we took in order to meet the necessary fiscal challenges was an attrition PEG so we're not able to hire as people leave.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I was asked by a reporter earlier today, would this have a similar impact in all neighborhoods in New York City, and I said it would have an impact in every single neighborhood in New York City, but it's especially

2 hard on low- and moderate-income New Yorkers whose  
3 parks are our front yards and our backyards, our  
4 lungs, our places for joy, our places for sports, our  
5 places to gather, and this budget that the Mayor has  
6 proposed would create significantly deteriorated  
7 conditions in our parks and, at a time when we have  
8 such significant surpluses, I just can't fathom why  
9 anyone would want to slash the Parks Department's  
10 budget. I think it's an absolutely wrong decision,  
11 and I'm appreciative of the leadership of this  
12 Council, especially Chair Krishnan and Speaker Adams  
13 and Chair Brannan for helping us to fight to restore  
14 these cuts, because they are absolutely dead wrong.

15           Could I ask a favor? Mercedes asked me to  
16 read her questions. Is that okay? Okay.

17           I'm going to read questions from Council  
18 Member Narcisse.

19           COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Okay.

20           COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: They are from  
21 her. The proposed budget cuts could lead to the  
22 elimination of up to 700 jobs related to Parks  
23 maintenance and upkeep. What support will be provided  
24 to the workers who will lose their jobs due to these  
25

2 cuts? Are there any plans to shift these employees to  
3 other agencies who are understaffed?

4 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, Council  
5 Member, for the question. Just to be clear, there are  
6 no layoffs anticipated with these cuts. The reduction  
7 in staffing will happen through attrition.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: In light of my  
9 previous concerns about the prevalence, her previous  
10 concerns, sorry, just to clarify, about the  
11 prevalence of rats in Canarsie Park, can you provide  
12 an update on the amount of rats in City parks, and  
13 how do you feel those numbers will be adversely  
14 affected by proposed cuts?

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you for the  
16 question. We work very closely with on rat  
17 mitigation, and it's been a huge focus of this  
18 Administration. Our team attends regular monthly  
19 meetings looking at all aspects of rat mitigation  
20 from number of burrows, collapsed burrows, to how  
21 we're addressing rats across the city. It's a very,  
22 very active part of our work, and in collaboration  
23 with the Administration.

24

25

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: But how many  
3 exterminators does the Parks Department have on  
4 staff?

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: How many  
6 exterminators on staff?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Across the  
8 agency, across all five boroughs, we're currently  
9 funded for 18 positions, plus the three more we just  
10 got for Brooklyn so for the Council Member's  
11 questions about Canarsie, they would be addressed by  
12 the additional exterminators.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And those 18  
14 positions are filled?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: Those  
16 positions we're just getting in the FY25 budget, so  
17 they're not filled yet.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: How many do we  
19 currently have?

20 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: How many  
21 exterminators? Exterminators.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: We have 18  
23 across...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: 18 that are  
25 filled, is what I meant, I apologize.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FOCHT: 18 that are filled across all five boroughs.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And you'll be adding three more, okay. Not a lot, but okay. We should have more.

And then she asked me to say thank you to the Commissioner, thank you, Commissioner, and as well to her team, and I really appreciate your commitment to make our parks better for all of us, and a shout out to Marty Maher. Thank you so much.

And then just lastly, on a local issue, the conditions in Star Spangled Playground in Bed-Stuy are horrifically bad. This is a turf that like has rivets in it that are bigger than me. I mean, I'm not that big, but still. This was something that Liam Kavanagh got funding for, and it's been a few years since he's worked on the Parks Department, and we still haven't actually seen the project done. Parks has promised me it's going to happen this summer but, frankly, I've been promised that it was going to happen before. It would be really great if you guys could follow up with a crisp timeline because I'm worried about, I think it's a safety issue for people who are out there and it's a green space that is

2 relied on. It's one of the lowest income portions of  
3 my District. People really need that park space, and  
4 we hope we can get it fixed up soon. Thank you very  
5 much.

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely, yes.  
7 We will look into it. Thank you.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member  
9 Paladino.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Good afternoon.  
11 How's everybody? Good?

12 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Good.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Good. I have  
14 simple little things I want to mention. First, I want  
15 to advocate for my parks that we get to keep the  
16 people who have been there now for over 20 years.  
17 We'll talk offline about that. These are people who  
18 give their blood, sweat, and tears to the same parks  
19 for decades. That's the first thing.

20 The second thing I want to say is our  
21 capital projects. Now, we all know we get tied up in  
22 all the bureaucracy and the red tape and how we have  
23 to do this. I was wondering, just as a shortcut, is  
24 there any way possible that per District we could  
25 actually interview and ask the local landscapers,

2 tree pruners, and all of that, if we could actually  
3 get prices from those that are more local rather than  
4 subletting this out to other contractors who may not  
5 even live in the five boroughs. There's a lot of work  
6 that goes out to Long Island and up to Westchester.  
7 These are people who live in the area. I think it  
8 would be a really good idea, something maybe worth  
9 exploring, and at least seeing if they could get the  
10 proper licensing or whatever is required so that we  
11 could really get a handle on what's going on. The  
12 tree pruning and all of that, my Office does give you  
13 additional funding for that, so I'm very happy.

14           Everybody here spoke about the sidewalks.  
15 We all know that story, but you're working on that.  
16 The biggest problem is that, as David said, as Member  
17 Carr said, is that the Comptroller does not come  
18 back. Nobody's better than Evelyn. She's like a dog  
19 with a bone, and I'm telling you, nobody's seeing any  
20 kind of money back after a gigantic layout of  
21 somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 dollars,  
22 depending upon. Circling back to that, smarter tree  
23 planting, of course, was brilliant. Finally, roots  
24 that will go down and not spread out, but in the  
25 older neighborhoods, these mighty oaks were planted,



2 and so they will grow, and so they will destroy.

3 Okay, that's another thing.

4 Community involvement. I just recently  
5 did a round about my neighborhood, and I put a video  
6 out on my Facebook page asking for certain flagpoles  
7 to get painted by licensed painters to volunteer  
8 their time, Memorial Day is coming, and my phone has  
9 not stopped ringing so the more you put out there to  
10 your constituents, plant it and it will grow, build  
11 it and they will come, and I said, let's just do it.  
12 Nally (phonetic) and I did it, and they're coming  
13 around so I really strongly believe in the community  
14 involvement.

15 One more moment.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: As far as the  
18 lifeguard shortage goes, we've talked about, this is  
19 so redundant. Everybody's got to face fact here.  
20 Nobody wants to be a lifeguard. It's just the way it  
21 is. You're not getting people because they don't want  
22 to do it, and we've talked about this jokingly years  
23 ago, it was a status for a young guy or a young girl  
24 to become a lifeguard. I don't know, maybe they're  
25 more interested in using this, but enough is enough

2 with that. Face facts, and that's what they need to  
3 do, is that get your young people shaken up. Stop  
4 giving them what they need. Tell them they got to go  
5 out and earn a living and become a lifeguard in an  
6 awesome way. Also, the training that's involved. You  
7 said 16 weeks. Well, if anybody knows, if you're  
8 going out into the ocean, it's not just jumping off  
9 like, this is in Baywatch. These guys have to take  
10 the canoes. They got to go out. They got to paddle  
11 against, it's so intense so it's rough. It really is.  
12 The other thing is, I do have young people who are  
13 interested. They are college age and a little bit  
14 older. They're looking for summer jobs. The problem  
15 with that is where they need to go train is a great  
16 distance away from their house. That's one. The other  
17 thing is that some are certified, but they need to  
18 get recertified. It seems to be a bit complicated so,  
19 if you guys will reach out to my office or we shall  
20 reach out to you. Another suggestion is the student  
21 is at St. John's. I know we'll be graduating St.  
22 John's. If we start to hit our college campuses up,  
23 this is something like I said, the yin and the yang  
24 of it, and there is work involved so to be a pool  
25 lifeguard is one thing and to be a beach lifeguard is

2 apples and oranges so I think that's all I want to  
3 say. Thank you for the trees that you planted last  
4 year in my District. I'm looking for some more. Thank  
5 you. Thank you.

6 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: One follow up on  
8 the lifeguards. Before you had mentioned the  
9 approximately 900 number, is that a projection or is  
10 that 900 ready to go right now?

11 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: No, that is the  
12 number we had last year, Council Member. What I said  
13 was last year, we reached close to 900 and we're  
14 projecting or hoping to be at least at that this  
15 year.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, and the  
17 official starting date is what? This weekend,  
18 Memorial Day?

19 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Our beach is open  
20 this weekend for Memorial Day, and then our pools  
21 open at the end of June when school gets out.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay but, if  
23 beaches were to open tomorrow, how many lifeguards  
24 would we have?

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Right now, we have about 230 who are in place.

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:  
It's about 230 that we'll have, and we have to spread them around throughout all the beaches in the city so what we try to do is, of course, the heavy impacted areas, that's where we assign them first because they will continue to be recertified. There's many people that are still coming in to be recertified throughout the month of May and June to be able and, as they come in, we keep on assigning them to open up more areas.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: And just want to clarify, Council Member, this is aligned with the usual process. The number was similar last year..

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Got it.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: And we're about at that same number and then people come in to recertify, returning lifeguards come in to recertify throughout the end of May and into early June.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Got it. Okay.

Thank you. Chair Krishnan.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sure. Council  
3 Member Paladino had a question. Won't you go ahead.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: I have a  
5 question. What if we were to supply our parks with  
6 the proper equipment so that they can take in, of  
7 course, we're not talking many acres. I'm talking  
8 about for my District. We've got Bowne Park. We've  
9 got Francis Lewis Park. Crocheron is gigantic. But if  
10 we go with our smaller parks and we supplied the  
11 parkies or those that are qualified to drive and we  
12 give them the mower, the ride-on, we give them the  
13 blowers, we give them the edging, everything they  
14 need, are we allowed to do that?

15 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: We do have Council  
16 Members who have donated equipment, I believe, in the  
17 past that can be used by our workers, yes.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Because when  
19 we're in a crunch like we're in, we've got to cut  
20 that pie up. We've got to figure out different ways  
21 to do things, and I think making a park more self-  
22 reliant and training those that are there to work the  
23 equipment and perhaps they could go to more than one  
24 park if need be. I think that may be one solution to  
25 purchasing the equipment, teaching them how to fish

2 and they eat forever, right, so I think if we were to  
3 do something like that, that would certainly help our  
4 situation where our parks go. Just a thought.

5 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Yeah, thank you.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER PALADINO: Okay.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Be careful where  
8 you fish, but yeah.

9 And I would just note we're not actually  
10 in a crunch. We've got the money we need to make  
11 these restorations so we just need to get it done.

12 Chair Krishnan.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you, Chair  
14 Brannan. Just a couple of followup questions.

15 One particular is, how many lifeguards  
16 are needed to staff our beaches, specifically?

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:  
18 We can get you that number, Council Member, but it's  
19 about, I would gather that it would be about 300,  
20 400, because we need to talk about being able to  
21 spread them around to Coney Island, Staten Island,  
22 Brighton Beach, and Rockaways, of course.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Right, so 1,200  
24 to 1,400 is overall, right?

2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:

3 Yes, overall, absolutely, and it would include the  
4 pools.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Right, and the  
6 beaches and pools and for lifeguards for the beaches,  
7 sorry. Hopefully you can get us that number. So  
8 what's the, I mean, Memorial Day is around the corner  
9 so what's the plan? Presumably, we don't have the  
10 staffing to fully staff our beaches so how are you  
11 all planning to operate? Which beaches are open and  
12 when? How is that going to work?

13 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Our plan is to  
14 open all of the beaches and, just as we have done in  
15 prior years, Council Member, we will open bays as we  
16 have lifeguards available so it means that we may not  
17 be able to open the entire stretch of beach and it's  
18 very uncommon that that happens given the 14 miles of  
19 beaches we have across the city, but what we do is we  
20 provide lifeguards at bays with as many lifeguards as  
21 we can so we spread out in open areas as we have  
22 lifeguards to staff them.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Got it. I mean,  
24 I think we should just be clear about it that while  
25 the beaches will be open or pools will be open, the

2 fact is that the schedule will be affected and  
3 limited given the fact that we don't have enough  
4 lifeguards to fully staff all of them, right. I think  
5 it's just important to be clear about that because,  
6 yes, we can open them, but they're not functioning as  
7 they should be because we don't have enough  
8 lifeguards to make that happen, right?

9 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Right, due to,  
10 yep, absolutely, what is a national lifeguard  
11 shortage, absolutely. We are being impacted just like  
12 cities around the country with not having enough  
13 lifeguards.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yeah, but I also  
15 would add with more resources, I do think you all  
16 could do more to both expand the hiring process,  
17 bring in more or create more opportunities so I  
18 understand that it's a national issue, but I do think  
19 we're leaving some things on the table in terms of  
20 resources that we're devoting to this issue because  
21 of cuts to the Parks budget.

22 One other point I wanted to make on that  
23 was, I think Council Member Paladino, I've raised  
24 this before at prior hearings, but I think there is  
25 one important point to note is I think it is worth,



2 in addition to looking at expanding the testing past  
3 February and I'm glad to hear there's movement on  
4 that, and I should say, stepping back, I do  
5 appreciate all that Parks is doing. I know you're  
6 doing more with less in the budget overall and on  
7 this issue so I do know how hard you all are working  
8 so this is a no way, and the numbers are encouraging  
9 to see the increase, but we're just not where we need  
10 to be so I think, in addition to looking at expanding  
11 testing beyond February, maybe by condensing, having  
12 a more accelerated training would help create more  
13 opportunities for high school, college students as  
14 they get closer to summer to apply. On top of that, I  
15 do think Council Member Paladino's point about  
16 expanding testing sites is an important one too  
17 because I know constituents in Jackson Heights that  
18 were assigned to the Fort Hamilton location and it's  
19 just not workable and, of course, that's even worse  
20 in terms of a commute for constituents coming from  
21 Eastern Queens or other places too and, again, these  
22 are all just ways, understanding the dynamics at  
23 play, all different things Parks can do to do all  
24 that it can to maximize opportunities for lifeguards.

2 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Absolutely, and  
3 thank you for that, and we agree, and it was prior to  
4 the First Deputy and I joining Parks, there was only  
5 training happening in Manhattan so the fact we have  
6 expanded, we have moved out to the outer boroughs. We  
7 absolutely want to continue to do that and we  
8 recognize the importance of it.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Are there any  
10 testing sites in Queens?

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:  
12 Not at this time, but we are looking to be able to  
13 hopefully increase instructors so that way we can  
14 have, as the Commissioner said, to be able to host  
15 some other sites for training throughout the city.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Yes, and I think  
17 I would say that given, especially Rockaway Beach in  
18 Queens to having a testing site in Queens is crucial  
19 and should be the number one priority. Of course,  
20 having more lifeguards to teach, as you mentioned  
21 First Deputy Commissioner, requires more resources  
22 and funding to keep them on, correct?

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:

24 (INAUDIBLE)

CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Sorry, I  
couldn't hear your answer for the record. Yes? Is  
that a yes? Yes.

How many testing facilities are there  
overall? Sorry, last question on lifeguards.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: There's two  
different things. There's testing facilities and  
there's training facilities. The testing is where we  
initially have folks come in, and there were 67 of  
those across the city, and then in terms of training  
facilities, there are four, is it?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA:  
No, we did 67 testing and we had 17 locations,  
including DOE. Department of Education was amazing,  
remarkable partner with us, and they continue to be a  
partner with us so we have that, and we have,  
currently, we have three training facilities, two in  
Manhattan and one in Fort Hamilton, and those are the  
training facilities that we have now.

CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay, so look  
forward to working to continue to expand that  
significantly.

These questions are from Council Member  
Salamanca. His first question is, this was touched on

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID WASTE JOINTLY WITH  
1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 220

2 before in terms of resources and the equitable  
3 allocation of resources and looking at PEP officers,  
4 Council Member Salamanca's question was, how come  
5 there are only 22 PEP officers who are active in the  
6 Bronx?

7 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: One moment. I want  
8 to get those numbers by borough. Thank you.

9 To that question from the Council Member,  
10 so in the Bronx, they're staffed at 59 for PEP  
11 officers. What we look to do is staff equitably  
12 across the five boroughs and be able to deploy staff  
13 where they're needed so in the Bronx, it's 59; in  
14 Brooklyn, it's 59; Manhattan is 59; Queens is 59 so  
15 we look to equitably distribute across the boroughs.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay, I think he  
17 had here 22 active PEP officers.

18 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: There are  
19 additions and changes as people leave, as there's  
20 attrition, but their baseline staffing is for 59 PEP  
21 officers.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Okay. I would  
23 just add 59, 22. I mean, this is so under what we  
24 need as far as PEP officers go for our parks in the  
25

2 Bronx alone but really across the city too so the  
3 impact of these cuts is pretty stunning.

4 The other question that Council Member  
5 Salamanca had was, how does Parks manage the dog runs  
6 where sometimes there are "Friends of" groups, but if  
7 there are communities that are underserved that don't  
8 have the ability to have "Friends of" groups, what do  
9 Parks do in those situations to manage the dog runs?

10 COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you, and a  
11 good question. We know that dog runs have become  
12 increasingly popular across the city. If there is an  
13 area that is looking for a dog run, we do ask that  
14 there is a group that can help maintain it. We're  
15 doing a whole lot of work on our side through both  
16 out Partnerships for Parks, through our Let's Green  
17 Initiative to help create and empower more "Friends  
18 of" groups, but that generally is the way that it  
19 works. In terms of a dog run, we need to have a  
20 "Friends of" group or a group to maintain it, and we  
21 will work hand-in-hand with a local community to help  
22 to create one, to help make introductions to other  
23 groups that have successfully done that, but there  
24 does need to be a group championing it on the ground.

CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I think those  
are both his questions, so thank you and turn it back  
over to Chair Brannan.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Commissioner and  
your team, thank you very much. We look forward to  
working with you passing a good budget that delivers  
for everybody.

COMMISSIONER DONOGHUE: Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you all so  
much.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, we'll take  
a 10-minute break, and we're going to hear from the  
public starting with public testimony for the Parks  
Department budget.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon,  
everyone. If we could start making way to seats. We  
need everyone in a seat. We are going to resume  
momentarily.

Once again, if you are here to testify  
and you have not filled out a witness slip, we need  
you to do so at the back table by the entrance. Even  
if you registered on Zoom or online, you need to  
still fill out a witness slip if you are in person.

Thank you.

2 Also, just a quick reminder, if you have  
3 an electronic device, a cell phone, please set it to  
4 silent, and any private conversations, please take  
5 outside of the Chambers.

6 Thank you.

7 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [GAVEL] Okay,  
8 we're now going to open up the hearing for public  
9 testimony.

10 I want to remind members of the public  
11 this is a government proceeding, and decorum shall be  
12 observed at all times. As such, members of the public  
13 shall remain silent unless you are testifying at the  
14 dais.

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

23 If you wish to speak at today's hearing,  
24 and you're here in the Chambers today, you got to  
25 make sure you fill out one of those appearance slips

2 that are on the back desk with the Sergeant-at-Arms,  
3 and then wait to be recognized. Once you're  
4 recognized, you'll have two minutes to speak on  
5 either the Parks Department budget or the Sanitation  
6 budget.

7 If you have a written statement or any  
8 additional written testimony you want to submit for  
9 the record, just provide a copy of that testimony to  
10 one of the Sergeants-at-Arms present today in the  
11 Chambers. You may also email written testimony if you  
12 don't have it prepared, and we'll accept that written  
13 testimony up to 72 hours after the conclusion of this  
14 hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be  
15 accepted, just written testimony, and you can email  
16 that to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

17 We're now going to start with our first  
18 panel. Negin Farsad, Max Alexander Barton, Diley  
19 Benn, Ralph Baselice, Joe Puleo.

