



**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committee on Parks & Recreation
Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget
March 23, 2026**

Testimony By: Tricia Shimamura, Commissioner, NYC Parks

Good morning, Chair Hankerson, members of the Parks Committee, and other members of the Council. My name is Tricia Shimamura, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. I am pleased to be here today to testify regarding the agency's Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget, and to be joined by several members of our agency's senior staff leadership.

Since this is my first opportunity to testify at a Council budget hearing as Commissioner, and some of you may be new to the Council or the Parks Committee, before we speak to the proposed budget, I'd like to offer a brief overview of our agency, outline some recent successes we've enjoyed, and provide a sense of what we want to achieve in the years ahead. NYC Parks is responsible for over 30,000 acres of land — 14 percent of New York City's surface area — including more than 5,000 individual properties spanning from Rockaway Beach to Pelham Bay Park, with an incredible array of uses and functions, ranging from tiny community gardens to miles of Greenstreets. In the properties under our jurisdiction, you'll find over 800 athletic fields and nearly 1,000 playgrounds, 1,800 basketball courts, 700 public restroom buildings, 550 tennis courts, 65 public pools, 51 recreational facilities, 15 nature centers, 14 miles of beaches, 1,200 monuments, 23 historic house museums, and over 5 million trees.

Two months ago, I was appointed by Mayor Mamdani to lead this incredible agency tasked with improving the lives of millions of New Yorkers each and every day. The Mayor has outlined his vision for a more affordable city, and I am very proud to be leading the agency of affordability, because parks are for everyone. Our park spaces are free and open to all New Yorkers regardless of your ZIP code, your ethnicity, or your tax bracket. To go out and enjoy our city parks, you just need a comfortable pair of shoes and the clothes on your back. In a city where a gym membership can cost you hundreds of dollars every month and a simple family night out at the movies can break the bank, we are providing completely free recreational, educational and cultural programming in parks throughout the year, as well as free or low-cost access to our recreation centers that every New Yorker can enjoy. As Commissioner, I will work to ensure that



our parks and facilities aren't just accessible - they need to be engaging and active spaces that New Yorkers can be proud of, whether they're looking for a chance to exercise, get closer to nature, gather with family or neighbors, or simply just sit and take in a moment of peace from our crowded and noisy streets. New Yorkers rely on our city parks as essential city infrastructure, so our staff needs to care for these spaces just like our own backyards – because for so many New Yorkers, that's exactly what they are - and they need to be clean and welcoming public spaces that provide a sense of belonging and joy.

In just these past few months, I have already seen countless examples of the hard work and dedication of our incredible employees, who are essential workers striving for excellence in the public realm and delivering for New Yorkers every single day. When New York experienced record-levels of snow and severe weather from the recent winter storms, including a deep freeze that felt like it would never end, Parks employees were out on the frontlines, working 12-hour shifts clearing our park perimeter sidewalks and intersections, resolving dangerous tree-related conditions, and patrolling the lakes and ponds within our parks, keeping New Yorkers safe. This is the level of dedication that our employees bring to this agency every day, and I look forward to living up to the example they set.

Last month, we were thrilled to celebrate the opening of the Shirley Chisholm Recreation Center, the first new Parks recreation center in over a decade, the first ever in Central Brooklyn, and the largest recreation center in the entire borough. Located right in the heart of Little Haiti, the residents of East Flatbush and Midwood finally have access to a state-of-the-art facility with 74,000-square-feet of space offering swimming in a competition-sized six-lane pool, team sports, exercise, educational programming, a teaching kitchen, and even an audio-visual production media lab. Like all of our Parks recreation centers, memberships are entirely free for kids and young adults, and incredibly affordable for New Yorkers of all ages. We're grateful to our partner agencies for their collaboration, especially the Department of Design & Construction for delivering the project through design-build contracting, years faster than would otherwise have been possible, and to our elected officials and local community members for their tireless advocacy and support for the project. Shirley Chisholm is an American icon, as well as a hero to me and millions of others, and opening this facility named in her honor is an incredible testament to her legacy, and a reminder that our government can, and must, deliver for everyone, not just the rich and powerful.



This commitment to equity and fairness means that we believe all New Yorkers should have access to vibrant high-quality parks, so we were excited to recently announce the newest phase of our Community Parks Initiative, also known as CPI. \$50 million dollars in new capital investment will deliver the transformative reconstruction of ten parks, serving neighborhoods in all five boroughs that have historically been neglected and underserved. Through this initiative, we are using data-driven methodology and working with local communities to create and revive thriving public places. Over the past decade, we have wholly reimagined and reconstructed 70 CPI projects for local neighborhood parks, with dozens more actively underway - over half a billion dollars of capital funding for rebuilding parks and playgrounds that haven't seen significant investment in decades.

Many of those underserved neighborhoods are also impacted by higher heat vulnerability and some communities aren't benefiting equally from the City's urban tree canopy, which is vital living infrastructure. We believe that every New York City neighborhood should get to enjoy the benefits that trees provide and we're working to expand our tree canopy with new plantings all over the city delivered in a more efficient and equitable fashion, thanks to the concentrated planting strategy adopted through our recently-launched Neighborhood Tree Planting program. Now, new street trees are planted on a data-driven basis of fairness and efficiency—prioritizing the most heat-vulnerable neighborhoods first, as a matter of environmental justice. Even in its early stages, this new efficient approach is already delivering results for New Yorkers. In our most recent fall-winter planting season that just concluded, we planted over 9,500 trees along our streets and in our parks, the highest planting levels in over a decade.

With the support of the Mayor and many of your offices, we engaged in a massive publicity campaign to get the word out to New Yorkers willing to rise to the challenge and become part of our lifeguard team for this coming summer, as we offered qualifying tests at indoor pools around the city, including our recreation centers as well as NYC Public Schools sites. We are working to get these new recruits trained, certified and ready to protect New Yorkers, serving alongside our returning lifeguards, so that the upcoming beach and pool season can be even more successful than the one we enjoyed this past summer. In Summer 2025, over 9 million people visited our public beaches and pools, we expanded the number of free summertime "Learn to Swim" classes, and we were able to bring back "Senior Splash" and lap swim programming to



our outdoor pools for the first time since the COVID pandemic. This was all made possible through an incredibly focused campaign to recruit and retain lifeguards, and expand training opportunities, which is an effort that will carry on, as we seek to build on that momentum.

As seen in the Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report released earlier this month, our MMR ratings for overall park condition and park cleanliness in the first four months of this current Fiscal Year increased by one percentage point in each category compared to the same period of FY25 – rising to 86 percent and 93 percent, respectively. Among other factors, we believe this improvement can be credited to the expansion of our “second shift” maintenance staffing approach, which strategically targets 200 heavily used park locations during peak-use evening hours and weekends. To be clear, this metric data, which helps inform our maintenance strategy around the city, is not self-reported by our operational staff. These metrics are derived from the thousands of inspections made throughout the year by our Parks Inspection Program, or PIP. This is a detailed, objective quality assurance program, independently administered by our Operations and Management Planning (OMP) division, conducted completely independently from our Maintenance and Operations staff - similar to what many in the retail business would call a “Secret Shopper” program – so we can hold ourselves accountable and adjust our strategies in real-time as problems arise.

The PMMR also reflects the growing interest in the recreational programming that we offer in parks around the city, as over half a million people attended our programs outside of recreation centers in the first four months of FY26, an increase of 77 percent over the same period in FY25. The increase was largely due to the addition of nine more program sites and an increased number of operating days for our Kids in Motion program, which is our free drop-in program led by NYC Parks staff, offering active outdoor play in playgrounds to keep kids active and engaged on those warm summer days.

Because we are committed to accountability and transparency, I will also mention that the newest PMMR reflects a significant decrease in the number of street trees pruned in the first four months of FY26 compared to the same period in FY25. Unfortunately, we unexpectedly lost the services of an experienced block pruning contractor due to the tragic passing of the company's owner in late June, forcing the agency to rebid those contracts. The preventive care of our tree canopy is a hugely important priority for us, so we are working to advance these new



block pruning contracts through the City's procurement process and bring those vendors on board as quickly as possible, so we can resume meeting our block pruning targets, as we've typically done over the years.

Even though it has felt at times like this winter would never end, we know that warmer days are approaching, and our parks, athletic fields and playgrounds are going to be busier than they've ever been. As many of you know, thanks to once-in-a-lifetime celebrations like the 2026 World Cup and Sail250, the New York City metro area is expected to receive a truly massive influx of visitors and tourists this summer, with an estimated 2 million people coming into or passing through New York City as they cheer on their favorite teams and celebrate the 250th anniversary of the founding of our country. We are confident that our employees are up to the task, as we are poised to begin on-boarding our seasonal employees, reactivate our water features, and getting our sports fields in shape as our busiest season approaches. There is no denying that this summer will present some very unique challenges, but we're extremely excited that so many visitors will be able to come experience our world-class greenspaces, alongside the millions of local New Yorkers that enjoy our parks every single day.

Turning to the specific topic for this hearing, the Fiscal Year 227 Preliminary 10-Year Capital Plan for NYC Parks includes a total budget of \$12 billion dollars, demonstrating this Administration's ongoing commitment to promoting equitable investment in a greener, healthier city. The FY27 Preliminary expense operating budget for NYC Parks is \$654 million dollars, providing our agency with the resources we need to continue getting the job done, delivering core services and keeping our city parks clean and welcoming. To be completely clear, this proposed budget figure does represent a \$33.7 million dollar decrease from the FY26 Adopted Budget of \$687.6 million dollars, which, it is important to note, is due to the routine expiration of single-year "one-shot" funding items that are typically added at each budget adoption, subject to negotiations between Council and the Administration. In our current FY26 Adopted Budget, this yearly funding includes Council "Parks Equity Initiative" discretionary expense funding, as well as additional staffing, supplies and equipment to support various efforts throughout our agency. Our maintenance teams, GreenThumb community garden program, Urban Parks Rangers, Forest Management Framework and Parks Enforcement Patrol are all significantly supported through this supplemental funding, which provides tremendous added value, and the Parkies



serving in those staffing lines are a hugely important part of our team, so we greatly appreciate the Council's long-standing support and advocacy for that dedicated funding.

Though we don't have time today to exhaustively outline every operational aspect of every effort and initiative being undertaken by the agency to ensure the long-term success of our park system, I hope this overview has helped demonstrate our commitment to growing and protecting green and open space around the city, and we look forward to working with the Council in close partnership to make sure our park system can be the envy of cities around the world. To be clear, we cannot do this alone – we rely on the support of our elected officials, our partner and friends groups ranging from larger conservancies with formal license agreements to small neighborhood associations organizing volunteer clean-up events, and most importantly, the individual New Yorkers and park visitors who use our parks every day, and who need to do their part, by treating these public spaces with the respect and dignity that they deserve, so we can all enjoy this vital resource that we all have to share.

In closing, I want to thank my entire team for their continued hard work and dedication to our mission. I'm honored and grateful to have been granted the privilege of leading this agency, and I look forward to working with each of you to continue improving our parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers. We would now be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

**Testimony by Heather Lubov
on the Preliminary Budget - Parks and Recreation
Prepared March 23, 2026**

Good afternoon Chair Hankerson and members of the Committee. I'm Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks Foundation, which delivers free programming that reaches 300,000 New Yorkers, enlivens our city's parks, and creates social cohesion and community. Through SummerStage, the PuppetMobile, sports lessons, and environmental education, we encourage people to use their parks. Through Partnerships for Parks, a public-private collaboration with NYC Parks, we support more than 420 grassroots volunteer groups and 28,000 individual volunteers who care for parks. Through the NYC Green Fund, we raise and regrant \$2.5 million annually to support groups that are programming and maintaining parks.

Central to our work is the Parks Equity Initiative, which we are asking the Council to expand after years of flat funding. This initiative pays for the staff who engage volunteers, provide technical assistance, distribute grants, and build stewardship capacity, particularly in environmental justice communities. Every dollar invested through the initiative multiplies into more volunteer hours, community capacity, and greener neighborhoods. Expansion of funding will help us implement the pilot work we started on the Urban Forest Plan to identify and train tree stewardship groups, increase our tree canopy and support climate goals.

Ultimately, though, our work really depends on a well-resourced Parks Department, which is why the preliminary budget is so concerning. We are genuinely excited to work with an administration that has an ambitious and progressive agenda. But in its current form, the preliminary budget does not match that ambition. It proposes \$33 million less than last year's adopted budget, eliminates 100 staffing lines, and fails to protect the 276 Parks workers set to lose their jobs at the end of this fiscal year. The Parks Department has been cut to the bone and staffing is inadequate in every possible way, from maintenance and forestry to permitting, from legal and capital planning to recreation. It becomes harder and harder to do our work when the agency can barely do its own.

New Yorkers deserve a thriving public realm. We urge the Council and administration to restore funding, baseline the 276 one-shot positions at risk, add funding per the Play Fair Coalition's agenda, and expand the Parks Equity Initiative. Thank you.



New York City Environmental Justice Alliance Testimony for NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation Hearing for the FY27 City Budget

March 23, 2026

This testimony is on behalf of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA), which is a citywide membership network linking 13 grassroots organizations from low-income communities of color in their struggle for environmental justice. NYC-EJA empowers its member organizations to advocate for improved environmental conditions and against inequitable environmental burdens by the coordination of campaigns to inform City and State policies. Through our efforts, member organizations coalesce around specific common issues that threaten the ability for low-income communities of color to thrive. In addition, we are a member of Forest for All NYC, a coalition of over 200 organizations committed to helping the city reach 30% tree canopy cover citywide by 2035 in an equitable manner. Reaching this goal will require sustained and baseline funding for the staff and programs which care for and grow the NYC urban forest.

The proposed funding in the [Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget](#) for the Department of Parks and Recreation is insufficient to both maintain and expand our urban forest at the pace that is needed to mitigate the impacts of climate change and extreme heat. Fully funding the urban forest is critical to public safety, workforce development, community health and wellness, and climate resilience. NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC, but the Parks staff and programs that support the urban forest have continued to be cut over the years. **We call on the City Council to fund and baseline NYC Parks forestry staff positions, as well as fund the implementation of the forthcoming Urban Forest Plan by the Mayor's Office, updated citywide LiDar data to monitor the urban forest, and the 2025 street tree census.** Additionally, restoring the hundreds of other Parks staff positions and tree programs that were cut in the past few years is critical to public safety, workforce development, community health and wellness, and climate resilience. **We call on the Council to allocate \$150M to fund the initial implementation of the 10-year Urban Forest Plan, including baselining and expanding NYC Parks forestry staff positions and funding to support other City agencies that will expand tree canopy under their jurisdiction.**

Background

The NYC Department of Parks and Recreation manages 53.3% of the total urban forest canopy in the city. Despite its laudable efforts, NYC Parks is chronically underfunded, particularly for urban forest management. Parks needs baselined and sufficient investment in the regular maintenance of the urban forest. NYC's first ever Urban Forest Plan, required by Local Law 148

of 2023, will be released this spring and chart a path for NYC to equitably expand tree canopy cover to 30% citywide. Successful implementation of this Plan will require resources, including planting additional trees, baselining existing staff and expanding the workforce that protects and maintains trees, as well as, investing in workforce development programs, tree nurseries, tree health research and monitoring, wood salvage, and more. The urban forest helps cool the city - reducing energy bills and decreasing heat-related public health risks. These investments can also help the Mayor meet his goals of improving livability and quality of life in NYC.

Recent [tree canopy change data](#) (from 2017-2021) from The Nature Conservancy demonstrates that investment in trees is effective in improving the urban forest. In the South Bronx, where investment in tree planting has been focused for over a decade to address systemic inequities in access to green space and related heat and health burdens, we continue to see an increase in overall canopy. Yet, many areas continue to lag behind in canopy growth, or experience loss from development and storm impacts. We need more and sustained investment to continue to address inequities in canopy distribution citywide and help grow and sustain an urban forest that is resilient to climate change. In addition to the demonstrated value of capital investment in tree planting, the data make a strong case for the need for maintenance and protection of mature trees. A coarse proximity analysis of tree canopy change suggests that most of the citywide gain in tree canopy from 2017 to 2021 can be attributed to the growth of existing trees rather than new plantings. Even with expanded access to playgrounds accounted for in the Preliminary Budget, not all parks have healthy, abundant, and mature trees. According to the Mayor's Office's EJNYC Mapping tool, despite walking distance access to several playgrounds, neighborhoods like East Harlem, Mott-Haven, and Prospect-Lefferts Garden earn a Heat Vulnerability Index score of 5 and have less than 30% tree canopy cover.

Funding Asks:

We ask that the Budget include approximately \$150 million for:

- Restoration, expansion, and baselining of NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) staff and programs to support ongoing operations and to grow the urban forest:
 - Expand NYC Park's capacity for tree risk management and inspections, including increasing and baselining the number of staff (climbers and pruners, foresters, and related management) and contract funding that are critical for caring for and managing the existing tree canopy across NYC.
 - Baseline NYC Parks positions currently funded by one-year contracts (approximately 276 positions including Parks Enforcement Patrol, Urban Forest Rangers, Forestry staff, etc.) to limit turnover and sustain the operational efficiency that come from retaining a stable workforce.
 - Provide \$16M in baselined annual funding to fully implement the Forest Management Framework for forested natural areas, including \$2.4M in annual capital funding for large scale restoration and contract work, \$11.2M in baselined expense funding for in-house staff to conduct maintenance and for materials and operating costs, and \$2.4M in baselined expense funding to provide one trails

crew per borough supporting the formalization and maintenance of NYC's nature trail network.