20 Okay, you want to start from the left?  
21 Just say your name and begin. Make sure your mic's  
22 on.

23 MAX BARTON: Max Barton.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, go ahead.  
25



2 MAX BARTON: All right, good afternoon. My  
3 name is Max Barton. I'm a construction worker and a  
4 Union Representative for Liuna Labor's Local Union  
5 1010 Pavers and Road Builders. We're 2,500 members  
6 strong who work in heavy highway, building trades,  
7 and parks in the construction industry. Myself and  
8 our membership thank Committee Parks Chair, Council  
9 Member Krishnan, for holding this hearing, and I'd  
10 like to thank our partners for the Play Fair Parks  
11 Coalition who have been tirelessly advocating for 1  
12 percent of the City budget to be allocated to New  
13 York parks, a prior commitment made by this  
14 Administration. The Play Fair for Parks Coalition  
15 includes over 400 organizations from across the five  
16 boroughs, many of whom will testify today. Our parks  
17 are New York's backyard, our members' communities'  
18 backyards, and where the city slows down and lives in  
19 nature harmony and, just like everyone in this room  
20 today, our membership shares with you a deed for 635  
21 million acres of public lands. This makes Park and  
22 Recreation funding a priority for local government  
23 service. The National Recreation Park Association had  
24 a study in 2018 where nine out of 10 Americans agree  
25 that parks are important in government service and,

2 in 2023, the study showed again that nine out of 10  
3 Americans agree that Parks and Recreation is  
4 important in government service. Americans love their  
5 parks. Myself, I'm (INAUDIBLE) member of the Queens  
6 Community Board 13, an active member in the Parks  
7 Committee there. During my time in this Committee, we  
8 see the need for more maintenance workers for our  
9 parks and more funding allocation to the Parks  
10 Department to keep our parks beautifully kept and  
11 safe for all to use. As you've heard over and over  
12 again, more funding should be allocated to Parks.  
13 Currently, project labor agreements in the City of  
14 New York exclude a substantial amount of capital  
15 project work performed by the New York City  
16 Department of Parks and Rec. We believe a simple  
17 study on the inclusion of site work to the New York  
18 City project labor agreement would yield tremendous  
19 savings. Site work includes field work, baseball  
20 fields, other playing fields, turf installation, as  
21 well as tree planting and landscaping, and we believe  
22 the cost of a feasibility study would be minimal  
23 versus the potential savings from coordinated work  
24 and other demonstrated savings provided by the  
25 existing City BLAs. In summary, it would greatly

2 benefit New York City citywide project labor  
3 agreements to include site work.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very  
5 much. Go ahead.

6 JOE PULEO: Okay, good afternoon. My name  
7 is Joe Puleo. I am President of Local 983. I  
8 represent the Urban Park Rangers, the Parks  
9 Enforcement Patrol Officers, the City's Seasonal  
10 Aides, and the Associate Park Service Workers. Okay,  
11 did I say it twice? We have a budget crisis. Okay, we  
12 have approximately 600 people that are in job  
13 jeopardy. We need the restoration of the 55 million  
14 dollars as we're all aware of. We are also down  
15 numbers with our Parks enforcement, even though  
16 they're not affected by this directly, but they are  
17 hard to recruit title. As soon as we get them, they  
18 leave. Why do they leave? Because of their  
19 background. They're all 24-hour peace officers. They  
20 go through background checks. They are employment  
21 ready for all of the City agencies, and Ralph later  
22 will go into further detail on that. Our parks are  
23 going to be in bad shape. The summer is approaching.  
24 The pools, the beaches, the recreation centers are  
25 going to be in full use. We do not have the staffing

2 to maintain it, and as we're all aware of in the  
3 news, crime is up in parks. People do not feel safe  
4 in their community parks, and it's disproportioned,  
5 unfortunately, by neighborhood parks, and it impacts  
6 people of color because they do not have the luxury  
7 like Central Park, which has its own precinct inside  
8 the park. People are going to be in a bad state of  
9 affairs once the weather gets warmer. We need to  
10 restore this funding. One way we can cure this once  
11 and for all is if we have 1 percent for Parks, and  
12 that's something that was promised to us. Not only  
13 was it promised to us, but instead of giving it to  
14 us, they took away from us, okay, and the two-for-one  
15 hiring when people leave, that only adds to it. We're  
16 in an extinction mode, okay? We appreciate all your  
17 efforts. We know a lot of it's not caused by you, and  
18 we appreciate all the efforts in the past. We need to  
19 get this resolved. Thank you.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Joe.

21 DILCY BENN: Good afternoon, Chair Brannan  
22 and Chair Shekar and fellow City Council Members. My  
23 name is Dilcy Benn. I'm the President of Local 1505,  
24 DC37, representing close to 1,000 City Park workers,  
25 also known as CPWs, as well as seasonal workers, the

2 primary work in New York City Parks and Recreation  
3 Department in all five boroughs, performing cleanup  
4 and conducting maintenance in all City parks. Here we  
5 are again, another budget year is upon us, and we are  
6 doing the same budget dance. I was disappointed to  
7 hear that the Administration did not restore any of  
8 the cuts to the Parks in the Executive Budget. I  
9 appear before you to ask the restoration of the 100  
10 CPW lines that were funded by the City Council last  
11 year and referred to as a part of the City Play Fair  
12 lines. These 100 CPWs were essential, especially in  
13 parks, and have Second Shifts. Without these workers,  
14 the parks will be overrun with garbage and rats. This  
15 is counter to the Mayor's war on rats, on how to  
16 combat the rat war if you don't have the staff to  
17 clean up the garbage in the parks. In addition, these  
18 Second Shift workers were told that they were made  
19 permanent workers, but we've come to find out that  
20 that's not true. Furthermore, my members risk their  
21 own safety when they go back to lock up parks. They  
22 have been threatened, even assaulted by parkgoers who  
23 do not want to leave the park. My members are a lot  
24 of minority women who work alone. As the weather gets  
25 warmer, these dangerous scenarios will become more

2 frequent. The parks need to be kept clean so  
3 thousands of New Yorkers as well as visitors can come  
4 and use our beautiful spaces. We need dedicated Parks  
5 workers doing the work necessary to upkeep these  
6 spaces. I want to remind the City Council Members  
7 about the Speaker Adrienne Adams mentioned in her  
8 State of the City Address. The Speaker proposed to  
9 create a pipeline to permanent civil service jobs for  
10 seasonal workers. This will be a game changer and a  
11 lifeline for so many seasonal workers. Thank you for  
12 the opportunity to speak. We need the 1 percent  
13 refunded, and I'll be happy to answer any questions  
14 if you have any questions.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

16 NEGIN FARSAD: Hi. I'm Negin Farsad  
17 representing the Friends of Tompkins Square Park in  
18 the East Village and we're also a part of the Play  
19 Fair for Parks Coalition and, like most of us here,  
20 we're really concerned about the budget cuts because  
21 parks in New York City are so many things. I mean, I  
22 know I use my park between one and 35 times a week,  
23 and I know that for my family, like a lot of us in  
24 here, it's our backyard, it's our fun, it's our  
25 access to nature, it's where we build memories. I

2 know I'm not the only one who my daughter, for the  
3 very first time, went on a swing in Tompkins Square  
4 Park. My dog went to the dog park for the first time  
5 in Tompkins Square Park, and I don't mean to get too  
6 sentimental here, but my husband told me he loved me  
7 in a New York City park, Carl Schurz, for anyone who  
8 wants to know what the romantic vibes are there. Now,  
9 parks are foundational for New Yorkers and besides  
10 all of the three-dimensional city life that it gives  
11 us, it's also our first line of defense for the fight  
12 against climate change, and I know that sounds like  
13 really big, but it's absolutely the case. It's a lot  
14 for these parks to shoulder with a limited budget.  
15 Keeping them green, growing the right plants means  
16 keeping the city cool and breathable, which will help  
17 us fight against a rapidly warming planet. You know,  
18 we in Tompkins Square Park take our role as  
19 environmental stewards of the park very seriously,  
20 and it's so upsetting when we see those funds  
21 diminishing over time so for all the New Yorkers out  
22 there, the parents, the kids, the athletes, the green  
23 thumbs, the future lovebirds, I really, I beg of you  
24 to restore the Park funding and not only restore, but  
25

2 like let's go above and so we can have a clean,  
3 green, and resilient Park system.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

5 RALPH BASELICE: Good afternoon, everyone.

6 I would like to thank you for hearing us today. My  
7 name is Ralph Baselice. I'm a Vice President for  
8 Local 983. Joe Puleo more or less spoke about all the  
9 titles we covered. One thing I noticed is the City  
10 Council's questions, majority, if not all of them,  
11 for Parks Administration cover just about every title  
12 Joe, myself and the local handle. The park rangers,  
13 extensive background checks. They do enforcement.  
14 They also do free pop-up educational programs for the  
15 people of the City of New York. Our City seasonal  
16 aides are assigned to the tennis courts. They help  
17 keep them clean. They regulate who's playing on them.  
18 They're also assigned to the closed sections of beach  
19 where there are no lifeguards to make sure swimmers  
20 don't go in where they can't be rescued in the event  
21 of a drowning. Our APSWs, Associate Park Service  
22 Workers, keep all these facilities clean. They  
23 operate the heavy-duty equipment, which a CDL is a  
24 condition of their employment, to operate beach  
25 rakes, payloaders. Joe, myself were at three of the



2 four beaches, Midland Beach, Coney Island Beach,  
3 Rockway Beach, equipment's down. They have one beach  
4 rake at each location. They have one 30-yard garbage  
5 container roll-off truck at Coney Island for the  
6 start of the season. That's like one busy day's worth  
7 of garbage. As Joe said, our Urban Park Rangers, Park  
8 Enforcement, there's a very high attrition rate. You  
9 have to maintain a special patrolman throughout your  
10 entire condition of employment. I've been a Sergeant  
11 for 20 years. The background checks are getting more  
12 and more involved, more and more extensive. You need  
13 a driver's license. As soon as they've been cleared  
14 two or three years down the road, another City agency  
15 picks them up. We need to maintain them. Those  
16 numbers Parks gave, 59 per borough. Those are  
17 beautiful day numbers where there's 59 Park  
18 Enforcement Officers per borough. Those numbers are  
19 nowhere near that. Joe, myself, the local, we need at  
20 least 300 of them citywide per borough, per park, per  
21 beach, per mini-pool, per rec center. They're  
22 everywhere. I heard someone mention the tennis  
23 courts, Von King. We have Park Enforcement Officers  
24 there. We have them in the rec centers. We need more  
25

1 than 1 percent but, again, thank you all for hearing  
2 me and everyone have a good day.

3  
4 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: When was the last  
5 time you felt you had that level of headcount?

6 RALPH BASELICE: I'll put it to you this  
7 way. Joe can answer that. When I started in 2005,  
8 there was about five of us per borough. Go ahead,  
9 Joe. I'm sorry.

10 JOE PULEO: Okay. At a maximum back in the  
11 '90s, we were up as high as 400. Again, that doesn't  
12 even scratch the surface.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: In the '90s,  
14 you're at 400 per borough?

15 JOE PULEO: No, no, no. 400 total.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Total, total.

17 JOE PULEO: Yeah, I mean, I believe we may  
18 have gone up to maybe 450 at one peak, but the thing  
19 is we don't even scratch the surface. In order for  
20 them to really be effective throughout the city, we  
21 would need thousands of them. Again, we're just going  
22 for the scrapings to keep it going as is and, to do  
23 so, we would probably need 175 additions to what we  
24 have now. They leave at a rapid rate. They are pre-  
25 employment for all these other law enforcement

2 agencies. In order to have them, we need to really  
3 beef up the numbers to keep people safe throughout  
4 the city.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And just for the  
6 record, what's the headcount right now as of today?

7 JOE PULEO: Under 300.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member  
9 Krishnan.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thanks, Chair  
11 Brannan. I just wanted to say thank you, Joe, Dilcy,  
12 Ralph. We see you, we hear you and your members. We  
13 know the work that you do to keep our parks clean,  
14 safe every day, and I've always said this, and I  
15 believe it strongly, that when we are talking about  
16 our Parks budget and Parks enforcement, we are  
17 fundamentally talking about supporting our workers,  
18 supporting members DC37, Laborers 1010. All the work  
19 that you all do, it is not unnoticed by this Council,  
20 and it really animates our advocacy so I just want to  
21 say on behalf of all of us, thank you so much. We  
22 will keep fighting to get the resources that you all  
23 need because we see it makes a difference. We see it  
24 in our parks. All our Members see it too. All our  
25

2 Colleagues see it. We're very, very grateful to you  
3 all.

4 I just have two questions. One was do you  
5 feel that you all have the resources you need now to  
6 keep the parks clean, to do your job? Do you feel the  
7 Parks budget gives you what you need to do your job?

8 DILCY BENN: No way. No way do we have  
9 enough to do our jobs. You talked about the needle  
10 crew. In the Bronx, there's an epidemic of these  
11 needles, and we only have two needle crews, and  
12 there's not enough people to clean them up. We don't  
13 have enough people to clean up. On top of that, I  
14 have 12 people that are homeless right now that work  
15 for the City of New York. We don't have enough  
16 staffing. They're not getting enough people to even  
17 clean up, do the late lockup, and this Second Shift  
18 that they just took away, and they told them they had  
19 permanent jobs were the people that did the lockup so  
20 now they were here during the winter, and now the  
21 summer's coming when everybody's coming out into the  
22 playgrounds, and they have no one to lock up if they  
23 take these lines. These lines end on June 30th so  
24 who's going to lock up the parks? You have the gangs  
25 out there. You have people out there barbecuing. You

2 have the kids out there in the parks. At night, we  
3 have to lock up in order to clean up during the day.  
4 Take a walk on 143rd Street and Lenox Avenue and see  
5 Jackie Robinson Park, one of these parks after the  
6 4th of July or either after a holiday, and see what  
7 it looks like. It looks like a battle zone. It takes  
8 them almost half the day just to clean that. We don't  
9 have enough staff now, and they talk about taking  
10 these lines. Every year we come back in here and we  
11 lose more and more and more every year. It's not  
12 enough staff now. There's no way in the world there's  
13 enough staff to do this job. No way.

14 JOE PULEO: Yeah, I agree. We're severely  
15 understaffed, and we do need to bring our numbers up  
16 to do the job that we love to do.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you. No  
18 further questions.

19 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member  
20 Holden.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So you're all  
22 understaffed, and certainly a hiring freeze does not  
23 help that situation so maybe you can give us an idea  
24 of the starting salaries, let's say, Joe, for PEP.  
25 What is the starting salary?

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID WASTE JOINTLY WITH  
1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 238

2 JOE PULEO: Okay, we just went through  
3 contract negotiations, so they got a little boost up  
4 but, currently, to become a Parks Enforcement  
5 Officer, we're talking about in the 50,000-dollar  
6 range.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: 50,000, and what  
8 about in your titles?

9 DILCY BENN: I've been here 33 years, and  
10 I just got to 50,000 last year.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah, that's  
12 unbelievable.

13 DILCY BENN: Okay, you figure, if you...

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Living in New York  
15 City, by the way.

16 DILCY BENN: Yes, and you figure, let's do  
17 it. If you pay 2,000 dollars a month rent, that's  
18 24,000, and you have the government taking another 25  
19 percent, our people ain't got lunch money.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: All right.

21 DILCY BENN: Okay, it's insane, but they  
22 come to work and they do this every day, but I got 12  
23 homeless people that work for the City of New York.  
24 That's a problem.

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: And I could just  
3 imagine closing parks, by the way, because we used to  
4 have volunteers, and we had to tell the volunteers  
5 it's too dangerous now to a point to try to close the  
6 park when there's people in it and you're saying it's  
7 a curfew, we got to close the park and we had  
8 situations.

9 DILCY BENN: I've sat down to dinner with  
10 Shekar and showed him pictures of the bathroom during  
11 COVID when they had this epidemic. My people were out  
12 there working, and we were overflowed with the  
13 bathrooms, the vehicles, the garbage. We just need  
14 help. We need help. And I can't even express upon you  
15 even more, you've seen the pictures. I've shared it.  
16 We have a lot of equipment that doesn't work. They're  
17 not giving us anything and now they talk about  
18 cutting us more. My people are out there, and they  
19 wonder why this job, people don't want to stay here  
20 because they don't pay them enough to do what we do,  
21 but my people still come in to work every day and do  
22 this, but we don't have enough to do it with. We need  
23 help.

24 JOE PULEO: I just want to add during  
25 COVID, we were all listed as essential employees, and

2 we went from that status, from essential to  
3 disposable in this current budget.

4 DILCY BENN: That's right.

5 JOE PULEO: Which is really appalling  
6 because most of our members, even the lowest paid,  
7 the City Seasonal Aides and the CPWs, like she said,  
8 we all complied with the restrictions, we all got our  
9 shots and we were rewarded by these cuts.

10 DILCY BENN: We had eight people that died  
11 during COVID out there working and then they come  
12 back and they cut our lines. It's crazy. It's just  
13 insane the way this works. And then every year we're  
14 back in here fighting for the same thing but, like I  
15 said, we need some help, and I'm hoping that maybe we  
16 can change things.

17 JOE PULEO: And we'd like to thank all of  
18 you too. We're arguing to the wrong panel, really,  
19 because you guys have always been supportive. We just  
20 want to thank you all.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you to all.  
22 Thank you, Chairs.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all  
24 very much for your testimony.

25 DILCY BENN: Thank you.



2 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: Thank you very  
3 much for testimony and your work.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Next panel  
5 is Mohamed Attia, Carina Kaufman-Gutierrez, Veronica  
6 Escamilla, Miguel Varela, Carla Rodriguez, Mohammad  
7 Biswas, and Vicente Veintimilla. Sorry, I can't read  
8 the handwriting.

9 Okay. Who wants to start?

10 MOHAMMAD BISWAS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
11 LANGUAGE)

12 TRANSLATOR: Hello. My name is Mohammad  
13 Biswas. I'm a general merchandise vendor in Jackson  
14 Heights. I mostly sell religious items such as prayer  
15 mats, Quran, hijab, hats, etc. on 37th Avenue, and  
16 I'm a member of the Street Vendor Project.

17 MOHAMMAD BISWAS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
18 LANGUAGE)

19 TRANSLATOR: Thank you, Committee, for the  
20 opportunity to testify. I'm testifying today because  
21 DSNY has been doing excessive enforcement all over  
22 city and especially in Jackson Heights area. Some of  
23 the vendors in Jackson Heights are general  
24 merchandise vendors, and everyone knows that most of  
25 them don't have licenses, and that's because the City

2 has kept the general vendors licensing at 853. Well,  
3 we still need to work because we need to make some  
4 money to feed our family and survive, and that's why  
5 DSNY has been torturing us for not having licenses  
6 but doesn't acknowledge that it's the City's fault  
7 that we don't have licenses. We think DSNY should  
8 stick to the policy announced on April 1st of  
9 compliance first and not focus on business licensing.

10 MOHAMMAD BISWAS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
11 LANGUAGE)

12 TRANSLATOR: The NYPD did some excessive  
13 enforcement on 37th Avenue during the Ramadan this  
14 year, the holy special month, and that was right  
15 before our big holiday, Eid. We all look forward to  
16 working during Ramadan because that's when our  
17 customers from all over the states come visit us and  
18 buy our religious merchandise. We couldn't work for a  
19 few weeks and we were scared that if we try to set up  
20 our tables, we'll get arrested. My son was recently  
21 hospitalized, and I had to spend all my savings for  
22 his recovery.

23 MOHAMMAD BISWAS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
24 LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: What can we do just to be  
able to work and not risk our lives? Please tell us.

MOHAMMAD BISWAS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: DSNY is not cleaning up the  
streets. They're waging a war on working families, a  
war that hurts vendors for having no choice but to  
work in an outdated system. We need the City Council  
to enact the Street Vendor Reform Legislative  
package, including Intros 431, 408, 47, and 24. This  
package will create a fair and regulated system for  
street vendors and our community.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Please conclude.

MOHAMMAD BISWAS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: Thank you, Committee, for the  
opportunity to submit my testimony.

CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very  
much.

VERONICA ESCAMILLA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE)

TRANSLATOR: Can you hear me? Yes. Good  
afternoon. My name is Veronica Escamilla. I am a  
street vendor in the Hunts Point area of the Bronx. I

2 thank this Committee and Council Member Abreu for the  
3 opportunity to give my testimony. I am here  
4 testifying because, as a cancer survivor, this  
5 situation has seen all aspects of my life  
6 deteriorate. The excessive enforcement of regulations  
7 has affected my life with respect to my well-being,  
8 above all, my health, for example, high blood  
9 pressure and diabetes, but also my income, especially  
10 given that I am my family's breadwinner. We need the  
11 City Council to approve the Street Vending Reform  
12 legislative package, including Intros number 431,  
13 408, 47, and 24. This package will create a fair and  
14 regulated system for street vendors and our  
15 community. I, again, thank this Committee and  
16 Councilman Abreu for their time and the opportunity  
17 to give my testimony.

18 CARLA RODRIGUEZ: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
19 LANGUAGE)

20 TRANSLATOR: My name is Carla Rodriguez. I  
21 am a street vendor from the Parkchester area of the  
22 Bronx, and a member of SVP, V as in Victor. I thank  
23 this Committee and Council Member Abreu for the  
24 opportunity to give my testimony. I am here  
25 testifying because the excessive enforcement of

2 street vending regulations has affected my life in  
3 general. However, with respect to my income, my well-  
4 being, and my emotional and physical health, the way  
5 in which all aspects of my life have been seen to  
6 deteriorate is incalculable. We need the City Council  
7 to pass the Street Vending Reform legislative  
8 package, including Interest 431, 408, 47, and 24.  
9 This package will create a fair and regulated system  
10 for street vendors and our community. I, again, thank  
11 this Committee and Council Member Abreu for their  
12 time and the opportunity to give my testimony.

13 CARINA KAUFMAN-GUTIÉRREZ: All right. Good  
14 afternoon, Chair Brannon, Council Member Krishnan,  
15 and Council Member Holden. My name is Carina Kaufman-  
16 Gutiérrez, and I'm the Deputy Director at the Street  
17 Vendor Project. I also really want to thank the  
18 translators and the staff who's really made it  
19 possible for everyone to testify today. We're here  
20 today to provide insight into the current landscape  
21 of street vending. The Department of Sanitation  
22 Commissioner has stated publicly in several hearings  
23 before this Council that they would take a  
24 compliance-first approach to provide warnings to non-  
25 compliant vendors and then later conduct enforcement

2 rather than a license-first approach, an  
3 acknowledgment of how broken the City's permitting  
4 system is. However, in practice, it's important to  
5 acknowledge that more than half of the tickets issued  
6 by the Street Vendor Enforcement Officers between  
7 April 1, 2023, and April 1st of this year were for  
8 vending without a license or a permit, in direct  
9 contradiction of the Department of Sanitation's own  
10 policies. The arm of the Department of Sanitation  
11 that oversees street vending is not civilian  
12 employees. These are Sanitation Police Officers  
13 authorized by the City of New York to carry weapons  
14 and able to issue criminal summonses. We strongly  
15 encourage Council to require Sanitation Police to  
16 wear body cameras just as law enforcement agents are  
17 required to do. These enforcement agents are out  
18 every day issuing 1,000-dollar tickets to someone  
19 serving fresh-squeezed orange juice, then hauling  
20 their non-perishable items to the only location in  
21 the City where items are held, in East New York, in a  
22 parking lot that's a 34-minute walk from the nearest  
23 subway station. This destructive cycle is harming New  
24 Yorkers who are already living day-to-day, struggling  
25 to keep a roof over their heads and raise their

2 families here. In the last year, vendors in the Bronx  
3 received 29 percent more tickets from sanitation than  
4 they had from DCWP in the previous year, like no  
5 other borough experienced. I ask, why is the borough  
6 with the lowest average income now the most  
7 frequently targeted for vending? Lastly, we must  
8 highlight how widely disproportionate resources are  
9 that go to enforcement instead of licensing and  
10 education. The Department of Sanitation has a 2.9-  
11 million-dollar budget for the Office of Street Vendor  
12 Enforcement with a headcount of 40 employees, which  
13 is set to increase to 4.7 million by Fiscal Year 27.  
14 Meanwhile, the agency that is supposed to conduct  
15 street vendor outreach and education, SBS, has zero  
16 staff dedicated to outreach. The only outreach they  
17 have done, in fact, is mail this one pamphlet to all  
18 street vendors on a waiting list that says, we have  
19 the resources street vendors need to operate and  
20 expand, and we all know that they do not. We also  
21 must emphasize that this is the only warning that the  
22 Department of Sanitation gives out to street vendors.  
23 What it reads is, NYC law enforcement personnel have  
24 observed you operating a street vending business at a  
25 time, location, and/or manner that violates a New

2 York City Administrative Code by either not having a  
3 vending license, your vending display was measured  
4 larger than eight feet by three feet, and your items  
5 may have been displayed on a walkway without the use  
6 of a table. This, frankly and respectfully, the City  
7 should be truly embarrassed that this is what is  
8 being offered as outreach and education to the  
9 hardworking street vendors of New York City who are  
10 small business owners trying to survive and to  
11 provide for their families. We really need  
12 comprehensive reform of the street vending system to  
13 create stability, order, and economic opportunity in  
14 communities in need. And we respectfully ask City  
15 Council beyond this hearing to look into the Street  
16 Vendor Reform legislative package, including Intros  
17 431, 408, 47, and 24, that will provide a regulated,  
18 predictable enforcement system and give street  
19 vendors a real chance to build wealth in their  
20 neighborhoods. Thank you.

21 MOHAMED ATTIA: Hello. Good afternoon,  
22 Chair Brannan, Chair Krishnan, and Council Members.  
23 My name is Mohamed Attia. I'm the Managing Director  
24 of the Street Vendor Project. Thanks for the  
25 opportunity to testify today. As you have heard from



2 so many people so far, the vending system we have  
3 right now is not functioning. It's not working for  
4 the vendors, it's not working for City agencies, it's  
5 not working for New Yorkers, and I'm here today to  
6 highlight the fact that you cannot enforce a system  
7 that's impossible to follow. No matter how much we're  
8 funding DSNY police to enforce the vending laws,  
9 nothing will improve until serious efforts are made  
10 to reform the vending system, starting with making  
11 sure that vending licenses and permits are available.  
12 It is self-contradictory that one City agency, DSNY,  
13 is fining the vendors for not having a license, while  
14 the other agencies, like DCWP and DOH, are not  
15 offering the same license for vendors. The current  
16 system of street vending illustrates clearly how the  
17 City government is failing to regulate such an  
18 important industry that has been a part of the city  
19 for centuries. As we heard today, loud and clear,  
20 from Commissioner Tisch when she was asked about what  
21 tools the agency would need to change the dynamics in  
22 the streets, she said, quote, the key driver is the  
23 number of licenses we give out as a City, end quote,  
24 a number that has been fixed since 1979, since the  
25 80s, and has been only increasing very slowly for

2 food vendors over the last several months. We cannot  
3 hide from the fact anymore, the number of licenses  
4 available is the key issue. More enforcement of the  
5 current system means trapping vendors in poverty and  
6 extracting wealth from disadvantaged and marginalized  
7 communities. We cannot blame the City agencies for  
8 the number of permits and licenses available. They  
9 only implement what's in the books. It's the City  
10 Council's job to change the law, and we hope that the  
11 Council will address the vending issue soon and stop  
12 ignoring the elephant in the room. We need reform.  
13 It's that simple. We hope that the Council will take  
14 action on some of the bills that were mentioned  
15 today, Intro. 431 that will make sure vendors have  
16 access to business licensing, Intro. that will make  
17 sure that the City is providing trainings, workshops,  
18 and resources to the vendors, along with the two  
19 other bills that were mentioned, Intro. 47, sponsored  
20 by Council Member Krishnan, and Intro. 24, sponsored  
21 by Council Member De La Rosa. Thank you so much, and  
22 we're happy to answer any questions you may have for  
23 us.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all  
25 very much for your testimony.

1  
2 MOHAMED ATTIA: I'm sorry, Chair. I think  
3 one of the panelists was not able to make it, but  
4 he's here right now so should we include him in the  
5 next panel? His name is Miguel Varela.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Do we have a slip  
7 for him?

8 MOHAMED ATTIA: He was called, like, right  
9 with this panel.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, sure. Come  
11 on up.

12 MOHAMED ATTIA: If it makes sense.

13 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yep. Thank you.  
14 Go ahead.

15 MIGUEL VALERA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
16 LANGUAGE)

17 TRANSLATOR: My name is Miguel Varela. I  
18 am a street vendor from the Parkchester area of the  
19 Bronx and a member of the SVP. I thank this Committee  
20 and Council Member Abreu for the opportunity to give  
21 my testimony. I am here testifying that the DSNY must  
22 stick to its ordinance announced on April 1, 2023, in  
23 accordance with the law and regulations and not focus  
24 on the lack of licenses or permits for commercial  
25 activities on the street. Since last year, my income,

1 my well-being, and my emotional and physical health  
2 have been affected in all aspects of my life. We need  
3 the City Council to pass the Street Vending Reform  
4 legislative package, including Intros 431, 408, 47  
5 and 24. This package will create a fair and regulated  
6 system for street vendors and our community. I,  
7 again, thank this Committee and Council Member Abreu  
8 for their time and the opportunity to give my  
9 testimony.  
10

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very  
12 much.

13 TRANSLATOR: You're welcome.

14 VICENTE VENTIMILLA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN  
15 LANGUAGE)

16 TRANSLATOR: My name is Vicente  
17 Ventimilla. I'm a street vendor and SVP member, and I  
18 work on Fordham Road in the Bronx. Thank you to the  
19 Committee and Council Member Abreu for the  
20 opportunity to give my testimony about the planned  
21 budget allocation for the Department of Sanitation.  
22 We consider that this money is promoting unjust  
23 persecution of street vendors and that the funds  
24 should instead be invested in training about vending  
25 regulations and other workshops to educate both

2 vendors and the community about the importance of  
3 regulating informal commerce to face the needs of the  
4 city. It is evident that the hiring of new  
5 supervisors or strengthening the enforcement team  
6 will not end informal vending as long as legal  
7 loopholes continue to exist that restrict access to  
8 permits and licenses. Street vending will always  
9 continue to be an option as underground employment,  
10 which harms thousands of vendors. Far from persuading  
11 vendors, you are helping us to find adequate  
12 mechanisms in the unity of group organizing to defend  
13 our rights. Sanitation has seized merchandise to  
14 peers and other members of the community that are  
15 blind and to members of the community that use  
16 wheelchairs indiscriminately or without any  
17 discrimination towards who they take them away from.  
18 We want Sanitation to inspire us the respect that you  
19 deserve, not fear, and before being just towards us,  
20 we want you to treat us more humanly, to be treated  
21 as human beings. I, again, thank this Committee and  
22 Council Member Abreu for their time and the  
23 opportunity to give my testimony. Thank you.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very  
25 much.

1  
2 Okay, next panel, we have Tamar Renaud,  
3 Jake Patel, Alia Soomro, Emily Walker, Adam Ganser.

4 Okay, you want to go left to right? My  
5 left.

6 EMILY WALKER: All right, thank you. My  
7 name is Emily Walker, and I'm the Senior Manager of  
8 External Affairs at the Natural Areas Conservancy.  
9 Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Last  
10 month's Executive Budget release was tied to the  
11 City's launch of an ambitious climate budgeting  
12 initiative. In the Mayor's announcement, he stressed  
13 that NYC's budget must work toward reducing  
14 emissions, enhancing air quality, increasing heat and  
15 flood resiliency, elevating environmental justice,  
16 and creating green jobs. We applaud the City for  
17 taking this important step to ensure that we're  
18 making climate-smart budgeting decisions, but the  
19 substance of the FY25 Executive Budget for Parks  
20 paints a starkly different picture about how the City  
21 is prioritizing the environment. Despite the fact  
22 that the FY25 Exec Budget is the largest ever  
23 proposed at 112 billion dollars, the 582 million  
24 allocated to Parks represents the lowest proportion  
25 of funding for the agency in over five years. Without

2 action to restore the budget by June 30th, we will  
3 lose approximately 80 percent of the natural areas  
4 workforce who actively manage and care for our  
5 forests and wetlands, we will lose 50 urban park  
6 rangers whose programming helps educate New Yorkers  
7 about the natural wonders that surround us, and we  
8 will again lose the chance to create dozens of new  
9 green jobs to make our trail system more safe and  
10 accessible, despite the fact that this funding was  
11 named as a PlaNYC priority by the Mayor last year.  
12 Research consistently shows that the benefits of our  
13 natural areas providing to New Yorkers all of which  
14 align with the Mayor's budget climating goals. Our  
15 forested natural areas contain 5 million of our  
16 city's 7 million trees, which absorb a staggering 70  
17 percent of the city's carbon emissions. They also  
18 absorb as much stormwater as 580-million-dollars'  
19 worth of new green infrastructure each year, and can  
20 be up to 13 degrees cooler than our streetscapes  
21 during extreme heat events. It's no exaggeration to  
22 say that our forests are the lungs of the city, and  
23 with this budget, we are starving them of oxygen.  
24 These benefits can only exist if we are actively  
25 funding the care, maintenance, and programming of our

2 natural areas. If the City really means to combat the  
3 effects of climate change, the answer could not be  
4 clearer. Invest in parks and natural areas. The need  
5 to create green jobs and care for our local  
6 ecosystems is not just needed in the future, it is  
7 urgently needed now. Restoring the budget for Parks  
8 will not only ensure that New Yorkers have access to  
9 parks that are clean, safe, beautiful, and resilient,  
10 but will also create hundreds of green jobs. We urge  
11 the City Council and the Mayor to be true climate  
12 leaders and increase the funding for NYC Parks for  
13 the benefit of all New Yorkers. Thank you.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

15 ADAM GANSER: Hi there. I am Adam Ganser.  
16 I'm the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks.  
17 Thanks for the opportunity to talk today. I'm going  
18 to reiterate some of the budget statistics Chair  
19 Brannan spoke about at the beginning. The Executive  
20 Budget cuts Parks by 55 million dollars compared to  
21 last year. The Mayor's budget is also 1 million  
22 dollars less than the Proposed Budget in January. The  
23 Parks Department is one of the only remaining City  
24 agencies that has not had their cuts rolled back. The  
25 Parks Department, as we've all heard, is in a hiring



2 freeze. Critical programs have been eliminated.  
3 Staffing levels are plummeting. The Mayor's Proposed  
4 Budget will reduce the agency by roughly 700  
5 positions. We've been talking about 400 positions  
6 this year, but that will continue as next year  
7 continues, resulting in an even more depleted agency  
8 and exacerbating inequities that this Mayor has  
9 sought to solve. What are the impacts we're going to  
10 see with these cuts? Less safe parks as we've heard  
11 from the union, decimated programming, the  
12 elimination of 100 Second Shift locations which have  
13 been crucial to keeping our parks clean and safe,  
14 reduced trash collection, reduced care for our trees,  
15 filthy bathrooms. The list goes on. The Council took  
16 a strong stance on Parks in its response to the  
17 Preliminary Budget. The Mayor has ignored your  
18 response. Nearly every City Council Member has  
19 supported our demands for more Parks funding. Tens of  
20 thousands of New Yorkers have signed petitions and  
21 letters demanding more parks funding. Over 40  
22 Community Boards and counting have sent resolutions  
23 to you and to the Mayor demanding more Parks funding.  
24 We ask the Council to stay firm and support our  
25 city's communities. Demand the Mayor reverse the cuts

2 to this year's budget and pass a fully funded Parks  
3 budget for next year. Appreciate your time and  
4 support.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

6 TAMAR RENAUD: Thank you, Chairpersons  
7 Krishnan and Brannan and Members of the Committee for  
8 the opportunity to testify. My name is Tamar Renaud.  
9 I'm the new New York State Director for Trust for  
10 Public Land, a national non-profit organization that  
11 works to connect everyone to the benefits and joys of  
12 the outdoors. As a leader in equitable access to the  
13 outdoors, we work with communities to create parks  
14 and protect land where they are needed most. Based on  
15 peer-reviewed research, we know that time spent  
16 outdoors contributes to our mental and physical  
17 health, that green spaces make communities more  
18 resilient to flooding, severe heat, and the effects  
19 of climate crisis, and that shared public outdoor  
20 spaces contribute to social cohesion within  
21 communities. Hearing a woodpecker or touching an  
22 earthworm can create that feeling of excitement and  
23 awe so important to us city residents. Since 1978,  
24 the Trust for Public Land has worked to improve New  
25 York City neighborhoods by creating playgrounds,

2 trails, and park spaces, and parks also help save  
3 money and make money for the City. In 2022, the Trust  
4 for Public Land released a report, The Economic  
5 Benefits of Parks in New York City. Based on original  
6 research, we found that residents visit City parks at  
7 least 527 million times every year and received  
8 billions of dollars in benefits, over a billion in  
9 healthcare cost savings, 2 billion in stormwater  
10 management, and over 9 billion in recreational value.  
11 New Yorkers want to live near parks, contributing to  
12 at least 101 million in annual property tax revenues  
13 for homes within 500 feet of parks. If I can just  
14 finish my last paragraph. As a member of the Play  
15 Fair for Parks Coalition, we are here to strongly  
16 urge the City to restore cuts proposed in the Fiscal  
17 Year 2025 budget and fully fund the Parks system. New  
18 York City is a world-class city. It deserves a world-  
19 class Park system. We can't have that without 1  
20 percent for Parks. Thank you.

21 ALIA SOOMRO: Good afternoon. My name is  
22 Alia Soomro, and I'm the Deputy Director for New York  
23 City Policy at the New York League of Conservation  
24 Voters. Thank you, Chair Brannan, Chair Krishnan, and  
25 Members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation, for

1 the opportunity to testify. My colleague, Jake Patel,  
2 will testify for the Sanitation Committee. NYLCV  
3 stands in solidarity with the entire Play Fair for  
4 Parks Coalition and the Forest for All Coalition. As  
5 members of these two coalitions, NYLCV was deeply  
6 disappointed that the Mayor's Executive Budget did  
7 not restore the funding cuts to NYC Parks, despite  
8 widespread support from residents, Parks workers, and  
9 elected officials throughout the city. The Mayor's  
10 proposed budget cuts NYC Parks by over 55 million  
11 dollars, and the current hiring freeze will eliminate  
12 more than 600 essential agency job lines, making it  
13 impossible for the agency to ensure parks are safe,  
14 clean, green, and resilient across the city. The  
15 Mayor's budget cuts represent yet another major  
16 setback for an agency that has long suffered from  
17 disinvestment. Most importantly, these budget cuts  
18 completely undermine the Mayor's prioritization of  
19 cleanliness, his own campaign pledge to increase  
20 funding for the Parks Department to 1 percent of the  
21 City budget, and it also contradicts the climate  
22 goals outlined in the Administration's PlaNYC:  
23 Getting Sustainability Done. Empty words are not  
24 enough. We must fund our Parks system and get on a  
25

2 path to 1 percent of the City budget. I don't need to  
3 reiterate how many benefits parks has, including  
4 public health, economic, climate, and more. Despite  
5 these benefits, due to historic disinvestment and  
6 structural racism, our trees, parks, green spaces,  
7 and access to our city's waterfront are not equitably  
8 distributed. Access to parks and tree coverage is on  
9 average much lower in environmental justice  
10 neighborhoods that are already plagued by adverse  
11 health problems and high levels of pollution.

12 Continued disinvestment in Parks will only compound  
13 these inequities and make it even worse. We cannot  
14 emphasize this enough. Parks and green spaces are  
15 essential infrastructure. For too long, our Parks  
16 workers have been asked to do more with less.  
17 Allocating 1 percent of the City budget to Parks is  
18 not only necessary, but very reasonable. We call on  
19 the Mayor to fully restore the Parks budget and  
20 finally get us on a specific path to 1 percent. Thank  
21 you for the opportunity to testify.