- Increase the number of tree planting staff (via Capital funded Interfund Agreement) to increase the number of street trees planted from just under 18,000 in FY25 to at least 25,000 per year, with the aim of shortening the 9-year Neighborhood Tree Planting Program.
- Increase funding for the trees and sidewalks program, to increase the City's capacity to respond to damage to sidewalks caused by tree roots.
- \$1M for the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to support non-NYC Parks agencies tasked with heightened management and expansion of trees in their jurisdictions (such as NYC Housing Authority, Department of Education, the School Construction Authority, Department of Sanitation, Department of Transportation, etc.) in implementing initial actions of the forthcoming NYC Urban Forest Plan. This includes funding for an updated citywide Lidar remote sensing data capture and analysis to monitor the canopy coverage of the urban forest and measure the growth or loss of tree canopy coverage and track progress towards the 30% goal, as required by Local Law 148 of 2023 to be completed every 5 years.

In addition to these budget requests, there are several staffing-related needs that are essential in rebuilding and expanding the City's urban forest workforce, including:

- Salary increases for the advanced and technical civil service roles like Foresters and Climber & Pruners, to help attract and retain the best candidates to manage the nation's largest urban forest.
- Expansion of City-led workforce training programs, including internal programs to train existing employees and create promotional opportunities like the NYC Parks Climber & Pruner program, as well as programs that bring in new workers to expand overall workforce capacity.
- We commend the Mayor for lifting the hiring freeze and 2-1 hiring ratio, but are disappointed that 100 vacant roles will be eliminated from Parks on top of the 600 positions previously cut since 2023 - effectively resulting in 700 positions being permanently lost. We encourage all these positions to be restored and filled.

Trees, vegetation, and green space are critical infrastructure in New York City; infrastructure that needs funding to reflect how important it is. **The Department of Parks and Recreation deserves enough funding to maintain, expand, and fully staff the over 30,000 acres of land that Parks is responsible for.**

New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
Monday, March 23, 2026
Committee on Parks and Recreation - Preliminary Budget Hearing
Max Barton, Laborers Local 1010

NYC Parks and our city-trees provide a critical canopy or natural infrastructure that mitigates heat, reduces stormwater runoff, and improves air quality. The city has set an ambitious goal to increase this canopy to 30% by 2035. New Yorkers are struggling with affordability, the city is trying to address affordability, all while doing their best to respond to this amid a budget deficit without cutting services, especially in our beloved Parks which offer free recreation and low cost or free programming for all New Yorkers to enjoy.

This administration is looking for ways to improve government efficiency, an approach we support and being creative on how we achieve this. One way to do this that has proven time-and-time again to be effective and efficient is Project Labor Agreements. For **decades**, Project Labor Agreements have provided consistent labor standards across all bidders, ensuring that contractors compete on efficiency and quality rather than on the lowest possible labor costs. They also support workforce training, safety standards, and predictable staffing for complex public works.

As reported by the NYC Mayors' Office of Contract Services, the City of New York and the Building and Construction Trades Council (BCTC) of Greater New York have been parties to various Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) since 2009. These PLAs have been a critical component of the City's completion and delivery of public works by establishing consistent works rules across construction projects, reducing the administrative burden and costs on construction agencies, and providing opportunities for City residents and businesses. The recent PLAs also increase opportunities and add flexibility for Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprises (M/WBEs), allowing their workforce to gain valuable experience on city projects and build their companies and provide good paying career opportunities for low-income

communities. The city has multiple active PLAs, but absent from this inclusion is NYC Parks Forestry work.

In an oversight hearing held in September 2025 that focused on the Parks Department Contracting Practices & Vendor Accountability, testimony provide by Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations found promising results from contractors operating under Project Labor Agreements. In recent Parks Department datasets, tree-planting contracts performed by union-signatory firms **demonstrated faster planting completion and higher short-term tree survivability rates.**

For all these reasons, the City should consider whether Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) could strengthen the city's forestry contracting model. Thank you to the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation and Chair Ty Hankerson for holding this hearing.

Committee on Parks & Recreation

Hearing Date: March 23, 2026

Submitted by: Reshma Patel

Title/Organization: Manhattan Community Board 6

Contact Information: reshmap@gmail.com

My name is Reshma Patel, and I serve on the Parks and Cultural Affairs Committee of Manhattan Community Board 6 (CB6), as well as Vice Chair of its Budget and Governmental Affairs Committee. CB6 represents Manhattan's East Side neighborhoods, including Stuyvesant Town–Peter Cooper Village, Gramercy, Kips Bay, Murray Hill, Tudor City, Turtle Bay, and Sutton Place.

Over my eight years on the Board, the majority of our budget priorities have consistently focused on funding for parks. Since the pandemic, the reliance of our communities on these public green spaces has only grown more urgent. It is therefore deeply concerning that the Mayor's FY27 Preliminary Budget proposes a \$33 million reduction from the FY26 Adopted Budget for NYC Parks.

These cuts would eliminate critical staffing lines and jeopardize 276 essential workers at a time when our constituents are calling for *more*, not fewer, resources. This reduction further strains an already under-resourced agency, where only 65% of parks currently meet established maintenance standards.

Parks are essential infrastructure to a vibrant, healthy New York City. As climate change intensifies and heat waves become more frequent, New Yorkers increasingly depend on safe, clean, and well-maintained green spaces for relief and resilience. To meet this moment, the City must invest in second-shift maintenance, restore capital project staffing, and address the significant backlog in forestry and trades work.

With over 30,000 acres of parkland, New York City must treat its parks system as a core public health asset. Residents of CB6 have made clear their desire for increased investment. We respectfully urge the Council and the Administration to restore staffing, baseline seasonal positions, and commit to a long-term solution by allocating 1% of the City budget to NYC Parks.

Sincerely,

Reshma Patel



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Historic House Trust of New York City
FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing Testimony
NYC Council Parks & Recreation Committee
Monday, March 23, 2026

My name is Giulietta Fiore, and I'm testifying on behalf of the Historic House Trust of New York City. I'm also proud to stand with the Play Fair for Parks Coalition in calling on the City to **dedicate 1% of the budget to NYC Parks**. Thank you for this opportunity to share my perspective.

The Historic House Trust partners with NYC Parks to steward **23 City-owned historic sites across more than 400 acres of public parkland**. These include Revolutionary-era homes, abolitionist sites, centers of immigrant history, and neighborhood landmarks. Operated by nonprofit partners, these sites bring history to life every day, especially in communities that have long been underserved by major cultural institutions.

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the United States, it is more important than ever to support New York City's historic sites. **They are places where our stories live, in the spaces where history actually happened.** They are public spaces for everyone, stewarded by the community, offering low-cost programs that connect New Yorkers to history, culture, and each other. And they deserve equitable and reliable support, regardless of borough, neighborhood, or local wealth.

In today's digital age, where teens spend up to nine hours per day on screens, **hands-on, in-person learning is more urgent than ever**. Our historic sites provide this, bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world experience. They boost engagement, expose young New Yorkers to new perspectives, and make history tangible and relevant, contributing directly to a city where people can learn, explore, and thrive.

Historic preservation is a long game, but we are not stuck in the past. We are looking ahead to the next 250 years, securing our legacy and imagining a bright, vibrant future. **Yet years of underfunding for NYC Parks have put that future at risk**. Allocating 1% of the City budget is how we meet this moment with action and vision. The 250th anniversary should not be symbolic—it should be a catalyst. Cultural and open space resources are essential to daily life and the quality of life of every resident. **It's not enough to survive; we deserve to thrive**. If we act now, future generations will have the same opportunities to learn, explore, and live fully in New York City. If we fail, our city could lose its unique character, irreplaceable resources could vanish, and young people may take their talents elsewhere rather than investing in the public life of their own city.

We are calling for sustained investment in NYC Parks for staffing and maintenance—not just for historic sites, but for the entire system. Parks are where New Yorkers live their daily lives: in playgrounds, on ballfields, along boardwalks, and inside recreation centers. Without these cultural and recreational assets (the spaces that make New York City truly New York City) the city cannot fully support the well-being and livability of its residents. Let's make this city not just enduring, but truly vibrant for all New Yorkers, today and for generations to come.



Testimony for NYC Council Committee on Parks & Recreation Hearing on the Preliminary FY27 Budget
Tami Lin-Moges, Director, NY Cities Program, The Nature Conservancy
March 23, 2026

Thank you, Chair Hankerson, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to testify. My name is Tami Lin-Moges, and I am the Director of The Nature Conservancy's New York Cities Program. The Nature Conservancy is the world's largest conservation organization, and our diverse staff and more than 400 scientists conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. We impact conservation in 76 countries and territories, directly and with partners. We have 90,000 members across New York, 35,000 of whom are in New York City. We advance strategies that create a healthy, resilient, and sustainable urban environment and are committed to improving NYC's air, land, and water to sustain and support the people and nature of this great city.

In New York City, we convene the 200+ member [Forest for All NYC](#) coalition and we are leading practitioners on the science and policy of the NYC urban forest. In 2021, we authored the [State of the Urban Forest in NYC](#) (SUFNYC) a comprehensive assessment of the local urban forest, and with Forest for All NYC, released the [NYC Urban Forest Agenda](#), a collaborative roadmap that provides detailed recommendations to meaningfully protect, maintain, expand, research, and promote the NYC urban forest to benefit all New Yorkers justly and equitably. We also conducted an analysis, using 2017 data, of [local tree canopy potential](#) that shows the feasibility of expanding canopy cover in [every neighborhood](#) across the city. Later this year, we will be publishing updates on these analyses using the latest available [2021 canopy data](#), allowing us to further understand the dynamics of the NYC urban forest.

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of The Nature Conservancy and as a leading member of Forest for All NYC and the Play Fair Coalition regarding the FY27 Preliminary Budget. I urge the Mayor and City Council to finally start moving toward dedicating 1% of the City budget to parks, starting with \$150 million in capital and expense funds for the NYC urban forest in FY27. These funds would restore and baseline critical NYC Parks roles, expand forestry and natural areas staffing, and support implementation of the Urban Forest Plan across City agencies.

The urban forest includes not just the trees and their canopy, but also their physical infrastructure, such as tree beds and soil, the accompanying biodiversity, and a rich social infrastructure, such as the people who dedicate their careers and free time to it. The urban forest includes over 7 million trees, with their canopy covering 23.4% of the city as of 2021. It spans the whole of the city, crossing jurisdictions and owners, and can be found on our streets, private backyards, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) campuses, City parks, schools, institutions, and other sites.

This year's budget cycle comes at a pivotal moment. This spring, the City will release its first-ever [Urban Forest Plan](#), as required by Local Law 148 of 2023. This Plan directly builds on the work of the Forest for All NYC coalition and the *NYC Urban Forest Agenda*, and in many ways, is the culmination of decades of science, advocacy, collaboration, and community leadership. The Plan will set forth a comprehensive

roadmap for achieving a 30% tree canopy goal citywide in an equitable way, detailing how the City and its partners can expand the workforce, improve tree maintenance, strengthen community stewardship, and build a more resilient urban forest across all five boroughs.

The release of this 10-year Plan is a defining moment for NYC and requires associated investment to ensure its success. The Urban Forest Plan could set New York apart as a national and global leader in nature-based climate solutions. It also has the potential to substantially improve the lived experience of New Yorkers – particularly those living in heat-vulnerable neighborhoods with historically low canopy and fewer public resources. But it cannot be implemented without restoring and expanding the very workforce that sustains the urban forest.

For years, the City's ability to manage its portion of the urban forest has been constrained by chronic and unstable underfunding, which has led to workforce reductions. The NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) is responsible for 53.5% of tree canopy in NYC and manages more than 14% percent of all NYC's land area. Despite its enormous ecological, social, and economic value, NYC Parks only receives 0.5% of the City budget, with even fewer resources allocated to the forestry activities of NYC Parks, and the agency has faced repeated staff cuts and hiring freezes. Between FY23 and FY26, NYC Parks lost more than 600 positions, and an additional 100 vacancies are slated for permanent elimination this year as a condition for lifting the hiring freeze. Many of these roles directly support forestry, natural areas management, trails maintenance, public programming, and park safety. The consequence is that as the tree canopy is planned to grow to reach 30% cover, the available workforce is far smaller and more unstable than the task demands.

There are severe inequities in the spatial distribution of the NYC urban forest, and thus meaningful disparities in terms of where benefits and services are provisioned and to whom. This is further exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. As climate change increases the frequency and intensity of heat waves, heavy rainfall, and coastal storms, New Yorkers already burdened by environmental and socioeconomic challenges face heightened vulnerability, as outlined in the City's [EJNYC report](#) from 2024. The most heat-vulnerable neighborhoods in NYC are often home to lower-income residents and communities of color and have significantly less tree canopy, higher energy burdens, and greater exposure to air pollution (See [SUFNYC Ch. 4](#)). On average, [more than 500 New Yorkers](#) die prematurely each summer due to hot weather, with the death rate for Black New Yorkers two times higher than white New Yorkers. Extreme rainfall is becoming more frequent, overwhelming infrastructure and putting increasingly vulnerable households at [risk of displacement](#). The cost of inaction is not theoretical – New Yorkers are experiencing climate change now, and its consequences fall disproportionately on the communities with the fewest resources to adapt.

Nature and green spaces help make the city more affordable and livable. [Research published in 2018 by the US Department of Agriculture \(USDA\) Forest Service](#) on the urban forest indicates that its benefits and services of carbon sequestration and mitigation, air pollution removal, avoided stormwater runoff, and reduced energy costs to be worth well over \$260 million per year, and the cost to replace this resource if lost would be about \$5.7 billion. Investments in trees and green space reduce household energy costs, mitigate heat exposure, and lower the financial burdens associated with climate risks. They

reduce flooding in vulnerable areas, which helps avoid costly damage and provides direct economic savings. Parks also serve as free, accessible, proximate places to rest, play, gather, and seek relief on hot summer days – benefits that matter enormously in a high-cost city. Nature is not an add-on to affordability; it is an effective tool to reduce financial strain and improve quality of life.

The Nature Conservancy respectfully requests that the Council and the Administration work together to allocate \$150 million in FY27 to start to rebuild NYC’s urban forest workforce and launch the first phase of the Urban Forest Plan. This \$150 million investment includes:

- Restoration, expansion, and baselining of NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) staff and programs to support ongoing operations and to grow the urban forest:
 - Expand NYC Park’s capacity for tree risk management and inspections, including increasing and baselining the number of staff (climbers and pruners, foresters, and related management) and contract funding that are critical for caring for and managing the existing tree canopy across NYC. Planting new trees is critical, but recent research from The Nature Conservancy (report forthcoming) indicates that approximately 90% of the canopy growth from 2017-2021 was due to growth of existing trees – highlighting just how critical the protection and maintenance of the trees we already have is in reaching the 30% canopy goal.
 - Baseline NYC Parks positions currently funded by one-year contracts (approximately 276 positions including Parks Enforcement Patrol, Urban Forest Rangers, Forestry staff, etc.) to limit turnover and sustain the operational efficiency that comes from retaining a stable workforce.
 - Provide \$16M in baselined annual funding to fully implement the Forest Management Framework for forested natural areas, including \$2.4M in annual capital funding for large scale restoration and contract work, \$11.2M in baselined expense funding for in-house staff to conduct maintenance and for materials and operating costs, and \$2.4M in baselined expense funding to provide one trails crew per borough supporting the formalization and maintenance of NYC’s nature trail network..
 - Increase the number of tree planting staff (via Capital funded Interfund Agreement) to increase the number of street trees planted from just under 18,000 in FY25 to at least 25,000 per year, with the aim of shortening the 9-year Neighborhood Tree Planting Program.
 - Increase funding for the trees and sidewalks program, to increase the City’s capacity to respond to damage to sidewalks caused by tree roots.
- \$1M for the Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to support non-NYC Parks agencies tasked with heightened management and expansion of trees in their jurisdictions (such as NYC Housing Authority, Department of Education, the School Construction Authority, Department of Sanitation, Department of Transportation, etc.) in implementing initial actions of the forthcoming NYC Urban Forest Plan. This includes funding for an updated citywide Lidar remote sensing data capture and analysis to monitor the canopy coverage of the urban forest and measure the growth or loss of tree canopy coverage and track progress towards the 30% goal, as required by Local Law 148 of 2023 to be completed every 5 years.

In addition to these budget requests, there are several staffing-related needs that are essential in rebuilding and expanding the City’s urban forest workforce, including salary increases for the advanced and technical civil service roles like Foresters and Climber & Pruners, to help attract and retain the best

candidates to manage the nation's largest urban forest. We also call for expansion of City-led workforce training programs, including internal programs to train existing employees and create promotional opportunities like the NYC Parks Climber & Pruner program, as well as programs that bring in new workers to expand overall workforce capacity.

These investments are necessary to ensure that millions of New Yorkers across generations can benefit from the cooling, health, safety, and economic impacts of a thriving urban forest. They are investments in public health, in workforce stability, and in the long-term affordability and livability of our city. I urge the Council and the Administration to seize this moment by fully funding the workforce, programs, and cross-agency coordination necessary to bring this plan to life. The Nature Conservancy stands ready to continue offering technical expertise, community partnership, and support for the City's efforts.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to testify.

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New York Restoration Project
Testimony before New York City Council
Committee on Parks and Recreation Preliminary Budget
3/23/2026

Good afternoon Chair Hankerson and members of the Parks Committee. My name is Lynn Bodnar Kelly, and I am the Executive Director of New York Restoration Project (NYRP), founder and former Co-Chair of Parks and Open Space Partners and a founding member of the Play Fair Coalition. I am here today advocating for full funding of NYC Parks in the FY27 budget, a department that has been operating on an austerity budget for over 40 years.