22 JAKE PATEL: Thank you. My name is Jake  
23 Patel, and I'm also testifying on behalf of the New  
24 York League of Conservation Voters. Thank you, Chair  
25 Brannan, Chair Abreu as well as Members of the

2 Committee on Sanitation, for the opportunity to  
3 testify. One of NYLCV's top policy priorities is  
4 achieving our City's Zero Waste by 2030 goal. Food  
5 waste is the third largest source of New York City's  
6 overall emissions after buildings and transportation.  
7 When food waste is sent to landfills, which are  
8 disproportionately located in low-income and  
9 communities of color, organic waste decomposes to  
10 create methane gas, a powerful greenhouse gas more  
11 than 20 times more potent than carbon dioxide.  
12 Neighborhoods near polluting facilities like waste  
13 transfer stations and incinerators have higher rates  
14 of pollution, which cause disproportionately higher  
15 cases of asthma, cancer, and other health issues and  
16 compound already existing environmental and racial  
17 inequalities. Due to these environmental injustices,  
18 which are only being compounded with the impacts of  
19 climate change, the City must do everything in its  
20 power to continue moving toward organic waste  
21 recycling, including allocating robust funding for  
22 these programs. Despite the urgency of reducing our  
23 city's food waste, along with many other advocates  
24 and elected officials, NYLCV was very disappointed  
25 with the Mayor's Executive Budget did not restore the

2 cuts to community composting or the original timeline  
3 for the citywide Curbside Organics program. NYLCV  
4 stands with advocates calling for the restoration of  
5 the Community Composting budget of 7 million dollars  
6 plus capital funds for buildouts of the replacement  
7 facilities planned for the Lower East Side Ecology  
8 Center and Big Reuse mid-scale composting facilities.  
9 The Community Composting budget is a drop in the  
10 bucket compared to the many other City programs,  
11 despite having a profound positive impact on many  
12 communities and residents. Moreover, NYLCV was  
13 disappointed that the original rollout for the  
14 Curbside Organics program in the Bronx and Staten  
15 Island was not restored in the Fiscal Year 25  
16 Executive Budget and instead pushed back to October  
17 2024, bringing three of the remaining boroughs into  
18 the program all at once. It is fair to say that with  
19 the stop and go of previous composting initiatives,  
20 we are wary this program will not effectively roll  
21 out as originally planned, since the Executive Budget  
22 includes PEG cutouts to DSNY outreach and  
23 communication through Fiscal Year '28. NYLCV urges  
24 the City to restore these PEG cuts for outreach since  
25 this is a vital part of making the citywide organics

2 program rollout a success. At a higher level, the  
3 proposed Fiscal Year '25 Executive Budget cuts  
4 directly undermine our City's Climate and Zero Waste  
5 goals outlined in PlaNYC in addition to the Mayor's  
6 own quality-of-life goals, a theme he continues to  
7 champion with the climate crisis growing more and  
8 more by the day. This is no time for New York City to  
9 cut funding for zero waste initiatives and outreach.  
10 With higher than anticipated tax revenues, we hope  
11 the City restores the Community Composting program  
12 funding and allocates robust funding over the next  
13 several years, not only for operations and staffing,  
14 but also for outreach and education and enforcement  
15 of the curbside organics program. Thank you for the  
16 opportunity to speak.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Thank  
18 you all for your testimony.

19 Okay, next panel is Preeti Sodhi, Joaquin  
20 Eleno, Mame Bousso Kane, Angela Padilla, Keisha  
21 Lewis, Iyana McGhaney, Fahad Hussain.

22 You want to start from my right and go  
23 left? Start that way? Whatever you want. Go ahead.

24 PREETI SODHI: Good afternoon, everyone.  
25 My name is Preeti Sodhi, and I'm the Senior Director



2 of Community and Government Relations with Friends of  
3 the High Line, the non-profit organization  
4 responsible for the High Line's maintenance and  
5 operations. To begin, several thank yous are in  
6 order. To the City Council Finance and Parks  
7 Committees, thank you for holding this hearing. To  
8 the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation  
9 for their partnership in operating the High Line and  
10 for very recently for going above and beyond in  
11 response to the new U.S. House of Representatives  
12 Community Project Funding Guidelines. Also thank you  
13 to the many individuals and organizations who support  
14 us. I'd also like to thank our teen staff,  
15 particularly those sitting next to me. As  
16 participants in the High Line Teen Employment  
17 Program's Civic Engagement Pathway, they represent  
18 some of the most inquisitive and engaged members of  
19 our local community. Today, we remain uniquely  
20 reliant upon this community because unlike many other  
21 New York City parks, we are responsible for raising  
22 nearly 100 percent of our operating budget. The Parks  
23 Department cannot provide us with any annual  
24 operating support, despite our park's enormous  
25 economic impact. The High Line produces 64 million in

2 annual tax revenue, and visitation spurs 50 million  
3 dollars in local spending, bringing 114 million  
4 dollars into New York's economy every year. This is  
5 over five times our operating budget, a significant  
6 return on investment, particularly for a public  
7 amenity, and these numbers are far from the full  
8 story. Our deepest impact is felt locally, and our  
9 greatest responsibility is to the people who rely on  
10 the High Line as green space, to access world-class  
11 art installations, and for connections to educational  
12 and work opportunities, and more. About half of our 6  
13 million annual visitors are from New York City, and  
14 nearly 20 percent of visitors claim the High Line as  
15 their local park. Each year, over 10,000 New Yorkers  
16 participate in our culturally relevant, community-  
17 informed programming. As measurements of loneliness  
18 climb, the mental health crisis continues, and third  
19 spaces disappear, it is critical that the High Line  
20 and all City parks receive adequate funding so that  
21 they can remain community resources. Finally, we call  
22 on the City to follow through on Mayor Adams'  
23 unrealized commitment to allocate 1 percent of the  
24 City's budgets to Parks, and to re-examine existing  
25 relationships with organizations such as the High

2 Line to ensure that all public green spaces receive  
3 sustaining baselined funding. Thank you.

4 KEISHA LEWIS: Good afternoon, Committee  
5 Chairs and the Members of the Committee. Thank you  
6 for convening the hearing. My name is Keisha Lewis,  
7 and I am here representing the High Line Teen  
8 Employment Program, a program that employs teens  
9 across the city and focuses on building workforce  
10 skills in horticulture, civic engagement, and arts  
11 and culture. I live in the South Bronx, where clean,  
12 well-taken-care-of green spaces are already so scarce  
13 to begin with. The local government fails to realize  
14 the importance that parks take in the lives of  
15 teenagers who grow up in New York City. Not only do  
16 parks positively affect mental health as a whole, but  
17 are also a common place for teens to safely hang out  
18 without the lingering feeling of being a victim to  
19 the violence in the streets. With the proposed budget  
20 cuts of 55 million and over 600 essential jobs being  
21 at risk, it would be a drastic change that will  
22 impact millions of New Yorkers. We'll be taking away  
23 the spaces where countless memories and family  
24 traditions are embedded into the soil of the space,  
25 where generations after generations have seen each

2 other laugh, cry, and have just grown alongside the  
3 park. These families demand 1 percent of the City  
4 Budget for New York City Parks. Low-income  
5 communities deserve to have clean, taken-care-of,  
6 safe green spaces. We deserve it. Not only are  
7 residents being affected by those budget cuts, but we  
8 are forgetting those whose lives are being supported  
9 by their employment to the Parks Department. 600  
10 jobs, thousands of lives. This could be your mom,  
11 brother, cousin, uncle, next-door neighbor. Just  
12 because it does not affect you directly does not mean  
13 that it is not affecting those around you. As a  
14 community, we need to understand the magnitude this  
15 budget cut proposes. Since 1980, the budget has  
16 increased 127 percent, and almost every other  
17 Department has had an increase of 127 percent through  
18 165 percent, except the Parks Department, with only  
19 72 percent. The Parks Department cannot afford this  
20 budget cut. They are overworked, understaffed, and  
21 underpaid. These Park workers demand 1 percent of the  
22 City budget for New York City Parks. Thank you.

23 ANGELA PADILLA: Good afternoon, Committee  
24 Chairs and Members of the Committee. Thank you for  
25 having this hearing. My name is Angela, and I am from

2 the Highline Teen Employment Program, a member of the  
3 Play Fair Coalition. I am from Harlem and have lived  
4 there most of my life. Today I wanted to talk about  
5 how New York City Parks deserve more from us.

6 Currently, some of our parks are already in very bad  
7 conditions, to the point where some parents do not  
8 even feel comfortable taking their children to  
9 certain areas, certain parks or playgrounds due to  
10 drug dealers, gangs, or gun violence happening in the  
11 area. Cutting down the budget is only going to make  
12 this worse, as it is inviting negative energy to take  
13 over spaces for family and youth who are trying to  
14 enjoy public spaces, where they are able to bond and  
15 enjoy each other's time, to the point where some  
16 students do not even feel safe going to their nearby  
17 park because there might be dangerous individuals  
18 that have taken over. We need 1 percent of the City  
19 operating budget to fund the Parks Department. Thank  
20 you for listening.

21 MAME BOUSSO KANE: Good afternoon to the  
22 Committee Chairs and the Members of the Committee. My  
23 name is Mame Bousso Kane, and I am here with the High  
24 Line Teen Employment Program. I am from the South  
25 Bronx, and I have always been a nature kid, just like

2 many other kids from the Bronx. Between work, home,  
3 and school, our City parks are one of our only free,  
4 emphasis on free, third spaces for us to gather and  
5 spend time together. We hold our parks dear to our  
6 hearts as we grew up in these parks, coming out to  
7 play with friends and cousins, having Fourth of July  
8 barbecues, and scraping our knees on the concrete as  
9 we fall. We all have had so many memories and  
10 personal connections with these parks. As most of us  
11 live in apartments, New York parks are our very own  
12 oasis, but our beloved parks have been neglected by  
13 the City. While the city is growing and obstacles  
14 arise, the City still has the largest City budget in  
15 the country, yet the percentage of our operating  
16 budget assigned to Parks does not compare to other  
17 cities. With this beyond an adequate budget, it is  
18 clear to my generation that the people in charge have  
19 forgotten about our need for free outdoor spaces that  
20 are clean and safe. This budget cut does not reflect  
21 the importance of creating jobs for people like me  
22 who would want to learn how to maintain parks and  
23 give back to my community. The Parks Department  
24 manages so much more than just parks. The care and  
25 staffing for pools, recreation centers, beaches, ball

2 fields, and courts has been lacking, leading them to  
3 be out of use. What benefit are these amazing  
4 facilities if the people of New York can't enjoy  
5 their safe and clean environments? As your  
6 constituent, I'm asking you to increase the City  
7 budget to 1 percent instead of cutting it, even  
8 though I believe it should be more than that, because  
9 I believe that we have the budget for it and, as the  
10 biggest city in the United States, we should  
11 represent and have beautiful parks all over the city  
12 that are perfectly designed for our use. Thank you  
13 for your time.

14 JOAQUIN ELENO: Hello, Committee Chairs  
15 and Members of the Committee. My name is Joaquin  
16 Eleno. I'm with the High Line Teens Employment  
17 Program. I'm from Elliott Chelsea Houses, and I'm  
18 here to testify with the Play Fair Coalition, and I'm  
19 here to say that NYC Parks need their fair share of  
20 funding. Through multiple Administrations, the Parks  
21 Department's budget has been cut, and with each cut,  
22 the Parks Department is able to do less and less with  
23 what they have. In New York City, where most  
24 residents don't have backyards, parks are supposed to  
25 be our backyards, and when they are underfunded, they

2 do more harm than good for us. With underfunded  
3 Parks, we get an increase of other issues that worsen  
4 pre-existing problems in New York City. Third spaces  
5 are very important for our communities, for our  
6 children, teens, and our elderly. With more budget  
7 cuts to the Parks Department, it will inhibit the  
8 goal of third spaces, which are supposed to be a  
9 place in between work and home. With a decline in  
10 amenities or in maintenance and oversight, as  
11 proposed by the current Administration's previous  
12 budget, it would decrease visitation to these parks,  
13 effectively taking away third spaces used by many  
14 different New Yorkers in many different ways, and I  
15 thank you for your time.

16 IYANA MCGHANEY: Good afternoon, Committee  
17 Chairs and Members of the Committee. My name is Iyana  
18 McGhaney, and I'm here representing the High Line  
19 Teen Employment, a member of the Play Fair Coalition.  
20 I live in the East Bronx and grew up in the city in  
21 an apartment so the parks of New York City have  
22 always been an essential part of my life, and the  
23 funding that we already have was pretty meager. I  
24 have been to parks in New York City that resembles  
25 dumpsters with used drug needles scattered across it.



2 If anything, we should be increasing funding to make  
3 it nicer for families who don't have access to a  
4 backyard. Thank you for your time.

5 FAHAD HUSSAIN: Good afternoon, Committee  
6 Chairs and Members of the Committee. Thank you for  
7 convening the hearing. My name is Fahad Hussain, and  
8 I am representing the High Line Teen Employment, a  
9 member of the Play Fair Coalition. I would like to  
10 pause for a second and remind everybody why our  
11 public parks were created. To combat pollution,  
12 alleviate overcrowding, and address the lack of green  
13 spaces in our city. These very parks that this  
14 Administration wants to cut funding, they provide  
15 essential green spaces for our citizens. Mayor Adams'  
16 decision to propose a cut of 55 million dollars from  
17 the Park budget is quite unwise. Without this  
18 funding, we are going to see an increase in pollution  
19 and littering in playgrounds where the youth of our  
20 city spend their time. Our bathrooms will be filthy,  
21 and our trees will not be maintained, leading to  
22 overall chaos. Growing up in an underfunded community  
23 in the South Bronx, I saw firsthand how insufficient  
24 Park funding impacted our lives. Our park swings were  
25 barely functional, graffiti covered the slides, and

2 the monkey bars left our hands with filth. Only when  
3 funding increases did our parks receive much-needed  
4 renovations. Cutting this funding will cause our  
5 parks to deteriorate once again, back to the  
6 nightmare it once was. Furthermore, these budget cuts  
7 affect City Park workers like my neighbor, who lost  
8 her job because of similar cuts. Workers like her  
9 depend on these jobs and their income in order to  
10 live a sufficient life in New York City. Without  
11 these jobs, we are seeing an increase in homelessness  
12 and more people at risk of losing employment, which  
13 is a problem we should aim to be solving. New York  
14 City parks will also all suffer from the lack of  
15 maintenance, leading to a decline in tourism and  
16 economic loss. In summary, we are here to ask for at  
17 least 1 percent of the operating budget to be  
18 allocated to the Parks Department. This funding is  
19 crucial to maintain our green spaces, support our  
20 workers, and preserve the benefits these parks  
21 provide to us and our city. Thank you guys, and I  
22 appreciate you guys for your time.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Chair Krishnan.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON KRISHNAN: I just wanted to  
25 say thank you all so much for testifying. Your great,

2 powerful words about how important our parks are,  
3 your dedication to the issue as students, too. You  
4 know, we do this work all together, but really what  
5 we do for our parks affects you all, and it's the  
6 future we're fighting for, for you all, and to see  
7 you all as part of that fight with us gives us such  
8 energy to keep moving forward, and we're very  
9 grateful for that so, amazing work, and thank you for  
10 your commitment to our parks, too.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all  
12 very much for your testimony.

13 Okay, next panel. Morgan Monaco, Vanessa  
14 Butler, Merritt Birnbaum, Christina Taylor, Rosa  
15 Chang, Keri Butler.

16 You can begin.

17 MERRITT BIRNBAUM: Can you hear me?

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yep.

19 MERRITT BIRNBAUM: My name is Merritt  
20 Birnbaum. I'm the President and CEO of Riverside Park  
21 Conservancy. We are here to join with our Play Fair  
22 colleagues and demand that the Mayor fulfill his  
23 promise of 1 percent of the budget for Parks. Our  
24 district at Riverside is responsible for six miles,  
25 450 acres of public green space. We work alongside

2 our colleagues in the Parks Department to care for  
3 five parks that are critical to the health and  
4 happiness of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers on  
5 the West Side, Harlem, and Washington Heights. Our  
6 parks are in crisis. We see it every day. We see the  
7 bathrooms that are closed at 3 p.m. We see the  
8 overflowing trash cans on a Sunday afternoon. We see  
9 it in the graffiti and the acts of vandalism. And I  
10 want to be clear that this is not because Parks  
11 workers aren't doing their jobs above and beyond the  
12 call of duty. It is because there are simply not  
13 enough of them. The vast majority of parks don't have  
14 conservancies to help them, so our situation only  
15 underscores how dire this really is. What does it  
16 mean to cut the Parks budget? Well, this year it  
17 means somewhere between 600 and 900 fewer workers, as  
18 we've heard but, as you know, we are suffering from  
19 year after year of neglect and underfunding. Fifteen  
20 years ago in our district in Riverside, at this time  
21 of year, we had 79 CPWs working in our park. Right  
22 now, we have about 20, and we're still waiting to  
23 hear what the next couple of months will bring. As  
24 you know, they do everything in our park. They do all  
25 of the things that no one in the city wants to do,

2 picking up trash, cleaning out overflowing toilets.  
3 They are the front line of the Parks Department, and  
4 in our district alone, they've fallen to about 25  
5 percent of what they were 15 years ago. It's a  
6 disgrace. It's a disgrace that five decades ago there  
7 were 7,000 of these workers, and now there are 4,000  
8 of them, despite the fact that we have 200 more parks  
9 than we did five decades ago. This Mayor needs to  
10 fund Parks. He needs to fund the staff that we need.  
11 If he stands for sanitation and safety, he needs to  
12 take care of the sanitation and safety of our green  
13 spaces. This is a rounding error, as we've heard over  
14 and over again, but it means the world for the parks  
15 and the staff that we need to care for them. Thank  
16 you.

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

18 KERI BUTLER: Thank you. Good afternoon.

19 My name is Keri Butler, and I am with the Municipal  
20 Art Society of New York. We are a proud member of the  
21 Play Fair for Parks Coalition and the Forest for All  
22 Coalition, and we stand here in support of our  
23 colleagues to urge you to restore the Parks budget  
24 and work toward 1 percent for Parks. I know you all  
25 have received a lot of data today, so I'm not going

2 to repeat it all. I do want to emphasize that parks,  
3 our open spaces, our green spaces, our urban canopy,  
4 these are essential infrastructure. They should be  
5 funded in the same way, with the same attention that  
6 we give our streets and our sewers. They are not  
7 nice-to-haves, they are must-haves and, when I talk  
8 about social infrastructure, I mean these are  
9 essential to our public health, mental, physical, you  
10 all know this, also our local economy, supporting  
11 local vendors, people of all ages coming to learn. We  
12 talked about the marinas. We talked about recreation  
13 centers. The bathrooms, of course, are essential. We  
14 talk about green infrastructure. This is critical to  
15 fighting climate change. Extreme heat is the number  
16 one weather-related cause of death in our country,  
17 and trees are a powerful way to mitigate that and  
18 sequester carbon so these are all going to meet, as  
19 people already said, our PlaNYC goals, our  
20 sustainability goals, as our Mayor has said that he  
21 wants to do. So I do want to also say that I worked  
22 in City government for 16 years, and Parks employees  
23 that I worked with were some of the most dedicated,  
24 hard-working City employees that I worked with so  
25 it's not about them. They're out there doing the hard

2 work every day. We need the money. We have the data.  
3 You've got the stories. We need you to restore the  
4 budget. Thank you.