For over 30 years, NYRP has partnered with residents in the city's least green neighborhoods to plant trees, restore parks, and expand access to green space. Today, more than 1.6 million New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of an NYRP-managed space. We believe every New Yorker deserves access to high-quality public green space.

NYC's 30,000 acres of parkland are essential public infrastructure. They support public health, strengthen climate resilience, and improve quality of life in every neighborhood. Our parks system is also one of the city's most important affordable resources, providing free spaces for recreation, exercise, and connection with nature.

Yet the FY27 Preliminary Budget moves us backward. It cuts \$33 million from the Parks budget and fails to restore funding after years of reductions. It also eliminates 100 positions, on top of more than 600 staff already lost since 2023, while 276 additional workers remain at risk due to temporary funding. As a result, only 65% of parks meet basic maintenance standards.

To ensure a safe, clean, and functional parks system, the City must take immediate action. This includes adding 460 second-shift workers to maintain 400 high-use parks and restrooms, restoring 59 capital staff and adding 60 more to restart nearly 100 stalled projects and unlock \$450 million in investments, and hiring 227 forestry staff to address a backlog of over 20,000 uninspected trees and 35,000 open work orders.



NEW YORK RESTORATION PROJECT

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Importantly, New Yorkers support increased investment in parks. In a recent New York Times poll of more than 35,000 readers, a majority ranked parks funding as their top policy priority. The public understands what is at stake.

Parks underpin the health, safety, and resilience of our city. Continued disinvestment will only increase long-term costs and deepen inequities across neighborhoods.

We urge the Mayor and the City Council to restore staffing, invest in park maintenance, and commit to a long-term goal of dedicating 1% of the city budget to NYC Parks.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to New York City's parks system.

**Written Testimony of Morgan Monaco
Prospect Park Alliance President
New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Preliminary Budget Hearing - Parks and Recreation
Monday, March 23, 2026**

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

My name is Morgan Monaco, and I am the President of Prospect Park Alliance and the Prospect Park Administrator. I am here today as a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, representing over 450 organizations that believe our city's parks are not just a luxury, but essential public infrastructure.

I often speak of Prospect Park as Brooklyn's Backyard, and it truly is. We welcome more than 10 million visits each year from every zip code in the borough. But as any homeowner knows, a backyard is only as good as its upkeep. Right now, the City's budget is failing the New Yorkers who rely on these spaces. Mayor Mamdani's FY27 Preliminary Budget is \$33 million less than last year's adopted budget. Instead of moving toward the 1% for Parks that we were promised, we are hollowing out our green infrastructure.

We are still feeling the cumulative impact of years of cuts, including the loss of 600 staffing lines since 2023. This budget would eliminate another 100 lines just to end a hiring freeze. Furthermore, 276 of our dedicated Parks workers are currently in positions that depend on temporary, "one-shot" funding. These workers are the backbone of our parks; they must be baselined now so they have the job security they deserve and the City has the stable workforce needed to meet basic maintenance standards.

The lack of operational funding creates a "maintenance gap" that actively devalues our capital investments and wastes taxpayer money. While there are often ample Capital funds available to build or renovate our facilities, there are not the requisite maintenance funds to care for what we build. Consequently, we are trapped in a cycle of rebuilding capital assets prematurely rather than having them last through their full useful life. It is fiscally irresponsible to invest in the "new" while neglecting the "now," forcing the City to eventually spend millions to restore what should have been preserved through basic daily care.

To bridge this gap, we need the City to invest in its workforce. Specifically, we ask for the addition of 460 Second-Shift workers to keep 400 high-use parks and restrooms clean. In Prospect Park, most of our 10 million annual visitors arrive in the afternoon and evening hours. These New Yorkers should be able to access a clean, safe park just like those who visit in the early morning. This underfunding is dangerous. In just the last three years, Prospect Park has faced unprecedented challenges, from the devastating flash flooding in 2023 to the 2024 brush fire that scorched our woodland during a severe drought. We cannot build a resilient city if we do not invest in the hardworking New Yorkers who manage our forests and keep our parks clean and safe.

Funding our parks is a critical way to accomplish the Administration's affordability agenda. Parks provide the high-quality, free green space that New Yorkers deserve, especially those who rely on public land for

their health and recreation. I urge the Council to restore these cuts, baseline our essential workers, and finally put NYC Parks on a path to 1% of the city budget.

Thank you for your time and your advocacy for our green spaces.



Testimony of Riverkeeper, Inc.
before the
New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
Oversight Hearing on the Preliminary Budget
March 23rd, 2026

My name is Em Ruby, and I am the New York City Advocacy and Policy Coordinator at Riverkeeper. Thank you, Chair Hankerson and Members of the New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation, for the opportunity to testify today. I would also like to thank the staff of the Department of Parks and Recreation (“Parks Department”) for the work they do to maintain our cities parks and wetlands and ensure that our natural areas and open spaces are maintained and protected.

Riverkeeper is a watchdog organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the Hudson River Watershed, including in the waterways and wetlands of New York City. We work to expand recreational access to these waters, improve water quality and resiliency, and safeguard drinking water supplies. Riverkeeper is a member of Forest for All NYC, a coalition of 170 organizations committed to justly and equitably protecting, maintaining, expanding, and promoting the NYC urban forest, as well as the Play Fair Campaign, a coalition of more than 500 organizations which advocates on behalf of New York City’s parks.

The Parks Department manages nearly 30,000 acres across the city, 14 percent of the total land cover of the city. This includes our city’s natural areas – the forests, wetlands, streams and grasslands that provide critical habitat, stormwater management, climate resiliency and recreational access across all five boroughs. Maintaining healthy parks in New York City is absolutely essential to ensuring the health of our waterways, particularly as rising sea levels and extreme rain from climate change have created new threats to these ecosystems. Despite the many benefits that parks provide, including numerous quality of life benefits for New Yorkers, years of budget cuts have left the Parks Department understaffed and underfunded.

The FY27 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks is \$33 million less than the FY26 Adopted Budget and does not provide critical restorations after four years of cuts. The Preliminary Budget maintains the status quo of underinvestment in our parks system, leaving the Parks Department with 0.5% of the total city budget, rather than putting NYC Parks on a path toward 1% of the budget, a goal which the Mayor committed to on the campaign trail.

To address these challenges, and protect the health of our city's parks, natural areas and waterways for decades to come, the Parks Department must be fully equipped to respond. Our testimony calls for Council support for four critical priorities in this year's budget:

1. Dedicate 1% of the City Budget to Parks
2. End the hiring freeze at the Parks Department and restore agency staffing to pre-Covid levels, restoring 600 lost positions since 2023, and an additionally proposed cut of 100 staff lines in the FY27 Preliminary Budget
3. Invest in the Urban Forest as climate mitigation, and add 227 forestry staff to address the backlog of 20,000+ uninspected trees and 35,000+ open work orders
4. Commit \$1 million for the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to publicize and begin implementing Local Law 148 of 2023, the city's first Urban Forest Plan, along with non-NYC Parks agencies tasked with heightened maintenance and expansion of trees in their jurisdictions.
5. Provide \$4.5 Million to protect New York City's Wetlands
6. Invest in natural and nature-based solutions that protect residents from coastal and inland flooding. This includes green infrastructure projects, such as rain gardens, bioswales, water squares, green and blue roofs, daylighting rivers, and permeable pavements to help absorb stormwater, purify the air, and mitigate the urban heat island 2 effect. DPR must continue working with DEP to provide access to quality green infrastructure, especially in NYCHA campuses.

Invest in Parks, Natural Areas and the Urban Forest to reduce Stormwater Runoff

New York City parks are home to 5 million of NYC's 7 million trees, they absorb 22% of its stormwater and 70% of its carbon, and can also be up to 13 degrees cooler than nearby streets during extreme heat events. Forested natural areas make up 24% of the city's parkland portfolio, but receive an annual average of 0.7% of the Parks Department's expense budget, and 0.84% of staff resources to manage it.

As a member of Forest for All NYC, Riverkeeper is committed to helping the city reach 30% tree canopy cover citywide by 2035 in an equitable manner. The proposed funding in the FY27 Preliminary Budget is insufficient to both maintain and expand our urban forest at a pace that is needed in the face of climate change and extreme heat. To address this, Riverkeeper urges the city to provide \$1 million in FY27 for the urban forest, including for implementation of the Urban Forest Plan. We also call on the city to fund and baseline 227 forestry staff to equip the Parks Department to improve tree health of existing tree canopy cover along 12,000 miles of sidewalks and in 30,000 acres of parkland.

New York City is a city of water. Our over 520 miles of shoreline boast over 6,000 acres of tidal marshes, swamp forests, and streams across all five boroughs, and half of NYC's wetlands and streams can be found in New York City parks. These wetlands support more than 325 species of birds, 315 species of plants, and 200 species of fish and shellfish. They

play an invaluable role in mitigating the harmful effects of climate change by capturing and storing floodwaters, sequestering carbon, and creating resilient shorelines. And, wetlands protect the quality of waterways by retaining stormwater, absorbing nutrients and filtering sediment and contaminants, and reducing flood risk for coastal communities.

As climate change impacts to our city grow every year, we should be investing in and expanding wetlands across our coastal communities. Instead, we are struggling to protect our existing wetlands from threats from development, rising sea level and extreme heat, and we continue to observe over 6 acres of salt marsh wetlands lost per year. Further, mitigation funds from large-scale resiliency and renewable energy projects are intended to benefit tidal wetlands in the city – however we are running out of project areas within the five boroughs where those funds can currently be used.

As a result, more oversight and staffing will be needed to ensure that the Parks Department can maximize the benefits of this funding, and increase the restoration and protection of our vital wetland resources. To address these challenges, Riverkeeper urges the Council to approve \$4.5 million in funding to support 45 staff at the Parks Department in FY27 for wetland restoration and protection.

Conclusion

The Climate Crisis is here, and New York City needs to adapt quickly to ensure that our communities and infrastructure are prepared to respond to this generational challenge. In the last 13 years, Superstorm Sandy exposed the threat to New York City's coastlines from storm surge, Tropical Storm Ida underscored the vulnerability of inland communities to flash flooding from extreme rainfall, and rising summer temperatures have endangered the health of thousands of New Yorkers living in urban heat islands underserved by parks and green infrastructure.

And today we are faced with unprecedented attacks on climate mitigation and resiliency work, on clean air, clean water, and environmental justice, from the federal government. Now more than ever, we need bold leadership from the New York City Council and this Administration to ensure that adequate funding and resources are provided to critical agencies to protect existing ecosystems and to prepare our city for this climate reality.

Riverkeeper urges the City Council and the Administration to take action now, and lead our city forward toward an equitable, climate ready future that reimagines our parks and waterways as critical resources for recreation, ecological health, and climate adaptation. To accomplish this, we urge the City to dedicate 1% of the FY27 Budget to the Parks Department.

Em Ruby, Advocacy Policy and Planning Coordinator · eruby@riverkeeper.org



· 20 Secor Road · Ossining, NY 10562 ·



FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing | New York City Council Committee on Parks

Monday, March 23rd at 11:30 AM

Open your testimony:

Good afternoon, Chair Hankerson and members of the Parks Committee. My name is Sophie Stelboun, and I am the NY Program and Operations Coordinator for the Trust for Public Land, a national non-profit that connects everyone to the outdoors, and and as a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition.

Living in New York is exciting, and it is hard. The city has a major affordability crisis. And the struggle to live here isn't just about housing — it's also about quality of life. Families raising children in small apartments wonder: *where can our kids play without adding another line to the budget?* The answer is in this city's nearly 2,000 parks. They represent one of those amazing AI-free environments, where you get to feel the earth, the sun, and the wind.

But parks also need care: people to take care of them. The budget cuts \$33M compared to last year's budget. 276 one-shot positions will be lost. We need to restore those positions and move the parks budget up to one percent of the city's budget. That's what it takes to make these parks thrive.

Another major opportunity for outdoor play spaces is NYC's schoolyards. We strongly support Council Member Brewer's position that schoolyards remain open after school hours and on weekends.

Keeping a single schoolyard open? A mere \$72,000. These spaces exist in every neighborhood — including the ones with the fewest parks. Opening parks means children have somewhere to run near their home. Parents have somewhere to exhale. And neighbors can sit in the shade of an activated and joyful place.

Mayor Mamdani — we see you. Many of your videos are filmed outside. You clearly love these spaces. Now it's time to fund them. To the Council - — we urge you to include \$33 million more than what's in the budget just to restore what was baselined last year, along with an additional \$3.1 million to open renovated schoolyards.

Give the people of New York what they want. What they *need*. Invest in our parks.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today, and I would welcome any questions the Council may have.



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About Us

TPL is a national nonprofit that creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come.

For more than 50 years, we've been using nature and the outdoors as powerful forces for connection, equity, and community well-being.

Photo: Joe Martinez



PS 156 Waverly and LS 392 - Brooklyn, NY

Building a Greener, Healthier New York City

Partnering to Transform Schoolyards into Environmentally Resilient Community Playgrounds

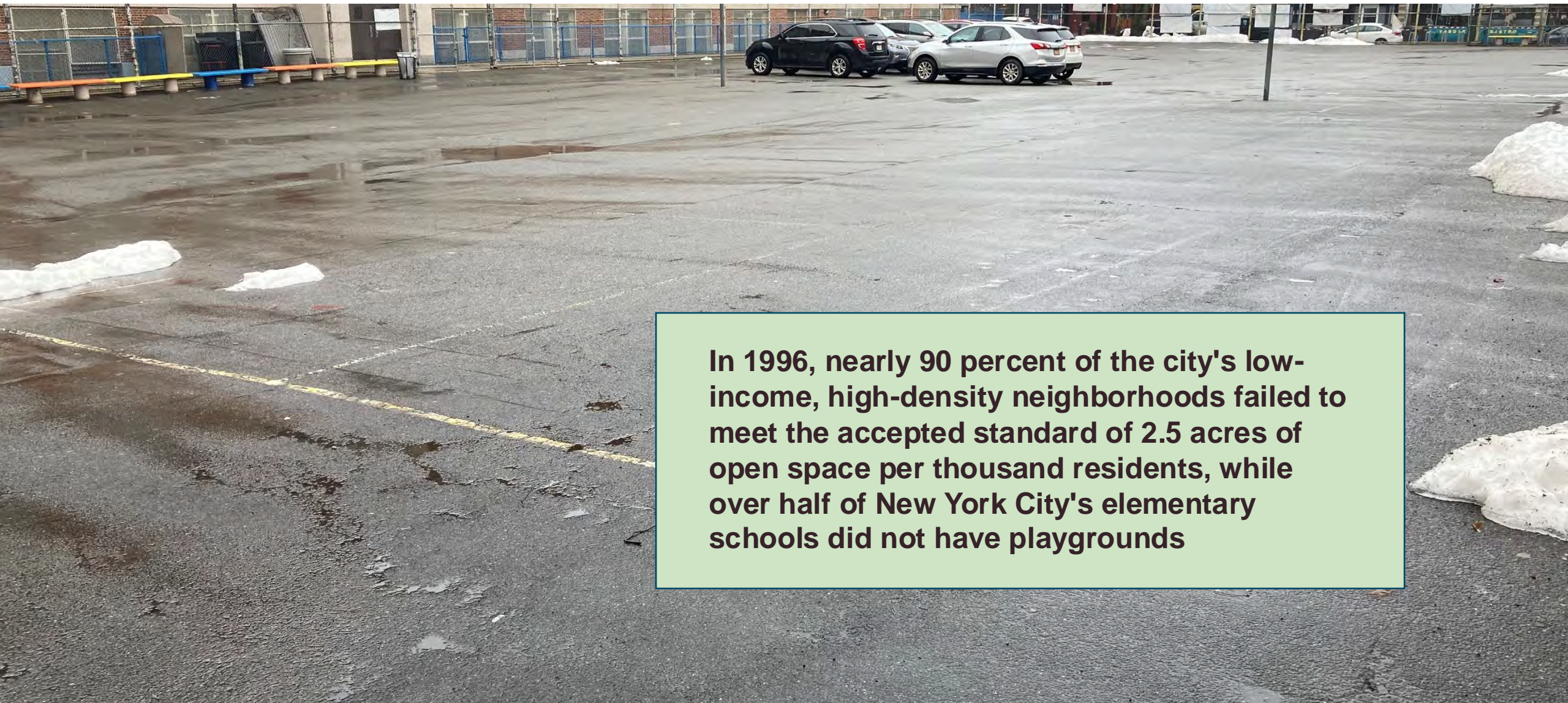


Photo Credit: Alexa Hoyer

PS 204K, Bensonhurst, Brooklyn



Connecting everyone to the outdoors™



In 1996, nearly 90 percent of the city's low-income, high-density neighborhoods failed to meet the accepted standard of 2.5 acres of open space per thousand residents, while over half of New York City's elementary schools did not have playgrounds



Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

NYC Community Schoolyards Program Origins – 1996 **The Need for Green Play Spaces for Children**

The Solution:

Transform Empty Asphalt Schoolyards into Nature-Rich Community Playgrounds



**Piagentini & Jones Schoolyard
Throgs Neck, Bronx**

Over 25-years, our partnership with New York's City Council, DOE, SCA and DEP has helped us to provide enriching outdoor spaces for those most in need of them.



Our playgrounds feature resiliency integrated designs that include storm-water-capture turf fields, shade trees, gardens, and recreational facilities that provide places to gather, exercise and play for students and neighbors alike.