5 VANESSA BUTLER: Good afternoon, Chair  
6 Krishnan. I'm Vanessa Butler, speaking on behalf of  
7 Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks  
8 Foundation, a citywide non-profit that supports a  
9 vibrant, thriving park system by offering free  
10 environmental, performing arts, sports, and community  
11 building programs. We work closely with the Parks  
12 Department to manage Partnerships for Parks, a  
13 public-private partnership. Few City agencies  
14 resonate as deeply with New Yorkers as the Parks  
15 Department does. Last year alone, Partnerships for  
16 Parks engaged 28,000 volunteers stewarding  
17 neighborhood parks, a network funded in part thanks  
18 to the NYC Council's visionary Parks Equity  
19 Initiative. These grassroots efforts are fueled by  
20 genuine love for parks and community. However,  
21 volunteers cannot and should not bear the City's  
22 maintenance responsibilities. NYC Parks is staffed  
23 with individuals who harbor a profound passion for  
24 our open spaces and are unwaveringly dedicated to  
25 their mission. However, the ability to fulfill their

2 duties is severely hampered by the relentless budget  
3 slashing. The Executive Budget exacerbates this with  
4 the hiring freeze, eliminating over 600 Parks job  
5 lines, depleting an understaffed workforce when  
6 demand for crucial services is at its peak. The  
7 workforce is now leaner than during the pandemic, a  
8 period whose challenges disproportionately impacted  
9 low-income communities. Through initiatives like the  
10 NYC Green Fund, City Parks Foundation endeavors to  
11 explore innovative avenues for generating private  
12 support and identifying alternative revenue streams.  
13 However, it is imperative to emphasize that the  
14 responsibility for funding and maintaining our parks  
15 ultimately lies with the City Administration. No  
16 single organization or coalition can fully compensate  
17 for ongoing disinvestment. Today, I stand united with  
18 the Play Fair Coalition to unequivocally denounce the  
19 Mayor's proposed budget cuts. We implore the Mayor  
20 and other decision-makers to recognize the existing  
21 inequities in our city's open spaces and commit to  
22 addressing them by investing in staffing,  
23 maintenance, and infrastructure. We call upon the  
24 Administration to allocate 1 percent of the City  
25 budget to the Parks Department, ensuring adequate



2 funding for the Parks Equity Initiative, and  
3 prioritizing the health and well-being of all New  
4 Yorkers by investing in public spaces.

5 MORGAN MONACO: Thank you. Good afternoon.

6 I am Morgan Monaco, President of the Prospect Park  
7 Alliance, the non-profit organization that operates  
8 Prospect Park in partnership with the City. I'd like  
9 to thank the Council for holding today's budget  
10 hearing and giving members of the open space  
11 community a chance to share our perspective on how  
12 the budget cuts impact our work and the public at  
13 large. I'm here today to support the efforts of the  
14 Play Fair campaign to restore a 5 percent budget cut  
15 currently in place for NYC Parks and for the City to  
16 fulfill the Mayor's campaign promise of 1 percent of  
17 the City's budget for Parks. Prospect Park is truly a  
18 public-private partnership. We rely on the City to  
19 help with day-to-day trash pickup and facility  
20 maintenance. This essential service is core to making  
21 Prospect Park a welcoming and accessible space for  
22 the diverse communities of Brooklyn. Since the  
23 pandemic, visitorship to City's parks has increased  
24 significantly. In Prospect Park, we've seen a record  
25 number of visitors throughout the year, which has

2 created significant wear and tear in the park. At the  
3 same time, the City has not kept up with this record  
4 use in its funding of Parks in the City budget. Now  
5 is the time where we need more and not less funding  
6 for our parks. Parks are not only essential living  
7 infrastructure, they are critical to our health and  
8 well-being and are the great equalizers of our  
9 society. The Citizens Budget Commission recently  
10 released a survey that made clear that neighborhood  
11 parks are part of what contributes to excellent  
12 quality of life for New Yorkers. NYC Parks have been  
13 operating within an austerity budget for more than 40  
14 years, with only 0.5 percent of the City budget  
15 allocated to Parks, despite the fact that parks  
16 comprise 14 percent of City land. This chronic  
17 underfunding has been devastating to our parks. While  
18 we applaud the City for reinstating the Parks  
19 Opportunity Program, which provides essential  
20 frontline maintenance staff, the current 5 percent  
21 budget cut represents a loss of 700 park staff and 55  
22 million in critical funding, which includes the  
23 elimination of the tremendously successful Second  
24 Shift program that brought evening maintenance care  
25 to the park as well as further reductions in the

2 Urban Park Rangers and Parks Enforcement Officers,  
3 which is incredibly disheartening, considering that  
4 currently there are only two Parks Enforcement  
5 Officers, two Parks Enforcement Officers on duty in  
6 Central Brooklyn at any one time. We implore the  
7 Council to increase funding for Parks in this budget  
8 cycle. In addition, we applaud the City Council for  
9 recognizing parks as essential infrastructure by not  
10 only restoring current budget cuts, but also moving  
11 beyond a cycle-to-cycle funding model. 1 percent of  
12 our budget must be for Parks. Parks saved our city  
13 during the pandemic. Now it's time to make sure they  
14 get their fair share of the budget. Thank you.

15 ROSA CHANG: Hello. Thank you very much  
16 for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Rosa  
17 Chang, Co-Founder of Gotham Park, a grassroots  
18 501(c)3 created in 2021 to open, operate, and  
19 maintain a new community-led public space in a  
20 neighborhood that has been historically underinvested  
21 and overlooked, right outside of City Hall. We are an  
22 environmental justice neighborhood with over 47,000  
23 residents within a half-mile radius with racial  
24 health and structural inequity and a historically  
25 disadvantaged community. As our site is anchored by

2 the Brooklyn Bridge, we are actually a DOT plaza and  
3 not a park, but I am here today to support our fellow  
4 parkies because to anybody in our community, as far  
5 as they are concerned, we are a park, and our parks  
6 and open spaces are so critically important,  
7 especially in New York City. So important that we  
8 fought for and created a new plaza underneath the  
9 bridge because we don't have many options for open  
10 space, as Chair Krishnan knows. We need to make our  
11 infrastructure spaces also do double duty for us. We  
12 are asking for a full funding of our Parks Department  
13 to support our parks, which are critical to the  
14 mental, social, and physical health and well-being of  
15 our community. New York can be a pretty tough city to  
16 live in, but we choose to live here because of the  
17 diversity and excitement and opportunity and energy  
18 of this amazing city of ours, but green space here is  
19 not a given, and what little we have is not usable or  
20 safe without maintenance, and that means we need the  
21 essential people who take care of our essential  
22 parks. Our parks are our living rooms, our dining  
23 rooms, our entertainment spaces, our gym. It's where  
24 our children learn to socialize, where we meet our  
25 neighbors, and where we build this fragile thing that

2 we call community. Parks are essential. They are not  
3 a luxury, and we need to take care of them if we  
4 expect them to take care of us. So please support  
5 community-originated support and led initiatives like  
6 ours. Help all of our public spaces to survive and  
7 thrive. We need the 1 percent for Parks. Thank you  
8 for the opportunity to share Gotham Park with you  
9 today and, Chair Brannan, I'm looking forward to our  
10 site tour.

11 CHRISTINA TAYLOR: Good afternoon. I'm  
12 Christina Taylor, Deputy Director of the Van  
13 Cortlandt Park Alliance, and we are members of the  
14 Play Fair Coalition. New Yorkers deserve a fully  
15 funded, safe, clean, green, and resilient park  
16 system. The budget cuts to New York City Parks this  
17 year and the proposed budget cuts for next year  
18 jeopardize the very heart of our communities. These  
19 cuts will make it even more difficult for the already  
20 understaffed, under-resourced Parks Department to  
21 carry out the basic work needed to ensure parks are  
22 equitable and accessible for all New Yorkers. The New  
23 York City Parks budget has already been cut by 25  
24 million for the current year, and there's a proposed  
25 55-million-dollar cut for next year. Year after year,

2 New York City Parks staff does more with less. The  
3 staff is already stretched too thin. They are tired  
4 and frustrated, and so are we. Van Cortlandt Park  
5 Alliance exists to add additional programming and  
6 resources to the park, not to replace City funding,  
7 but that is the role we now find ourselves in. For  
8 the first time ever, the Alliance purchased garbage  
9 bags to be used by Park staff to keep the park clean.  
10 We purchased 70 cases in the fall, and another 140  
11 cases were delivered just last week, and now we have  
12 a new low, toilet paper. That's right, New York City  
13 Parks is currently rationing toilet paper, and VCPA  
14 park staff could not get enough to stock the  
15 bathrooms in the park, so last week I personally  
16 delivered almost 3,000 rolls of toilet paper to the  
17 park, something I thought I'd never have to do. What  
18 is going to happen next year when there are  
19 additional cuts? This can't keep happening without a  
20 reduction in the programming and services that VCPA  
21 currently runs. Are we going to trade free community  
22 programs for garbage bags and toilet paper? We are  
23 nearly there. And Van Cortlandt Park is one of the  
24 lucky parks that has a partner group like ours. But  
25 really the basics should be covered by the City's

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID WASTE JOINTLY WITH  
1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 287

2 budget, not by a tiny non-profit organization. To be  
3 sure, with these budget cuts, it is New Yorkers who  
4 will suffer. The hiring freeze and reduced budget  
5 will result in nearly 1,000 fewer Park workers. We  
6 are already feeling the effects of the hiring freeze  
7 because they can't replace staff that they currently  
8 have. There are no outside hires. It's not going to  
9 be a pretty picture this summer if we don't get an  
10 increase in the Park's budget, and it will be a  
11 really bad picture if we get a decrease. Thank you.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Thank  
13 you all very much.

14 Okay, next panel is Arif Sunmore, Sitra  
15 Bowman, Natalie Huang, Eric Menjuar, Violet Black,  
16 Austin, I can't read it, Lina Frey.

17 You can begin.

18 NATALIE HUANG: Good afternoon, Chairs  
19 Abreu and Brannan and Members of the City Council. I  
20 appreciate the opportunity to speak today. My name is  
21 Natalie Huang, and I'm a long-time member of the  
22 GrowNYC Workers' Collective, a labor union  
23 represented by the Retail, Wholesale, and Department  
24 Store Union. I am one of 53 community composting  
25 workers in GrowNYC's compost program who are being

2 laid off today. Additional worker layoffs to  
3 GrowNYC's zero-waste schools and stop-and-swap  
4 programs will be in June, and collectively, 79 union  
5 workers will be unemployed. Despite massive support  
6 for restoration of funds and a private donation that  
7 kept GrowNYC's compost program afloat until now, the  
8 cuts still prompt the closure of some of our drop-off  
9 sites. These changes were devastating, as our  
10 participants depend on those sites as their only  
11 options for composting. Now, because the worker  
12 layoffs go into effect today, all GrowNYC-run drop-  
13 off sites are permanently closed, too. Commissioner  
14 Tisch from DSNY claimed at a March hearing that all  
15 of Brooklyn and Queens has access to the citywide  
16 brown bin program. I surveyed constituents from  
17 Bensonhurst, Bay Ridge, Flatbush, to Crown Heights,  
18 who gave countless stories about their landlords  
19 refusing to let tenants use the brown bin, and other  
20 tenants not participating in the program or  
21 contaminating the bin with non-compostable materials.  
22 So many times I answered people's questions and  
23 taught them to separate their organic waste, with  
24 community composting drop-off sites as additional  
25 options for them. Rather than getting rid of us, the



1 Mayor and DSNY need to be united with us to further  
2 New York City's growth in environmental  
3 sustainability and equity. In a December hearing last  
4 year, Director Jiha for the Mayor's Budgetary Office  
5 called community composting small and inefficient.  
6 It's a shame the Mayor undervalues our work, despite  
7 how much we've accomplished on such a small budget,  
8 and the far-reaching strides we've made in  
9 encouraging local participation in composting. Now  
10 all that specialized knowledge, accessibility to  
11 education, outreach, and hands-on composting  
12 experience will be gone with the elimination of our  
13 jobs. The emotional labor of this job is exhausting,  
14 but I'd do it all over again because people's  
15 livelihoods and access to composting and education  
16 are worth fighting for. I ask the City Council to  
17 prioritize baselining funds for GrowNYC's compost  
18 program and New York City's compost project in the  
19 upcoming budget and ensure full restoration of funds  
20 to our zero-waste programs. Thank you for your time.

22 ERIC MENJUAR: Good afternoon, Chair  
23 Brannan and Members of the Sanitation and Finance  
24 Committees as well as Council Members who are viewing  
25 this virtually, who may be Chair Abreu as well as my

2 Councilwoman, Vicky Paladino. Thank you for this  
3 opportunity for me to testify. My name is Eric  
4 Menjuar, and I'm a proud member of the Bargaining  
5 Committee of the GrowNYC Workers' Collective,  
6 represented by RWDSU. One of my roles in GrowNYC is  
7 compost coordinator as part of the zero-waste program  
8 that was defunded this past December. That job,  
9 however, ended just a few hours ago with our final  
10 delivery of food scraps to Earth Matter, another  
11 organization that was also impacted by the budget  
12 cuts. In our history, community composting has  
13 diverted over 25 million pounds of food scraps from  
14 landfills, thanks to at least 3 million contributions  
15 from the residents of New York City, and we're  
16 processing the compost that has benefited our  
17 communities. Our demands remain the same as when I  
18 first testified last year. We demand a restoration of  
19 funding not only of the New York City compost  
20 program, but to all zero-waste programs. We need the  
21 zero-waste schools program to educate children on  
22 efficient solutions, such as composting, and to  
23 empower them to change the culture regarding  
24 composting. We also need our stop-and-swap program to  
25 provide our communities access to material assistance

2 that they might not find elsewhere and to divert  
3 resources from landfills. The best plan for  
4 sustainable infrastructure, if that is what the City  
5 wants, is the collaboration of local organizations to  
6 collect food scraps, process them, and provide  
7 compost for our parks, homes, and gardens. Instead of  
8 building off of this infrastructure with the curbside  
9 collections, in December our Mayor defunded this  
10 program, jeopardizing the progress made in the last  
11 few years in sustainability. Time and time again, we  
12 have heard disparaging comments from the Department  
13 of Sanitation and City officials in this very room  
14 that call our work inefficient. There is no  
15 inefficiency, there is no pseudoscience, there is  
16 nothing illogical. I will tell you what is illogical,  
17 eliminating community composting and thinking that  
18 people will simply adapt to a system in which food  
19 scraps are not guaranteed to be composted, and the  
20 best answer that DSNY has is beneficial use. To best  
21 serve the needs of our communities, the City Council  
22 must advocate the restoration of funding for the New  
23 York City Compost Project for the 2024 budget as well  
24 as expediting the contract process and RFP process to  
25 bring back operations quickly. This is my last day

2 testifying as a compost worker, but I will continue  
3 to advocate as a member of the union and as a worker  
4 for GrowNYC. Thank you for your time and  
5 consideration.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

7 ARIF SUNMONU: Good morning. Thank you,  
8 Council Chair Brannan, Council Chair Krishnan,  
9 Council Chair Abreu, and the rest of the Committee as  
10 well, for the opportunity to testify today. My name  
11 is Arif Sunmonu. I'm the Government Affairs Lead at  
12 GrowNYC. GrowNYC is here today to support the  
13 restoration of funding and reinvestment in community  
14 composting as well as the other zero-waste  
15 programming at GrowNYC. The Mayor's budget cuts have  
16 eliminated funding for GrowNYC and the seven  
17 organizations that make up the New York City Compost  
18 Project. In addition, the City is not intending to  
19 continue funding for our zero-waste schools program,  
20 which since 2010 has been instrumental in introducing  
21 the next generation of New Yorkers to the importance  
22 and practice of waste reduction, composting, and  
23 recycling, as our colleagues will testify today. And  
24 as well as our popular stop-and-swap program, which  
25 since 2007 has diverted over a million pounds of

2 goods and reusable items by working with over 100,000  
3 passionate New Yorkers to host 450 community events  
4 across our city. While GrowNYC receives stopgap  
5 funding to support its compost program, these funds  
6 will not carry us through the next Fiscal Year. In  
7 fact, this hearing is held on what is officially the  
8 last day of GrowNYC's popular and well-utilized food  
9 scrap drop-off program, which has operated for the  
10 past 13 years. Our delivery of food scraps collected  
11 last weekend are being delivered today to Earth  
12 Matter on Governor's Island for the last time. Over  
13 the past 13 years, GrowNYC has diverted over 25  
14 million pounds of food scraps from disposals, working  
15 with over 3 million individual food scrap donations  
16 from the public. Simply put, the loss of these  
17 programs is tragic. If funding for GrowNYC's programs  
18 is not restored, the program we have provided to  
19 millions of New Yorkers over the past 18 years,  
20 empowering them to take personal action against  
21 climate change, will cease to exist on June 30th. In  
22 addition, if funding is not restored to our partners  
23 in the Compost Project, we are at risk of losing the  
24 largest and the longest running community compost  
25 program in the nation and dismantling the processing

2 capacity that we've diligently built over the last 30  
3 years in which GrowNYC relies. The budget cuts have  
4 also human costs. The loss of funding for GrowNYC  
5 programs alone will result in the loss of 94 jobs, 79  
6 of which are union. In fact, we'll lay off the bulk  
7 of our compost staff today. In addition to our  
8 numerous waste diversion accomplishments, our compost  
9 program has an invaluable educational component and  
10 engages communities through free compost givebacks  
11 events and street care events throughout the five  
12 boroughs. It also educates the public on the  
13 importance of composting and education and its impact  
14 on global climate change. Our Zero Waste Schools  
15 program helps to train the next generation of climate  
16 leaders, and our Stop and Swap program facilitates  
17 and reinforces the importance of reuse over disposal.  
18 We urge the Mayor's Office and the City Council to  
19 restore funding for the GrowNYC and the NYC Compost  
20 Project, which will allow us to continue the most  
21 important and successful community compost program in  
22 the nation that serves as a model for others around  
23 the country. These programs will enthusiastically  
24 educate the public to participate in the City's  
25 curbside program during the critical early years of

2 implementation. We respectfully request the  
3 restoration of 7 million for the community composting  
4 and 2.5 million for GrowNYC Zero Waste programs. We  
5 look forward to working with Council Member Brannan,  
6 Krishnan, and Abreu, and the rest of the Council to  
7 restore these programs. Thank you very much.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Go ahead.

9 SITRA BOWMAN: Hello, good afternoon to  
10 the Chairs and to the City Council Members. My name  
11 is Sitra Bowman, and I am a proud member of the  
12 GrowNYC Workers Collective, represented by RWDSU. I  
13 am here today to ask you to reinstate funding for the  
14 Community Composting program, Stop and Swap program,  
15 and Zero Waste Schools, and to save 79 union jobs.  
16 The money that we are asking for is tiny compared to  
17 how much this City could save. This past year, the  
18 City spent 432 million dollars sending our waste to  
19 landfills. With proper education, outreach, and  
20 sorting, we could save over 100 million dollars that  
21 could be reinvested into this City. I have been  
22 working at GrowNYC doing education and outreach as  
23 part of the Zero Waste Schools program for almost two  
24 years. During this time, the program has been  
25 implemented in public schools across all five

2 boroughs. While I am extraordinarily proud of this  
3 accomplishment, it is not enough. Schools themselves  
4 are often short-staffed, and they need the extra  
5 support that this program provides to be able to  
6 successfully participate in curbside composting.  
7 Schools produce a mountain of waste, 50 percent of  
8 which can be composted. Without proper infrastructure  
9 and education, this will be a missed opportunity to  
10 divert waste from landfills and to have cleaner  
11 sidewalks and communities. Last month, we heard  
12 Commissioner Tisch discuss how wonderful the Zero  
13 Waste Schools program is. If she believes in the  
14 efficacy of this program, how can she justify cutting  
15 it? Climate change is one of the most pressing issues  
16 facing young people today. Students are best served  
17 when we can help them develop tangible skills to  
18 combat the issues that they are currently facing.  
19 This is what the Zero Waste Schools program provides.  
20 How can I encourage students to look for jobs in this  
21 field when I am being laid off? I am imploring you  
22 today to invest in green-collar jobs and in a  
23 sustainable future for our city and for our students.  
24 Thank you for your time.