MS 184X, Morrisania, Bronx Opened June 2025

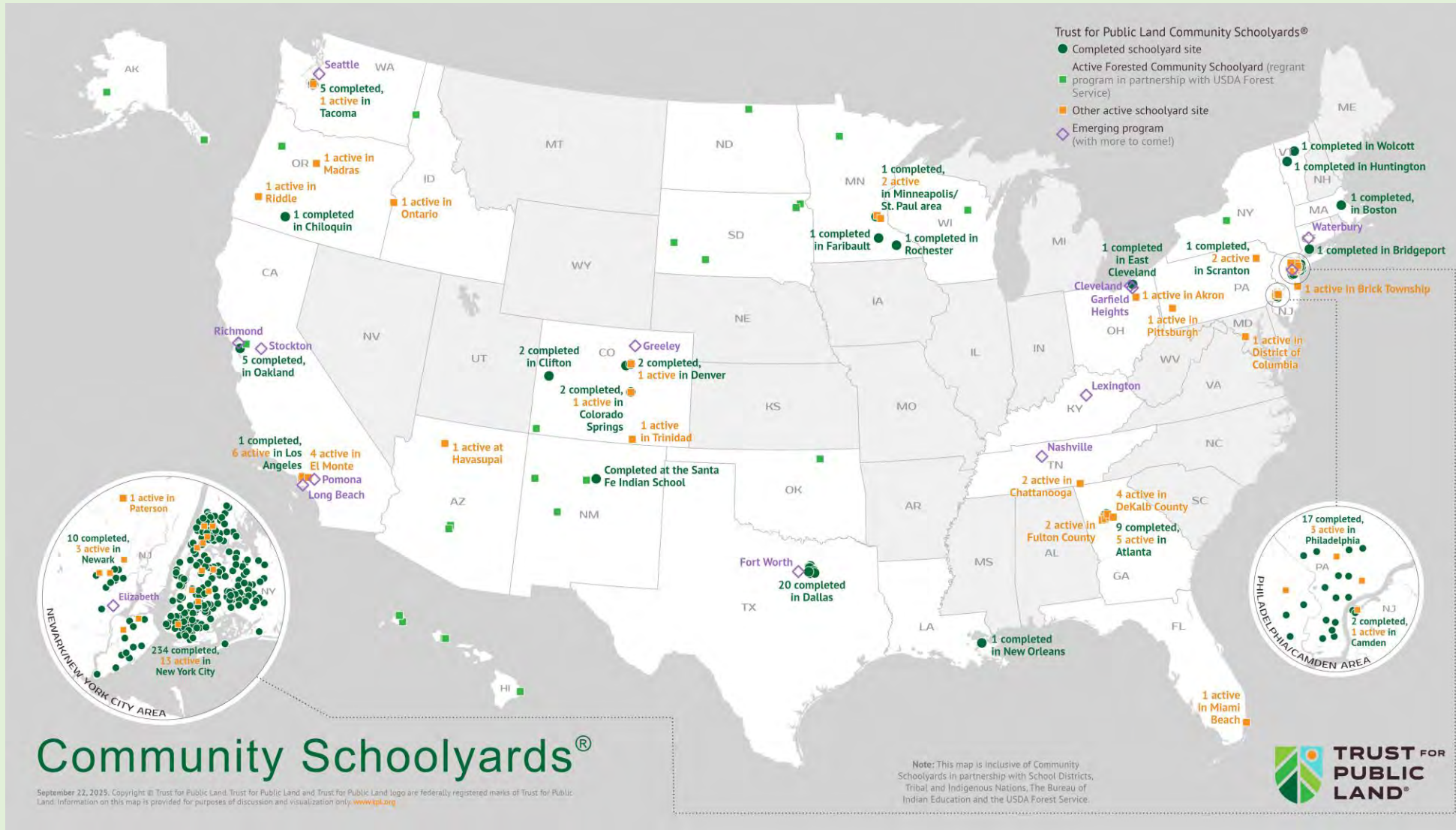


Before



After

Flagship NYC Program Inspired TPL to Expand Community Schoolyards Nationally



Site Selection

We choose schoolyard projects based on these broad criteria:

- Neighborhood Need and Equity, determined through TPL's GIS mapping tool
- School and Schoolyard Characteristics (size, visibility, school's agreement to open after school hours)
- Extreme Weather Mitigation Potential (soil permeability, flood zone)



MS 35K, Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn
Opened Oct. 9, 2025

Participatory Design at NYC Public Schools



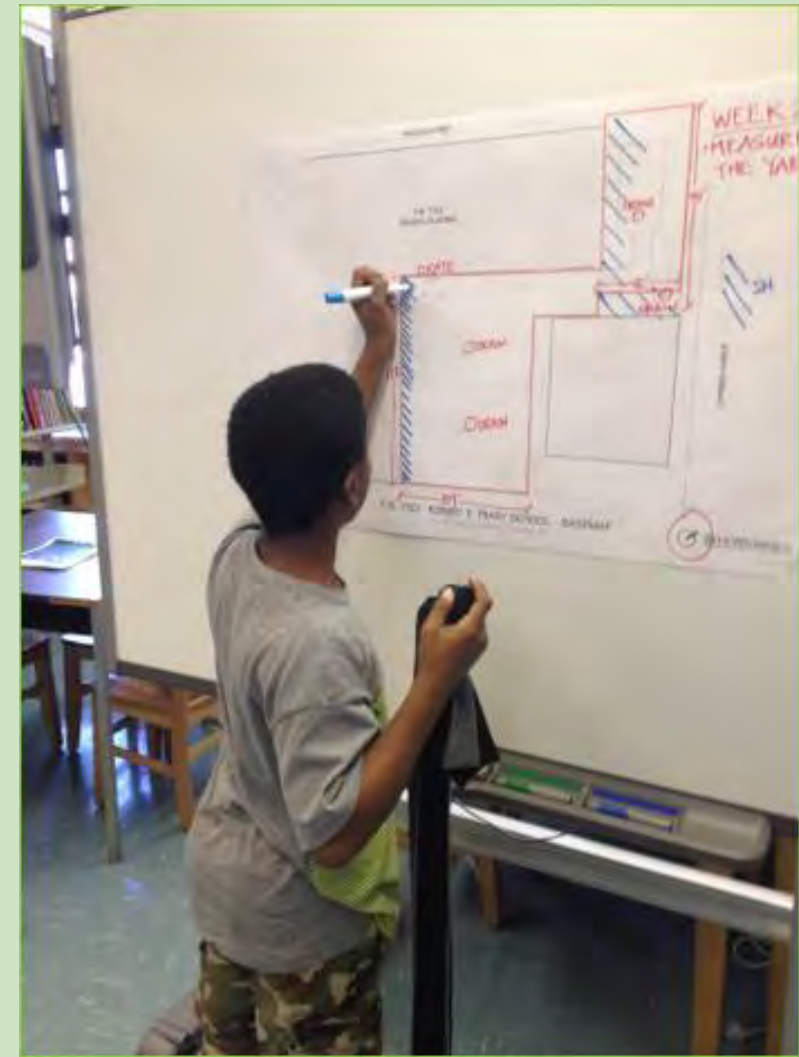
- Students are the project **ambassadors** / lead designers who must approach task with all users in mind.
- Skills development, introduction to careers, **civic engagement**
- **Project-based learning** with visible outcome creates agency, and a stake in long-term success of the space
- Schools can be a great **anchor for neighborhood transformation**

MS 354K, Crown Heights, Brooklyn

Participatory Design – Studying Existing Conditions



PS 60R, Bull's Head, Staten Island



PS 75Q, Ridgewood, Queens

Participatory Design: Students Take the Lead



MS 354K Crown Heights, Brooklyn



IS 224X, Mott Haven, Bronx

Participatory Design: Discussing Equity

EQUITY – Is there something for everyone in your schoolyard?