25 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.



2 VIOLET BLACK: Good afternoon, Chairs  
3 Abreu and Brannan and Members of the City Council. My  
4 name is Violet Black. I use she and they pronouns. I  
5 have been working for GrowNYC for just shy of three  
6 years, and I am a member of the GrowNYC Workers  
7 Collective. That, of course, ended today, but I have  
8 been telling people that it will work out okay for  
9 me. It is the environment not being prioritized that  
10 they should worry about. My coworkers have and will  
11 continue to tell you how popular and important  
12 community composting is, so why, then, does the will  
13 to keep it funded seem so elusive? The people  
14 speaking up for community composting have been  
15 referred to as true believers. Why, then, are we not  
16 proselytizing to convert more? We know that the  
17 curbside program, in order for it to succeed, we need  
18 more outreach, not less. In order to handle more  
19 volume of organic waste, we need more processing  
20 sites, not less. So how about another quote from Stan  
21 Lee? With great power comes great responsibility. I  
22 hope everyone in this room is under the firm  
23 awareness that we, as a species, clearly possess the  
24 power to affect our environment. We have done so to  
25 our great detriment. Yet, on a global scale, terrible

2 budgeting decisions are being made, scaling back all  
3 sorts of environmental programs, but, again, we need  
4 more, not less, so what's happening? Composting is a  
5 perfect metaphor. Instead of dealing with our  
6 problems, i.e., the toxic, rotting material, we send  
7 so much of it off to the landfill. We stick it  
8 somewhere out of sight, out of mind. We try to get by  
9 with less effort instead of more. We just keep  
10 kicking the can down the road. It's like we're  
11 dissociating as a species. Composting is the act of  
12 taking the toxic material and rehabilitating it. With  
13 passion, or heat, time, and exposure to air, we  
14 eventually work through our problems and come up with  
15 something vital. Fertile, nutritious matter that will  
16 help grow what's actually sustainable and healthy for  
17 us as humans. We can't keep treating our environment  
18 and our communities like they're expendable, like  
19 they're our lowest priorities. We can't keep trying  
20 to put our problems out of sight and mind, either. We  
21 need to compost them. We, and especially you all who  
22 have more power, have the responsibility to do so.  
23 Thank you for your time.

24 LENA FREY: Hi, good afternoon, Chair  
25 Brannan and Council Member Holden and Committee

2 Counsel. My name is Lena Frey, and I have been  
3 testifying before the City Council about the  
4 defunding of Community Composting and the loss of  
5 union jobs since last December. Every time I  
6 introduce myself as a proud union compost worker.  
7 Well, as of today, I can no longer say that. I have  
8 been laid off. I no longer work as a Compost  
9 Coordinator, and I no longer get the immense  
10 privilege of educating the public and providing waste  
11 diversion access in this city for my job. All three  
12 of GrowNYC's zero waste programs are coming to a  
13 halt, and 79 of us union workers are losing our jobs.  
14 We want to continue working in sustainable waste  
15 management, but the Mayor and Sanitation Commissioner  
16 are robbing us of that livelihood, and they are  
17 depriving the city of the important work that we do.  
18 GrowNYC's zero waste programs are immensely popular,  
19 extremely effective, and cost the City a negligible  
20 amount of money. Allowing these programs to be  
21 defunded is a failure to account for the interests of  
22 the people of New York, in favor of the interests of  
23 an (INAUDIBLE) Sanitation Commissioner who has  
24 publicly stated that she doesn't care about reducing  
25 the City's waste. The City Council must not only

2 restore funding for these vital programs, but push to  
3 expedite the RFP process so that we cannot suffer a  
4 long gap in services. The longer this gap, the harder  
5 it will be to maintain sustainable habits, and the  
6 longer that union workers go without work in our  
7 chosen industry. It is unacceptable for the City to  
8 drag its feet and delay the return of the zero waste  
9 programs any longer. Thank you for your time and for  
10 your support.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

12 AUSTIN ARACINA: Good afternoon. My name  
13 is Austin Aracina. Thank you, guys, again for the  
14 time to speak. I was a driver and coordinator for  
15 GrowNYC's compost program. It's unfortunate to be  
16 back here again after the initial budget cuts in  
17 December and after most of us here have just lost our  
18 jobs. I've served New York City residents in all of  
19 the five boroughs for two years, collecting food  
20 scraps, maintaining compost facilities, and educating  
21 the public on the benefits of composting organic  
22 waste. Over those two years, it's become very clear  
23 that any lapse in service or drastic change in the  
24 community composting service goes against the goal of  
25 this Administration's goal to separate food scraps

2 from mainstream waste. People need convenience,  
3 consistency, and accessibility to build a new habit,  
4 and for most New Yorkers, separating food from  
5 regular trash is a very new habit. If the City truly  
6 wants the curbside compost program to succeed, there  
7 needs to be consistent, convenient, and reliable  
8 access to the program. However, currently there's a  
9 very large gap in service now that the GrowNYC's  
10 compost program has officially been shut down. At  
11 almost every food scrap drop-off site that I've  
12 worked at the past couple weeks, participants are  
13 outraged at the closure and voice their confusion on  
14 how to continue their habit. For those who are not in  
15 a building or area with DSNY curbside pickup, the  
16 only other option they would have is the automatic  
17 orange bins scattered around the city. However,  
18 oftentimes these bins are full or inaccessible to  
19 many in the city. In particular, our older  
20 demographic of participants have voiced their  
21 inability to access the orange bins because of the  
22 technical barrier the bins pose. Without a phone,  
23 app, and cellular service, there's no way to use  
24 these orange bins, and that is a major problem for

2 continuing the compost program if that's the goal of  
3 this Administration. Thank you very much.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all  
5 very much.

6 Okay, next panel. Scott Daly, K. Webster  
7 of 246 Bowery, Andrew Wallach, Giuletta Fiore, Sarah  
8 Evans.

9 ANDREW WALLACH: Good afternoon. Thank  
10 you, Council Members Brannan, Krishnan, and Abreu for  
11 the chance to testify today about the Fiscal 2025  
12 Executive Budget for NYC Parks. My name is Andrew  
13 Wallach, and I've lived in New York City for more  
14 than 42 years and have witnessed many economic and  
15 political cycles in the city during that period,  
16 including the near bankruptcy period in the 1970s. I  
17 can tell I'm one of the few in this room who can say  
18 that. I'm currently the Chairman of the Board of the  
19 Natural Areas Conservancy and have served on that  
20 Board since 2017. As many of you know, the NAC is the  
21 only park conservancy which focuses solely on the  
22 20,000 acres of natural areas, forests, grasslands,  
23 and wetlands within NYC's Park system. I'm here today  
24 to strongly request that the City do the following.  
25 Number one, restore funding for NYC Parks from its

2 proposed level of 583 million dollars back to its  
3 Fiscal 2024 budget level of 635 million for the 2025  
4 Fiscal Year, number two, end the hiring freeze at NYC  
5 Parks and restore agency staffing to pre-COVID  
6 levels, number three, restore 2.4 million in  
7 permanent baseline funding for the Citywide Trail  
8 Formalization Program announced last year by Mayor  
9 Adams, number four, restore 2.5 million dollars in  
10 permanent baseline funding for 51 Forestry Management  
11 staff whose jobs are set to expire at the end of June  
12 and, number five, raise the total amount of operating  
13 funding for the Parks from the currently proposed  
14 level of 0.5 percent to at least 1 percent of its  
15 total budget as soon as practicable. We New Yorkers  
16 are blessed with a park system that is the envy of  
17 most major cities. Our ancestors displayed incredible  
18 foresight and generosity in carving out large areas  
19 for green space in all of the boroughs. The way we  
20 steward these long-term assets is a sign of how much  
21 we care about our future and the future of our  
22 children and grandchildren. Thank you very much.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

24 GIULIETTA FIORE: Hello, everyone. My name  
25 is Giuletta Fiore, and I am here today representing

2 the Historic House Trust of New York City, a non-  
3 profit that helps preserve 23 publicly owned historic  
4 houses that operate as museums, cultural centers,  
5 community hubs, and vibrant green spaces across all  
6 five New York City boroughs. We thank the City  
7 Council Finance Committee for holding this hearing  
8 and support our fellow Play Fair for Parks Coalition  
9 members in advocating for increased funding for New  
10 York City Parks to ensure a safe, clean, and  
11 resilient park system. As some of the oldest  
12 structures in New York, the City-owned sites that we  
13 help steward sit on over 400 acres of public parkland  
14 that serve as important cultural and educational  
15 spaces, celebrate Pride Month at the Alice Austin  
16 House on Staten Island, experience African American  
17 folk and Americana music with the Cornelius E.D.  
18 Group at the Van Cortlandt House Museum in the Bronx,  
19 or join the 45th annual Thunderbird American Indian  
20 Powwow at the Queens County Farm Museum, head over to  
21 the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum in Upper Manhattan to  
22 celebrate the African and Dutch New York celebration  
23 of Pinkster, or sign your family member up for the  
24 Youth Garden Apprentice Program at the Wyckoff House  
25 Museum in Brooklyn. Despite the best efforts of hard-



2 working Parks employees, years of disinvestment in  
3 New York City Parks have taken a toll on our public  
4 resources. The proposed budget cuts for FY25 will  
5 make it even more difficult for the already under-  
6 resourced Parks Department to carry out the basic  
7 work needed to ensure parks are equitable and  
8 accessible for all New Yorkers. At our sites, we're  
9 seeing unsafe conditions on pathways, deteriorating  
10 roofs and wood siding, water infiltration, and  
11 graffiti. On top of all this, New York City's  
12 parkland is on the front lines of climate change. In  
13 the past few years, we've seen increased storm  
14 impacts, including flooding, downed trees, and more.  
15 Without funding for maintenance workers, specialized  
16 tradespeople, and climate resiliency efforts across  
17 all five boroughs, we fear that communities will no  
18 longer see these park resources as safe and welcoming  
19 places. One of the benefits of our park system is  
20 that New York City Parks can see the City's needs  
21 holistically to work towards equity across boroughs.  
22 While non-profits like us are happy to help out where  
23 we can, we want to caution against overly privatizing  
24 our public spaces. We work with over 20 local groups  
25 that excel at community engagement programming and

2 education. However, they are increasingly being asked  
3 to expand their operations to respond to growing  
4 needs across the park system, like training staff in  
5 de-escalation and emergency response. They are rising  
6 to meet the challenge, but they shouldn't have to.  
7 Thank you very much for this opportunity to voice our  
8 needs, and we hope that you invest in the park system  
9 to sustain the places that make New York City our  
10 home.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

12 SARA EVANS: Good afternoon. My name is  
13 Sara Evans, and I am the Director of the Living  
14 Collection at Greenwood Cemetery, which is a National  
15 Historic Landmark, Arboretum, and a 478-acre green  
16 space in the heart of Brooklyn. Like our public  
17 parks, Greenwood is open 365 days a year with free  
18 access to the public and, just like our public parks,  
19 Greenwood needs support on funding through the Parks  
20 Equity Initiative. As New York's largest contiguous  
21 private landowner, Greenwood is committed to  
22 leveraging our acreage to support the climate  
23 resilience of the city. We have over 8,000 trees, and  
24 we'll plant 2,000 more over the next few years to  
25 grow our canopy cover from 32 to 35 percent.

2 Greenwood's neighbor is the thriving community of  
3 Sunset Park, an environmental justice area  
4 underserved economically, culturally, and  
5 environmentally for decades, which underscores the  
6 importance of our dedication to supporting a  
7 collection of healthy, climate-resilient trees. One  
8 of Greenwood's longest-standing research conservation  
9 projects is a partnership with the United States  
10 Forest Service, where we survey and scout for beetles  
11 in order to catch newly-introduced species that have  
12 the potential to cause catastrophic damage to our  
13 city and wild forests, like the emerald ash borer has  
14 done. With New York City being an epicenter of  
15 international trade, its urban forest, held in its  
16 parks, cultural institutions, and wild areas, stands  
17 on the front lines of invasive species detection and  
18 management. This is only one of the many reasons, as  
19 we've heard previous to my testimony, why the City's  
20 funding for these spaces and workers that steward  
21 them is so critical. Greenwood is proud to be one of  
22 140 member organizations of the Forest for All New  
23 York City Coalition, which is committed to justly and  
24 equitably protect, maintain, and expand the urban  
25 forest, and I stand with our colleagues in the

2 coalition to urge the City Council to invest in green  
3 spaces and organizations like Greenwood that offer  
4 initiatives for climate resilience, environmental  
5 justice, and community engagement. Thank you.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

7 SCOTT DALY: Thank you. Good afternoon,  
8 Chair Brannan, Council Member Holden. I want to thank  
9 you for the opportunity to address the Council. My  
10 name is Scott Daly, and I am the Senior Director of  
11 the New York Junior Tennis and Learning, NYJTL,  
12 programs of free tennis throughout the City of New  
13 York. We are here, very simply, to ask the Council  
14 for an increase in our Fiscal Year '25 Budget. I'm  
15 not going to read you testimonies. Just let me bullet  
16 point the highlights of what I feel are necessary.  
17 For 16 years, we've remained static at the current  
18 funding levels with the Council. We are asking for a  
19 200,000-dollar increase this year. No need to tell  
20 you, over 16 years, how much costs have increased  
21 throughout the City of New York, yet we are still  
22 able to produce the programs. Right now, as you well  
23 know, there's no COLA increases in Council-funded  
24 programs. Our programs are under the City's Physical  
25 Education and Fitness Initiative. We are the largest

2 tennis and education organization in the country. In  
3 10 days, we're going to start in a City park in the  
4 Bronx at Crotona Park, the Mayor's Cup. It used to be  
5 known as the Mayor's Cup. It was renamed Mayor  
6 Dinkins Cup. It is the largest interscholastic tennis  
7 program in the country. Right now, we are in more  
8 than 27 different parks throughout the city. Let me  
9 name a few. Howard Bennett in the city, Wolfe Pond,  
10 Fairview, Silver Lake, Staten Island, Linden, Jackie  
11 Robinson, Andrees, McDonald Park, Brooklyn, Crotona,  
12 Haffen, St. James, St. Mary's, Queens, my God, Forest  
13 Park, Juniper Valley, Travis, Flushing Meadows,  
14 Rockwell, Detective Keith Williams, Roy Wilkins,  
15 Bayswater. You know, what we do, I would be remiss  
16 right now if I didn't just mention one part that I've  
17 submitted in my testimony. I'm not going to give you  
18 all the data and the metrics. Eighty percent of the  
19 population that we serve at NYJTL, black, Latino, and  
20 Asian, 70 percent ten years old or younger. I just  
21 want to thank the City Council for the many years of  
22 support. We know that the increased funding in the  
23 budget will help us with our vision of our founder,  
24 Arthur Ashe. With your support, we know we can  
25 continue to change the lives of thousands of New York

2 kids and families. Thank you very much, everyone.

3 Thank you for your time.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all  
5 very much.

6 Okay, next panel is Beth Slepian, Keanu  
7 Arpels-Josiah, Jan Selden, Mansa DeDominicis, Justin  
8 Wood.

9 You can begin.

10 BETH SLEPIAN: Good afternoon, and thank  
11 you for this opportunity to speak. My name is Beth  
12 Slepian, and I am Vice Chair of the Brooklyn Solid  
13 Waste Advisory Board. I am also an educator and a  
14 micro hauler with Common Ground Compost, a certified  
15 master composter, and a member of Brooklyn Community  
16 Board 12. However, I am speaking to you today not as  
17 a representative of any of these entities, but  
18 instead as an individual, a longtime educator in  
19 schools, and as a public school parent. I trust this  
20 Council to make the right decision and restore the 7  
21 million dollars in funding for community composting,  
22 as well as the 4 million dollars for new compost  
23 sites managed by Big Reuse and the Lower East Side  
24 Ecology Center, and I thank you for your continued  
25 advocacy for these vital City services. As you know,

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID WASTE JOINTLY WITH  
1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 311

2 we cannot have community composting without physical  
3 sites throughout our city to turn our organic waste  
4 into finished compost that benefits our trees and  
5 green spaces and improves our quality of life. I am  
6 also hopeful that you will find a solution with the  
7 Parks Commissioner to save Big Reuse's Queens Bridge  
8 composting site. Now, let's talk about another line  
9 item, schools. The Mayor, Schools Chancellor, and the  
10 Sanitation Commissioner have recently touted the  
11 completed rollout of compost collection in all 1,800  
12 public schools. This is no small feat, but let's give  
13 credit where credit is due. Curbside composting  
14 exists in our City schools in large part because of  
15 the hard work completed by the Zero Waste Schools  
16 team at GrowNYC. 25 people, most of whom are union  
17 employees whose contracts are set to expire and will  
18 be losing their jobs by the end of June. Please  
19 include the 2.5 million dollars that was previously  
20 allocated for Zero Waste School programs in the FY25  
21 budget. Without continued education, these efforts  
22 will be fruitless after a few years. Students grow  
23 up. Teachers and staff move on. I love my child's  
24 school, but the rollout of curbside composting there  
25 was likely before my first grader was born, and their

2 brown bins are rife with contamination. Like all  
3 schools, they need ongoing education to manage their  
4 waste better. 86 percent of our school waste is  
5 recyclable or compostable. We don't need larger  
6 containers where it all goes to landfill. We need  
7 waste reduction and smarter solutions, more waste  
8 educators in our schools, and more funding to ensure  
9 we can rely on our young people to preserve a greener  
10 future. Thank you.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

12 JANE SELDEN: Thank you for giving me the  
13 opportunity to speak today. My name is Jane Selden,  
14 and I Chair a Committee on Waste Reduction at the  
15 Climate Activist Group 350NYC. Recognizing the vital  
16 role New York City's community composting programs  
17 play in educating New Yorkers about the benefits of  
18 organics recycling, we urge the Adams' Administration  
19 to fully fund these programs in the FY25 budget and  
20 to permit Big Reuse to continue operating its highly  
21 successful Queensbridge composting site. Passage of  
22 the Mandatory Citywide Curbside Composting bill last  
23 year was a major achievement. However, simply passing  
24 this bill is not enough. Ensuring widespread  
25 participation will require many New Yorkers to



2 develop new habits and a new level of awareness  
3 regarding waste disposal. People will need to know  
4 not only the nuts and bolts of source separation, but  
5 understand and appreciate its value. This is where  
6 the educational outreach and hands-on community  
7 engagement provided by community composting programs  
8 plays an essential role. As a retired educator, I  
9 know how important it is not just to relay  
10 information, but to listen to questions and address  
11 concerns. Flyers slipped under the door and PSAs on  
12 social media are no substitute for a one-on-one  
13 conversation with a community composter at a farmer's  
14 market. Why is the City cutting funding for the very  
15 programs that are key to making the mandatory  
16 curbside organics recycling program a success? It  
17 makes no sense. Equally baffling is the Parks  
18 Department's decision to evict Big Reuse from its  
19 award-winning Queensbridge site where, for the last  
20 10 years, it has combined leaves and yard waste from  
21 City parks with food waste from community food drop-  
22 off sites to create soil-enriching compost, which it  
23 provides to the Parks Department for free. Instead of  
24 shutting down this site, the City should continue its  
25 mutually beneficial relationship with Big Reuse and

2 fund more local composting programs like it to reduce  
3 transportation emissions and produce high-quality  
4 compost, not biogas. At a previous DSNY hearing,  
5 Deputy Commissioner Joshua Goodman praised the work  
6 of community composting organizations. Referring to  
7 the Mandatory Curbside Composting Law, he said, we  
8 would not be in a position to roll out this program  
9 if it weren't for the work of community composters.  
10 Well, I would say that their work is far from over.  
11 In fact, it's needed now more than ever. Thank you.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

13 SAMANTHA NORMANDIA: I will be speaking on  
14 behalf of Marissa DeDominicis of Earth Matter New  
15 York. She's the Executive Director. Since January  
16 2024, the City's budget cuts eliminated Earth  
17 Matter's and all community composting funding for  
18 compost processing and compost education work. Since  
19 December, friends and supporters, 40,000 petition  
20 signers, individuals, and large donors, such as Mill  
21 and Friends, supported us with 5-dollar donations and  
22 higher to validate our efforts to be active  
23 participants to save our planet by encouraging  
24 neighbor participation and separating out food scraps  
25 and hort materials to be magically transformed by

2 microbes into what we call black gold. Elected  
3 officials and friends encouraged us to keep the fire  
4 going in spite of the fact that our Mayor and DSNY  
5 felt our work was dispensable. We embraced the hope  
6 that we could financially be in a position to  
7 continue the work if we just kept our infrastructure  
8 for community composting up and running for six  
9 months. Since this time, there has not been a day  
10 that has gone by that one of my staff, someone from  
11 GrowNYC Workers' Collective, Lower East Side Ecology  
12 Center, Big Reuse, or one of the botanical gardens  
13 has made it abundantly clear why and how our work is  
14 indispensable, contrary to what DSNY and the Mayor  
15 have stated through their lack of financial support.  
16 Requests for our black gold compost from Peace  
17 University's New Garden, Battery Park Conservancy,  
18 Downtown Alliance, over 16 New York City Parks  
19 Department community gardens, community members who  
20 drop off at farmers' markets, to name a few, are a  
21 few reasons of how and why we feel like we should not  
22 be considered dispensable. New Yorkers who contact us  
23 to volunteer to help with zero-waste events, Friday  
24 workdays, our farm, and community visitor open hours  
25 on weekends on Governors Island, has been Earth

2 Matter's constant tinder for us to keep this hope,  
3 this fire going these past months. We need you, City  
4 Council Members, to validate our work and the work of  
5 all New Yorkers who do not agree with the Mayor or  
6 DSNY that our community compost work is dispensable.  
7 Thank you, Council Members. Please vote to restore  
8 our community composting budget in Fiscal Year '25 to  
9 keep the community composting fire glowing and  
10 growing.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

12 KEANU ARPELS-JOSIAH: Hi, my name is Keanu  
13 Arpels-Josiah. I'm an 18-year-old high school student  
14 and an organizer with Fridays for Future NYC, a youth  
15 climate justice organization representing high school  
16 students and young people throughout the city. We're  
17 nearing the anniversary of our skies turning orange  
18 last June, of asthma rates spiking, of the worst air  
19 quality in the world. Last summer was the hottest  
20 summer on record, though it will go down in history  
21 as the coldest one for the rest of my generation's  
22 lives, and what does our City do in response? Cut  
23 investment after investment in our communities and in  
24 our future. In New York City, 20 percent of our  
25 landfill waste is composed of food scraps. 58 percent

2 of national methane emissions of greenhouse gas, 80  
3 times more warming power than CO2 when it's released,  
4 come from these food scraps. There is no addressing  
5 the climate crisis. There is no climate justice  
6 without community composting. Just a few weeks ago,  
7 the head of the U.N. Climate Body, Simon Stiell,  
8 said, we have two years left to save the world.  
9 That's not hyperbole. It's high time for this City,  
10 which is ranked as the third highest emitting city in  
11 the world, to restore the 7-million-dollar community  
12 compost program entirely cut by the Mayor as well as  
13 the rest of the budget cuts. The current anaerobic  
14 co-digestion being partially used by the City is  
15 simply not composting. It actually continues to  
16 perpetuate the same system of burning fossil fuels  
17 and creating planet-warming emissions. Simply put, we  
18 need to invest in our communities, in our parks, in  
19 climate justice, and in composting. Our generation's  
20 future is online. The question for this body, for the  
21 Mayor, for New York City, is will you choose our  
22 generation, our communities, or will you hand down a  
23 death sentence to frontline communities here in New  
24 York, around the world, in the global south? In 2018,  
25 Greta Thunberg left school to protest for climate

2 justice outside the Swedish parliament. In New York  
3 City, we've been doing the same here every Friday  
4 since 2019. Since January 2022, just here at City  
5 Hall, every Friday from 4 to 6, we've been doing the  
6 same. Stand up for our generation. Restore the budget  
7 cuts. Thank you.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

9 JUSTIN WOOD: Good afternoon. Thank you,  
10 Council Member Holden and Chair Brannan, for this  
11 opportunity for the public to speak at an Executive  
12 Budget hearing, and thank you also for your  
13 independent analysis showing there's over a billion  
14 dollars being left on the table by this  
15 Administration. We're hearing so much today about the  
16 harm that ongoing austerity is doing to our city and  
17 to our future. I'm Justin Wood. I'm the Director of  
18 Policy at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest.  
19 We're a member of the Transform, Don't Trash New York  
20 City Coalition and the Save Our Compost Coalition.  
21 Wanted to start by talking a little bit about the  
22 commercial waste side of Sanitation, which we heard a  
23 little bit but not enough about today. We're really  
24 concerned that it's 20 years into this current solid  
25 Waste Management Plan, which is about to expire, and

2 we still haven't heard a plan from DSNY to start  
3 accepting commercial waste trucks at the City's  
4 marine transfer and rail transfer stations that we've  
5 invested so much in. We want to applaud the Council  
6 and the Sanitation Committee for advancing Intro. 55  
7 of 2024. That's Council Member Nurse's bill that  
8 would finally, 20 years after this important  
9 environmental justice equity goal that would reduce  
10 VMT and dangerous private sanitation trucks in EJ  
11 communities, finally begin to use our public  
12 infrastructure to accept some commercial waste.  
13 Relatedly, we see and we're troubled by cuts in the  
14 Executive Budget for enforcement in Sanitation. We  
15 see enforcement as a key part of public education,  
16 business education, and safety. Just last week, it  
17 was in the Daily News, another New Yorker lost their  
18 life in a fatal collision involving a private  
19 sanitation truck reversing illegally down a one-way  
20 street in Manhattan. That's deeply concerning that  
21 we're seeing reductions potentially to Enforcement  
22 budgets at the same time. Finally, we're in complete  
23 support of restoring the community composting  
24 program. The City's diversion rate is going backward.  
25 Sanitation just told us last week with a new Waste

2 Characterization Study, we simply cannot do the all-  
3 of-government, all-out public education approach to  
4 both the commercial, residential, public space,  
5 recycling, donations, and composting that we need  
6 while we're cutting our local compost sites. Thank  
7 you so much.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Thank  
9 you all very much.

10 Okay, next panel is Dorian Mercer, Hayley  
11 Greenberg, Jonathan Malofsky, Darren Hinton, Sharon  
12 Brown Jeter, Christopher Leon Johnson.

13 Yeah, go ahead.

14 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Good afternoon,  
15 Chair Brannan, Mr. Holden. My name is Christopher  
16 Leon Johnson, and I want to make a statement about a  
17 trash situation that happened this past weekend over  
18 in the Bronx, featuring a candidate that's running  
19 for Congress against AOC named Tina Forte, and the  
20 fact that she refused to call out the racism that  
21 occurred over there with her fellow Proud Boys  
22 throwing up their little signs and calling every  
23 racial epithet they can do in those two hours with  
24 myself and Raul Rivera. Now, I want to talk about a  
25 certain Council Member that has no problem standing



2 next to her. Her name is Kristy Marmorato, and she  
3 serves the 13th District in the City Council. I am  
4 calling on Kristy Marmorato to condemn what happened  
5 on Saturday over in the Bronx with Tina Forte and the  
6 Proud Boys harassing myself and Raul Rivera for  
7 expressing our freedom of speech and for jumping  
8 themselves in a situation that had nothing to do with  
9 them. Now, Tina Forte refused to call out the racism  
10 that occurred in the Bronx, and Kristy Marmorato, I  
11 expect her not to say anything about it because she  
12 needs her support because she's a supporter of the  
13 City Council. Now, I'm going to tell Kristy Marmorato  
14 on this panel, if you don't want to call out, if you  
15 don't want to condemn the racism that Tina Forte had  
16 allowed to occur in the Bronx towards myself and Raul  
17 Rivera, I will not support you in your re-election  
18 campaign next year, and I hope that the Bronx  
19 Democratic Party, Jamaal Bailey, runs someone against  
20 her if she refused to call out, refused to condemn  
21 the racism that Tina Forte is allowed to occur with  
22 Derrick Gibson. I will make sure that she gets voted  
23 out next year in 2025 with Mark Gjonaj or Marjorie  
24 Velázquez because what I experienced this past  
25 weekend was really trash. The trash committee, what

2 happened in the Bronx was really disgusting and  
3 trashy, and Kristy Marmorato should do the right  
4 thing and condemn it. Thank you.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Go  
6 ahead.

7 HALEY GORENBERG: With thanks for this  
8 opportunity, I'm Haley Gorenberg, Chair of Friends of  
9 Mount Prospect Park. Facing Parks Department cuts of  
10 55 million dollars, it's all the more wrong to funnel  
11 11 million dollars of public money to pave over  
12 beloved green space in Mount Prospect Park in  
13 Brooklyn. We oppose the Mayor's plan to construct a  
14 regional-scale, 40,000-square-foot, mostly concrete  
15 and asphalt paved skateboarding complex on beloved  
16 green park space. The Mayor's 24-million-dollar plan  
17 includes four sites, two in the Bronx and two in  
18 Brooklyn. All except Mount Prospect Park are already  
19 paved. The paved sites do not face opposition. This  
20 project would make environmental problems worse for  
21 New Yorkers' families and our future. This project  
22 warrants the most probing environmental examination,  
23 but officials have provided none. Problems include  
24 heat and tree canopy because paving green space  
25 worsens heat effects in heat islands. The library

2 next door runs a cooling center because of already  
3 dangerous heat. Flooding, paving green space worsens  
4 storm water impacts. Flooding. Sewer problems. Flies  
5 in the face of key climate and resilience goals.  
6 Other impacts include noise and traffic on a block  
7 already jammed with tourist attractions. It's a  
8 dangerous site and a dangerous plan. Celebrity skater  
9 Tony Hawk's Skatepark Project Foundation publishes a  
10 best practices guide that says it's very important  
11 for monitoring problematic activity that there be  
12 clear sight lines through the facilities from street  
13 level, but Mount Prospect Park is on a steep grade  
14 high up, no sight lines. The ramp entrance to the  
15 park. Everyone acknowledges the obvious dangers of  
16 skaters hill-bombing down the park's entrance ramp.  
17 People with strollers, walking pets, elderly, frail  
18 people, small children accessing the playground,  
19 people with mobility aids use the ramp all day.  
20 Stairway entrance. Someone's going to try to skate  
21 off it. It goes right into the children's wing of the  
22 library and then busy Eastern Parkway. Who is  
23 benefiting from spending our public money? The PR  
24 campaign is referencing partnership and collaboration  
25 with Tony Hawk, and it leads many people to believe

2 the skate complex is bankrolled by a  
3 multimillionaire, but not so. It's our money. So we  
4 want investigation and disclosure of the potential  
5 financial interests, analysis of the health and  
6 economic impacts of substituting a single-use paved  
7 complex for multi-use free public green space that  
8 requires no expensive purchases and an assessment of  
9 the value of green space to the community. There are  
10 at least five nearby paved sites, park sites we've  
11 identified that could be built out and made great for  
12 skaters. There's no reason to have this manufactured  
13 conflict...

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

15 HALEY GORENBERG: Especially with a  
16 foundation that says its mission is to serve the  
17 underserved so please change the course of this  
18 expensive, dangerous project and don't pave the park.  
19 Thank you.

20 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

21 DARREN HINTON: Hi. My name is Darren  
22 Hinton. I thank you, Council Member Brannan and  
23 Robert Holden, for still being here. For many years,  
24 I have been visiting parks all over the city and  
25 making videos about them. I love learning about the

2 history of each place, and I believe every park has a  
3 story. I have spoken to landscape architects, friends  
4 groups, park conservancies, City Council Members, and  
5 former New York City Park Commissioners about parks.  
6 They all say the same thing. Parks are not luxuries.  
7 They are necessities. These places need at least 1  
8 percent of the budget devoted to them. I have been  
9 traveling to Prospect Park Parade Grounds for  
10 multiple times a week for soccer games. It is great  
11 to have these fields, but the Parade Grounds have  
12 many issues. For starters, the comfort stations are  
13 often locked. With usage well into the evening,  
14 children and adults have no other options nearby.  
15 Additionally, the turf itself is in various forms of  
16 decay. One thing is certain. When you arrive home,  
17 you will have a shoe full of small plastic grains  
18 from the disintegrating turf. In some places, this  
19 hopefully-not-toxic material is piled into mounds and  
20 children are playing in it. Accessibility is another  
21 factor. Parade Grounds is surrounded by a tall black  
22 fence with few entry points. Any entry points besides  
23 the main entrances are locked. It is not unusual to  
24 walk a significant distance to get to the field you  
25 need to be at. Maybe I'm just complaining, but one

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID WASTE JOINTLY WITH  
1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 326

2 thing I believe is spending more money on our parks  
3 would solve some of these issues, not just at Parade  
4 Grounds, but all over the city. Thank you.

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Go  
6 ahead.

7 SHARON BROWN JETER: Hello. My name is  
8 Sharon Brown Jeter.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You've got to  
10 turn your mic on.

11 SHARON BROWN JETER: Okay, so the Waste  
12 Management and the Parks Department Funding Finance  
13 Committee also. There must be bathrooms in the park  
14 for everyone in the bathrooms available for everyone,  
15 military, police, citizen. There has to be a numerous  
16 bathroom. The parks need bathrooms, and you should  
17 supply seating everywhere in the parks. They  
18 shouldn't only have to sit on the grass. People are  
19 allergic. There are a whole lot of issues that go on  
20 with people bending down, not being able to bend  
21 properly. There should be a whole lot of seating,  
22 plug-ups for people, kiosks for phones, and computer  
23 access out there also. No one should have a dead  
24 phone or be accessible to someone robbing them or  
25 rape or something like that because their phone died

2 and they don't have anything to do with it, what hit  
3 them with the phone. They can't actually call and let  
4 them know they're calling the police. We need the  
5 Bible back in public square in the Parks Departments.  
6 We need Bible activities, Bible amusement parks,  
7 parkland, Bible camping, anything you can find, the  
8 Ark of the Covenant amusement park. We should do a  
9 lot of different Bible-themed things because the  
10 Bible has come to the fore once again. We need to be  
11 able to get innovative with using the Bible and  
12 things in the Bible as recreation as well as  
13 teaching, solid moral teaching. The water filtration  
14 system and the recycling, not only should the food  
15 and things be recycled, the boxes and everything  
16 should be recycled, folded, flattened down so that it  
17 can be easier to take away, cart away, or reuse. It  
18 can be used in something else. The waste, the food is  
19 the same thing as fecal matter. The fecal matter, the  
20 food, it needs to be liquefied. It's dealing in the  
21 same situation. In the Bible times, they buried the  
22 fecal matter and it became fertilizer back into the  
23 soil.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

25

2 SHARON BROWN JETER: There's a bunch of  
3 different things. Can I just run down the list  
4 without going through them?

5 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We can't. We  
6 still have another panel. Thank you very much.

7 SHARON BROWN JETER: Okay.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you so  
9 much.

10 Okay, our next panel is on Zoom starting  
11 with Anna Sachs.

12 ANNA SACHS: Thank you for having me. I  
13 wanted to express support for restoring community  
14 composting. That is 7 million dollars for operations  
15 and 4 million dollars in capital costs for building  
16 out the promise sites for Big Reuse and Lower  
17 Eastside Ecology, especially as Big Reuse is facing  
18 this eviction from the Parks Department. Assuming  
19 that nothing changes and the Parks Commissioner and  
20 the Mayor's Administration insists on evicting Big  
21 Reuse, there will be no more community composting for  
22 them so, even if the budget is restored, where are  
23 they going to do the community composting so we do  
24 need that 4 million dollars to build out the  
25 additional community composting sites. I want to



2 comment that I think this is what Council Member  
3 Abreu was getting at the hearing and the Commissioner  
4 I don't think understood the question, but the  
5 capture rate. I think he was asking about what is the  
6 current capture rate, meaning the amount of organics  
7 that that the residents actually put in their brown  
8 bins, they separate them out to participate in the  
9 program. The current capture rate in Queens is 4  
10 percent, meaning the majority of the organics, 96  
11 percent, is actually going into the trash. Previously  
12 in 2018 and 2019, when in the same districts in  
13 Queens, there was a 7 percent capture rate. In  
14 Seattle, the organics capture rate is 60 percent. So  
15 we can get there, we just need the upfront investment  
16 in it, and that is through community composting  
17 education so it really doesn't make sense to be  
18 cutting costs to this as New York City is expanding  
19 the organics collection. We're setting ourselves up  
20 for failure and for a very expensive failure. I think  
21 that we need to continue to invest in community  
22 composting, continuing to invest in education  
23 outreach. I also want to say that the Zero Waste  
24 Schools Program, again, it's the same thing. We're  
25 investing in our own failure by cutting these costs.

2 We need to invest in the success of these programs  
3 because the most expensive thing that we're going to  
4 face is the collection costs and, if you're sending  
5 around empty trucks, it doesn't make sense...

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much. Your  
7 time has expired.

8 ANNA SACHS: Thank you. Also the Stop and  
9 Swap. thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL TWOMEY: Next is Clare  
11 Mifflin.

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

13 CLARE MIFFLIN: Sorry, I wasn't able to  
14 unmute. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'm  
15 Clare Mifflin, Executive Director of the Center for  
16 Zero Waste Design, also a member of the Save Our  
17 Compost Coalition and supporter of Forest for All. I  
18 just want to make the overall point that we need  
19 parks, we need compost. They work well together for  
20 so many reasons. If we can compost in parks, we can  
21 regenerate soils in parks, we can help regenerate  
22 soils for street trees citywide, and we can get  
23 people to get involved in stewarding those street  
24 trees and stewarding those parks. So, the  
25 Administration says they're doing climate budgeting

2 and Deputy Mayor said every dollar has to do double  
3 duty now, has to not only do its purpose in terms of  
4 building out infrastructure or providing energy, but  
5 it has to lower emissions, cool and absorb water, and  
6 that is the only way that New York City will survive.  
7 Well, I think that was really well said and I can  
8 think of nothing more important for the City to fund  
9 in that case than community composting and parks  
10 because they bring cooling, they mitigate stormwater,  
11 they help with reducing flooding, and they allow New  
12 Yorkers to get together and work together to improve  
13 their communities and to be part of creating climate  
14 and social resilience so I would just encourage the  
15 Council to keep fighting for that restoration of  
16 Community Composting funding and of funding for  
17 Parks, and so the 7 million dollars for community  
18 composting, the 4 million for the new compost sites  
19 because we need much more good quality compost that  
20 we have now and, as everybody else has said, for the  
21 fact that it helps educate New Yorkers on how to  
22 separate food scraps. Thank you very much for your  
23 time.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, now we have  
25 Eric Goldstein.

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

3 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Hi, my name is Eric  
4 Goldstein. I am the New York City Environment  
5 Director at the Natural Resource Defense Council. As  
6 you know, NRDC is a national non-profit legal and  
7 scientific organization. We thank you and urge the  
8 Council to support the restoration and baseline  
9 funding for composting of community composting as  
10 well as GrowNYC's related work and the build out for  
11 the two composting programs by Big Reuse and Low  
12 Eastside Ecology Center. The Adams' Administration  
13 short-sighted mid-year elimination of funding for the  
14 New York Compost Project was an example of  
15 mismanagement of an essential Sanitation service.  
16 Meanwhile, the Council's Budget Response document  
17 wisely called for the restoration and baselining of  
18 funding for this critical program. Neither I nor NRDC  
19 stand to benefit financially or personally from the  
20 restoration and baselining of these funds but, as a  
21 national non-profit organization that has observed  
22 sanitation programs around the nation, we can testify  
23 that the New York City non-profits that have been  
24 working to bring composting to city residents in all  
25 five boroughs have been nationally recognized for the

2 models they've created and the work they're doing.  
3 Restoring and baselining this funding makes sense  
4 economically. City taxpayers are now spending about  
5 500 million dollars a year to ship trash to out-of-  
6 state landfills and incinerators. A third of this  
7 trash is organics. That's over 150 million dollars a  
8 year spent on exporting these materials. In contrast,  
9 collecting organics and turning them into valuable  
10 soil-enhancing finished compost would save taxpayer  
11 dollars over time, as former Sanitation Commissioners  
12 Garcia and Grayson have conceded, and as cities like  
13 Seattle that have implemented successful composting  
14 programs have demonstrated. We applaud the Council's  
15 2023 passage of its Zero-Waste Package, including the  
16 establishment of curbside organics collection, but  
17 mandates alone are not enough to change public  
18 behavior. Curbside collection will never achieve its  
19 potential and will always be too expensive without a  
20 comprehensive, robust, multi-faceted public education  
21 and training program teaching New Yorkers how to  
22 compost and why it makes sense to do so.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

24 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: This must be done on a  
25 continuing basis, and that is exactly what the

2 curbside of what the community composting program  
3 will do.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much. Your  
5 time has expired.

6 ERIC GOLDSTEIN: Thank you for your  
7 attention.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, now we have  
9 Julie Jenkins.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

11 JULIE JENKINS: Hi, my name is Julie  
12 Jenkins, and I'm here as a resident of the Bronx, the  
13 founder of the Stewards of Ewen Park, and as a proud  
14 member of the Forest for All Coalition. Thank you,  
15 Committee Chair Brannan, Parks Chair Krishnan, and  
16 the Committee Members for the opportunity to testify  
17 today. I live in Kingsbridge in the Bronx. My  
18 neighborhood is an environmental justice area. It's  
19 one of the lowest tree canopy covers in the city and  
20 has a heat index of four out of five, with five being  
21 the worst. Maintaining the trees we do have is very  
22 important in my neighborhood, and we also need a lot  
23 more trees. Ewen Park is an eight-acre park adjacent  
24 to Kingsbridge. The community relies on it as a  
25 respite from pollution and the heat retained by

2 buildings with little to no shade from trees. Ewen  
3 Park has hundreds of trees, a playground, a  
4 basketball court, picnic fields, and already not  
5 enough Parks Operations staff to maintain it  
6 properly. In less than three years, we've pulled  
7 hundreds of bags of trash out of the park, we've  
8 painted benches, we've cleared invasive vines that  
9 make the park feel unsafe or unwelcoming. These are  
10 things Parks does not have sufficient resources to  
11 attend to. Trees provide our oxygen, clean our air,  
12 cool our city, mitigate the potential damage from  
13 increased flooding that New York City will see in the  
14 coming years and decades. The Parks Department is  
15 where you can find the expertise, dedication, and  
16 experience necessary to protect our urban forests,  
17 which is critical public infrastructure. This  
18 division should be generously funded. There's data  
19 from the Health Department demonstrating that heat  
20 kills and temperatures are rising. There's also  
21 significant data showing that trees cool. This is not  
22 a difficult correlation to comprehend. In PlaNYC:  
23 Getting Sustainability Done, it explicitly ties our  
24 forested areas to improved quality of life. The  
25 roadmap connects our urban forest to cooling our

2 built environment, which will protect New Yorkers  
3 from extreme heat. PlaNYC also highlights stewards  
4 and volunteers as essential partners. With these  
5 budget cuts, it seems that this Administration thinks  
6 that volunteers will fill the gaps, but without the  
7 dedicated and knowledgeable staff at Parks, there is  
8 little we as volunteers can do. Partnership..

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you so much. Your  
10 time has expired.

11 JULIE JENKINS: Thanks.

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Now we have  
13 Justin Green.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

15 JUSTIN GREEN: Hi, thank you so much. My  
16 name is Justin Green. I'm the Executive Director of  
17 Big Reuse. Thank you to our amazing Chairs, Council  
18 Members Abreu, Krishnan, and Brannan. We are grateful  
19 to the City Council for the strong response to the  
20 Mayor's budget and the demand that funds be restored  
21 for community composting and other essential  
22 community and parks programs. The outpouring of  
23 support from constituents for community composting  
24 shows how our work impacts and engages. We are here  
25 to ask for the restoration of community composting



2 funding and for City Council to ask the Parks  
3 Department to allow Big Reuse to remain at our  
4 Queensbridge composting site. Community composting  
5 funds master composter certification and composting  
6 education at Botanic Gardens, food scrap drop-offs at  
7 GrowNYC Farmers Markets, community composting  
8 programs at Lower East Side Ecology Center and Earth  
9 Matter and Big Reuse in gardens across the city.  
10 Before the elimination of funding, Big Reuse  
11 collected from 70 food scrap drop-offs across three  
12 boroughs, composting 2.2 million pounds at three  
13 composting sites and providing 1,000 cubic yards to  
14 200 parks, community groups, and street tree care  
15 programs. We also provided outreach for curbside  
16 collection that spoke with 70,000 residents annually  
17 about the new program. Elimination of community  
18 composting funding caused us to have to lay off 16  
19 staff in addition to 115 green jobs across seven  
20 other environmental organizations. It's frustrating  
21 to hear all the GrowNYC employees who just lost their  
22 jobs today as part of that. During a worsening  
23 climate crisis, we need to expand community  
24 composting and not cut it. The need for programs that  
25 empower the community to respond to climate change

2 should be obvious after an unprecedented year of  
3 climate impacts in New York City, wildfire smoke,  
4 record rain, and high tides flooding New York City  
5 neighborhoods. Please restore community composting  
6 funding and save our composting site underneath the  
7 Queensborough Bridge. Thank you.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Now we  
9 have Kate Wimsatt.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We can't hear  
12 you, Katie. Is your microphone on mute?

13 Okay, we're going to go to Maria Garrett.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

15 MARIA GARRETT: Okay. Good afternoon,  
16 everybody. Thanks for having me on. I'm here from  
17 Canarsie, Brooklyn, and I'm also with New Yorkers for  
18 Parks and the Park Coalition. I'm here to speak about  
19 having that 1 percent increase, I mean, budget for  
20 the 2020 year. I live over here by the nature  
21 preserve, and I would like to see this area preserved  
22 as a wetland forever wild. We do not have the proper  
23 maintenance on a yearly basis because the Parks  
24 Department don't have the manpower. As a parkie and  
25 an advocate for the parks, I maintain and watch over

2 this area on a daily basis. When anything goes wrong,  
3 I make sure I alert the Parks Department and let them  
4 come out and help to keep it clean so I would like to  
5 have that money, that 1 percent restored so this way  
6 the Parks Department could work a little bit more at  
7 this preserve. Also, we need signage to let people  
8 know that this is a place that no one could walk on  
9 because it's for the bird. It's a bird sanctuary,  
10 it's forever wild, so I would like to have those  
11 funds, that 1 percent increase, I can't say it  
12 enough, and thank you for your time and listening to  
13 me. Thank you.

14 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Now we  
15 have Rafael Espinal.

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

17 RAFAEL ESPINAL: Hi. My name is Rafael  
18 Espinal, I'm a Board Member of the Forest Park Trust  
19 and a former New York City Council Member. Thank you,  
20 City Council Committee on Finance, Chair Brannan and  
21 Park Chair Krishnan for your leadership. Part of my  
22 testimony is on behalf of the Forest Park Trust and  
23 its President, Michael Palermo. The Forest Park Trust  
24 is a non-profit organization that works in  
25 partnership with the New York City Parks to assist

2 the Forest and Highland Park Administration in its  
3 efforts to secure funding for both parks. The Trust  
4 supports the improvements to the landscape and  
5 recreational areas, provides free family and youth  
6 programs and events and finances seasonal staff to  
7 oversee free fitness classes, maintain our natural  
8 areas and community gardens. We hope that the City  
9 Council prevents the 55 million Fiscal Year '25  
10 budget cuts and stop the elimination of hundreds of  
11 essential jobs that are important for New Yorkers'  
12 well-being. For many New Yorkers, these parks are  
13 their backyards and the present budget outlined will  
14 threaten the cleanliness, maintenance and safety  
15 measures to ensure New York City parks remain secure  
16 havens for children and families to enjoy together. I  
17 grew up and continue to live in Cypress Hills, which  
18 is home to Highland Park and, as a former New York  
19 City Council Member, I secured over 40 million  
20 dollars in capital funds for the restoration of its  
21 playgrounds, gardens, athletic fields, pathways and  
22 several free cultural and sports programs. I'm seeing  
23 firsthand those positive impacts that it's having on  
24 my community. There's now a tremendous increase in  
25 park usership and more respect for Highland Park,

2 which when I was growing up felt abandoned by the  
3 City and was deemed unsafe for residents. These cuts  
4 will roll back years of progress that has been made  
5 to make the park more habitable for the people of  
6 Cypress Hills and East New York. These cuts will also  
7 disturb the health of our natural areas and the  
8 park's contribution to locally reducing the impact of  
9 climate change. Forest and Highland Park's forested  
10 areas contribute to a significant role in maintaining  
11 a greener and more climate resilient city, especially  
12 in communities like ours. I would also like to lend  
13 my voice in advocating towards the push of restoring  
14 funding to the composting program, a program I was a  
15 huge advocate for and have been surprised by  
16 rollbacks over the years given how dire...

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time's expired. Thank  
18 you.

19 RAFAEL ESPINAL: Thank you all for your  
20 leadership and commitment to New York City Parks.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, sir.

22 RAFAEL ESPINAL: Thank you.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Now we have Tami  
24 Lin-Moges.

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

2 TAMI LIN-MOGES: Hi, thank you so much. My  
3 name is Tami Lin-Moges, and I am the Interim Director  
4 of the Nature Conservancy's New York City Program.  
5 The Nature Conservancy is the world's largest  
6 conservation organization, and we have over 35,000  
7 members in New York City. The Nature Conservancy of  
8 New York is a member of the Play Fair Coalition, and  
9 we're also the convener of the Forest for All NYC  
10 Coalition that is made up of nearly 140  
11 organizational members, many of whom are also  
12 providing testimony today. I'm here to express  
13 support for growing the New York City Parks budget to  
14 1 percent of the total City budget and to commit full  
15 funding for the urban forest. Thank you to Finance  
16 Committee Chair Brannan, Parks Committee Chair,  
17 Krishnan, and Members of both Committees for the  
18 opportunity to speak about these issues, and thank  
19 you to the Chairs for your efforts to restore cuts to  
20 the Parks budget. I'll also submit a longer written  
21 testimony. So far, we commend the City's previous  
22 commitments to parks and the urban forest, including  
23 the Mayor's pledge to increase New York City Parks  
24 budget to 1 percent of the total City budget and in  
25 PlaNYC's commitment to reaching 30 percent canopy

2 cover citywide. We also applaud the unanimous Council  
3 passage of two historic bills last fall, including  
4 Local Law 148 that mandated the City's first Urban  
5 Forest Plan. However, the latest budget is not in  
6 line with these commitments. Worse and shockingly,  
7 the latest budget shows the overall City budget  
8 growing by 4.5 billion dollars compared to last year,  
9 and yet the Parks budget is being slashed by 55  
10 million dollars. To support the care and growth of  
11 the urban forest as well as clean, safe and  
12 accessible parks, the New York City Parks needs  
13 sufficient and baseline funding for capital and  
14 operations expenses. This includes ending the hiring  
15 freeze now and restoring staffing to pre-COVID  
16 levels. Furthermore, to ensure the requirements of  
17 Local Law 148 are on track, we strongly encourage  
18 committing funding for the Mayor's Office of Climate  
19 and Environmental Justice as the lead agency to  
20 develop the long-term New York City Urban Forest Plan  
21 by its legally mandated due date of July 2025. The  
22 Nature Conservancy is proud to join with hundreds of  
23 diverse organizations from across the city to call  
24 for 1 percent for Parks and...

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2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time's expired. Thank  
3 you.

4 TAMI LIN-MOGES: Thank you so much to both  
5 Chairs.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. We  
7 have Kate Wimsatt again.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Kate.

10 KATE WIMSATT: Can you hear me?

11 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes, go ahead.  
12 You're good.

13 KATE WIMSATT: Thank you, Chair Brannan  
14 and Chair Abreu, Members of the Committee. My name is  
15 Kate Wimsatt, and I'm the Director of GrowNYC Zero  
16 Waste Schools. In just one month, the much  
17 anticipated and celebrated annual milestone will be  
18 reached when schools break for the summer. As I'm  
19 sure you'll all remember, it's an exciting time. Less  
20 exciting, in one month, the successful and effective  
21 13-year partnership of GrowNYC Zero Waste Schools  
22 with DSNY and NYCPS will end and 25 skilled full-  
23 time green jobs will be lost due to the elimination  
24 of Fiscal Year '25 funding. While I celebrate the  
25 great achievement of all New York City Schools now



2 having curbside composting service, I am highly  
3 concerned that the loss of dedicated educational  
4 support provided by GrowNYC Zero Waste Schools will  
5 jeopardize the full implementation of school curbside  
6 composting. Let's be honest, schools now all have the  
7 service, but they are not by any means all  
8 participating fully. The largest school system in the  
9 country with the largest curbside compost program is  
10 celebrating the rollout to all schools by cutting the  
11 support that has been shown to improve participation  
12 and diversion rates. I just don't get it. Now is not  
13 the time. Now that service is universally available,  
14 ensuring that all schools fully integrate waste  
15 sorting into their daily habits as well as continue  
16 to educate students and adults who can influence  
17 behaviors at home should be a priority. A recent note  
18 from a teacher underscores how GrownNYC helps to  
19 build the capacity of the people who are ultimately  
20 responsible for the daily success of school curbside  
21 composting, the administrators, custodial staff, and  
22 sustainability coordinators. Our team first worked  
23 with William Schell at Brooklyn Tech and recently at  
24 his new school, IS318 in Brooklyn. William had this  
25 to say when he learned that the loss of our funding.

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2 "Without specialized educators from outside  
3 organizations like GrownNYC, helping educators on the  
4 inside, New York City teachers will continue to lack  
5 important support pieces necessary for us to  
6 coordinate school-based sustainability efforts and  
7 reinforce City policy or, more simply, we will lack a  
8 motivational factor for us teachers who need to be  
9 re-energized when we see that trying to do something  
10 good for the whole of our school or city doesn't  
11 matter to some of the stakeholders who should care  
12 the most." GrownNYC Zero Waste Schools urges Mayor  
13 Adams and City Council to care the most by funding  
14 the educational...

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time's expired. Thank  
16 you.

17 KATE WIMSATT: That supports school  
18 personnel and students to effectively participate in  
19 greenhouse gas reducing behaviors. Please restore 2.5  
20 (INAUDIBLE) for GrownNYC Zero Waste Schools and 7  
21 million for the community composting, including  
22 GrownNYC's food scrap drop-off sites. Thank you.

23 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Kate.  
24 Now we have Ulrike Nischan.

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

2                   ULRIKE NISCHAN: Good afternoon, Chair  
3 Brannan and Abreu, for allowing me to speak today and  
4 for your support of community composting. My name is  
5 Ulrike Nischan, and I'm speaking on behalf of the  
6 four borough-based Solid Waste Advisory Boards. I'm  
7 here to ask you to restore the cut to community  
8 compost and bring back all of the jobs lost. As the  
9 recently released IBO analysis of the Executive  
10 Budget shows, the money is there to fund this  
11 valuable work. As you can tell from the outpouring of  
12 support for community compost, even today, this is  
13 really vital and important to people across New York  
14 City. The program creates an inclusive space,  
15 bringing together New Yorkers of all income levels  
16 and backgrounds. The community compost projects were  
17 never designed to be an at-scale solution for New  
18 York City organics, but they are very efficient at  
19 doing what they were designed to do, which includes  
20 outreach to New York City residents about compost and  
21 food scrap diversion, technical support for community  
22 garden and compost programs, education of students,  
23 community gardeners, and importantly, the Master  
24 Composter Program, providing the most environmentally  
25 responsible and processing for food scraps diverted

1 and collected, and last but not least, distributing  
2 the highest quality compost at no charge in New York  
3 City parks, botanical gardens, and for street care  
4 events that help the city address climate change  
5 impacts and mitigate toxicity and depletion of soils.  
6 So only through the community compost project, feet  
7 on the street, hands in the soil, person-to-person  
8 outreach, will citywide curbside organics collection  
9 be sure to succeed and reduce methane created by  
10 landfilling and incinerating organics. That's because  
11 DSNY's strategy of relying on the legality of organic  
12 separation of fines is not sufficient as you can see  
13 from recycling rates in New York City that have  
14 proven this. Those rates have never reached the  
15 modest goal of 23 percent. Now, as the City embarks  
16 on this new stream of source separation, residents  
17 need education and a reason to participate. So please  
18 restore and build up the drop-off sites, composting  
19 and education infrastructure that budget cuts have  
20 brought to the brink of destruction and secure their  
21 futures so we don't end up in the same place in one  
22 year. Again, we know it's not a matter of New York  
23 City lacking the financial means...

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time's expired. Thank  
3 you.

4 ULRIKE NISCHAN: Crucial programming. We  
5 will also know that abstaining from funding community  
6 composting is a luxury the City cannot afford. Thank  
7 you.

8 CO-CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Now we  
9 have Zachary Hendrickson.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

11 ZACHARY HENDRICKSON: Afternoon, my name  
12 is Zachary Hendrickson. I'm a member of Brooklyn  
13 Community Board 4 in Bushwick and I'm a Grants  
14 Manager responsible for overseeing a program with the  
15 goal of supporting an equitable and resilient network  
16 of parks and open spaces to benefit the well-being of  
17 all New Yorkers. Today, New York City Parks faces  
18 over 55 million dollars in cuts and the elimination  
19 of over 600 jobs. These cuts will have a devastating  
20 impact despite accounting for a tiny part of the  
21 City's over 100-billion-dollar Executive Budget  
22 proposal from Mayor Adams, and they're made all the  
23 more cruel and unnecessary given the City has  
24 billions of dollars currently sitting in reserves.  
25 The people of New York deserve better. At my job, I

2 have the immense privilege to work with grassroots  
3 community partners, volunteers scraping together time  
4 in the evenings and on weekends to care for local  
5 open spaces and bringing joy to their neighborhoods.  
6 Last year, we supported 68 organizations across all  
7 five boroughs and, with just a few thousand dollars  
8 each, they held weeks of free skateboarding classes  
9 for young people in Brownsville, organized produce  
10 giveaways in Harlem, and so much more. Every day is a  
11 reminder of just how much goodness there is in this  
12 city, and yet I'm also reminded of just how badly our  
13 City has let some people down. People know what their  
14 neighborhoods need, and it's horrible to have to tell  
15 them that there's nothing we can do to help. Parks  
16 has no money to send more tree pruners to Bushwick,  
17 Parks has no money for a new Green Thumb garden in  
18 the Bronx and, yes, weekly cleanups have gotten  
19 harder because Parks has fewer employees than we did  
20 in 1975 and maintenance and operations workers are  
21 being asked to cover more sites with fewer staff.  
22 Last year, one community partner pleaded with me  
23 saying, I see the cracks in the basketball court get  
24 wider and wider every year, pretty soon we won't even  
25 be able to play anymore, you're saying there's really

2 nothing we can do? So today I'm doing what I can. I  
3 implore this City Council to hold Mayor Adams  
4 accountable to his campaign promise to allocate 1  
5 percent of our City budget to Parks and secure more  
6 permanent baselined jobs. I urge the Council to use  
7 all your powers at your disposal to achieve this goal  
8 and, should it come down to it, I call on all of you,  
9 especially Council Member Krishnan, to vote no on any  
10 budget that does not fully fund Parks.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time's expired. Thank  
12 you.

13 ZACHARY HENDRICKSON: Strong words are not  
14 enough. Communities need funding to grow. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very much.  
16 Okay, with that, day 10 FY25 budget hearings is  
17 adjourned. Thank you, everybody. [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 June 28, 2024