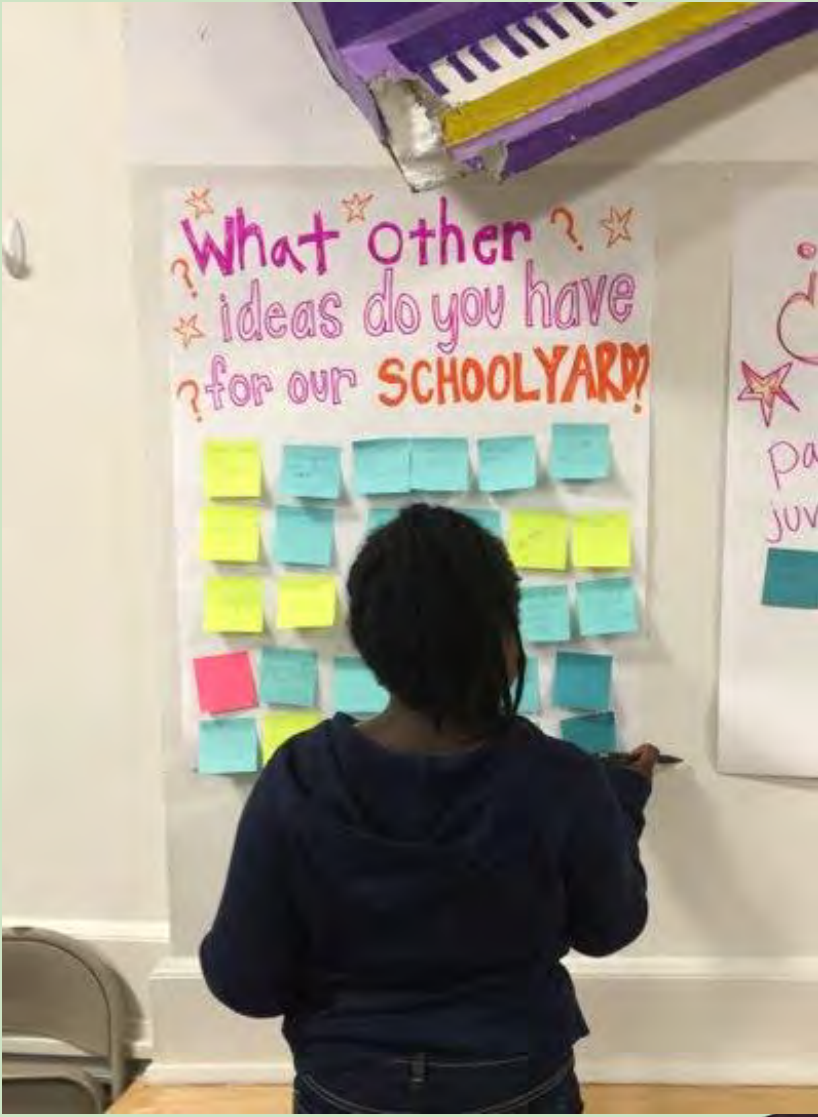
Directions: With your table, discuss the listed zones of activity. Who do you think will most use each activity zone?
Place a sticker next to the group/groups you think will most use each activity zone.

Activity	Boys	Girls	Younger	Older	Community Members
Field (soccer, football)					
Basketball					
Track					
Stage					
Trees and Benches					
Hangout area					
Fitness Equipment					
Play Equipment					
Turf Pod					



PS 164K, Borough Park, Brooklyn

Community Engagement



PS 152K/315K, Midwood, Brooklyn

Resilient Design Close Up

On average each site captures 1 million gallons of stormwater a year through rain gardens and infiltrating turf fields.



Resilient Design Close Up

- Learning Gardens/Outdoor Classrooms
- Environmental Education Signs



- Porous Surfacing
- Green Roofs on Sheds and Gazebos
- Turf fields capture stormwater

Connecting Students to Nature

We want to foster and support a love of nature



- Each yard include 20-30 trees, which the students help select.
- Most sites include learning gardens, which students plan and plant.
- Outdoor classrooms offer spaces for students get hands-on introductions to botany, pollination, and other earth sciences, when they plant flowers, vegetables and herbs.
- We've built raised vegetable beds, sensory gardens, pollinator plantings, rain gardens, and forest walks

Students Present Final Design



JHS 227K, Bensonhurst, Brooklyn



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Construction

Grand Opening Ceremony



PS 92M
Central Harlem
Manhattan

Stewardship and Activation



PS 111Q, Long Island City, Queens

TPL raises funds for staffing, ongoing stewardship, activation, and environmental education programs for each of our sites.

City Council's Crucial Role

- Reso-A: City Council members fund design and construction
- Advocate for baseline custodial funding



IS 145Q, Jackson Heights, Queens

Custodial Funding is Key to Success and Expansion of Program

Key to success of this program is the annual custodial funding that ensures the renovated schoolyards remain safe and accessible for community use outside of school hours.



PS 145K, Bushwick, Brooklyn



MS 354K
Opening Ceremony

Thank you!

Questions?

Please contact us:

Mary Alice Lee
Director
NYC Community Schoolyards

MaryAlice.Lee@tpl.org
(917) 363-9372



P.S. 111M, Hell's Kitchen



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March 23, 2026

**Testimony of WE ACT for Environmental Justice
to the New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation on March
23, 2026 regarding Fiscal Year ‘27 Preliminary Budget**

Dear Chair Hankerson and Parks and Recreation Committee,

WE ACT for Environmental Justice is a community-based organization that has been building healthy communities by ensuring that people of color and/or low-income residents participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health policies and practices for over 35 years.

WE ACT is a member of the Forest for All NYC coalition, comprised of over 200+ organizations seeking to equitably protect, maintain, expand and promote the NYC urban forest. Our members in Northern Manhattan find themselves at the intersection of vulnerabilities to extreme heat, flooding, and air pollution, in part because low income communities of color have [21% less park space](#) compared to more affluent neighborhoods. The NYC urban forest cools the air, offers shady respite from heat, sequesters carbon, increases energy efficiency, and contributes to New Yorkers’ health and wellbeing, and yet it does not serve New Yorkers equitably. To ease this disproportionate burden placed onto environmental justice communities, Local Law 148, which aims to grow canopy cover to 30% so that all communities have fair access to trees and their environmental services, must be sufficiently funded. It is with this mission in mind that we urge this Council to allocate \$150 million to ensure the Parks Department and the Urban Forest Plan are set up for success:

- Restoration, expansion, and baselining of NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) staff and programs to support ongoing operations and to grow the urban forest:
- Expand NYC Park’s capacity for tree risk management and inspections, including increasing and baselining the number of staff (climbers and pruners, foresters, and related management) and contract funding that are critical for caring for and managing the existing tree canopy across NYC.
- Baseline NYC Parks positions currently funded by one-year contracts (approximately 276 positions including Parks Enforcement Patrol, Urban



- Forest Rangers, Forestry staff, etc.) to limit turnover and sustain the operational efficiency that come from retaining a stable workforce.
- Provide \$16M in baselined annual funding to fully implement the Forest Management Framework for forested natural areas, including \$2.4M in annual capital funding for large scale restoration and contract work, \$11.2M in baselined expense funding for in-house staff to conduct maintenance and for materials and operating costs, and \$2.4M in baselined expense funding to provide one trails crew per borough supporting the formalization and maintenance of NYC’s nature trail network.
 - Increase the number of tree planting staff (via Capital funded Interfund Agreement) to increase the number of street trees planted from just under 18,000 in FY25 to at least 25,000 per year, with the aim of shortening the 9-year Neighborhood Tree Planting Program.
 - Increase funding for the trees and sidewalks program, to increase the City’s capacity to respond to damage to sidewalks caused by tree roots.
 - **\$1M for the Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice** to support non-NYC Parks agencies tasked with heightened management and expansion of trees in their jurisdictions (such as NYC Housing Authority, Department of Education, the School Construction Authority, Department of Sanitation, Department of Transportation, etc.) in implementing initial actions of the forthcoming NYC Urban Forest Plan. This includes funding for an updated citywide Lidar remote sensing data capture and analysis to monitor the canopy coverage of the urban forest and measure the growth or loss of tree canopy coverage and track progress towards the 30% goal, as required by Local Law 148 of 2023 to be completed every 5 years.

In addition to these budget requests, there are several staffing-related needs that are essential in rebuilding and expanding the City’s urban forest workforce, including:

- Salary increases for the advanced and technical civil service roles like Foresters and Climber & Pruners, to help attract and retain the best candidates to manage the nation’s largest urban forest.
- Expansion of City-led workforce training programs, including internal programs to train existing employees and create promotional opportunities like the NYC Parks Climber & Pruner program, as well as programs that bring in new workers to expand overall workforce capacity.
- We commend the Mayor for lifting the hiring freeze and 2-1 hiring ratio, but are disappointed that 100 vacant roles will be eliminated from Parks on top of the 600 positions previously cut since 2023 - effectively resulting in 700 positions being permanently lost. We



encourage the Mayor and Council to restore and fill all these positions.

These budget requests represent a critical investment in environmental justice by directly addressing the structural inequities that have long denied low-income communities and communities of color equitable access to the benefits of New York City's urban forest. By restoring and stabilizing the workforce, expanding tree planting and maintenance, and ensuring rigorous data tracking and interagency coordination, the City can move beyond piecemeal solutions toward a sustained, systemic approach to climate resilience. Fully funding these initiatives will not only advance the goals of Local Law 148, but also deliver tangible health, economic, and climate benefits—cooler neighborhoods, cleaner air, safer public spaces, and reduced energy burdens—to the communities that have historically borne the greatest environmental harms.

Sincerely,

Caleb Smith
New York City Policy Manager
WE ACT for Environmental Justice
caleb.smith@weact.org | 646-983-7288



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**New York City Council
Committee on Parks and Recreation, Honorable Ty Hankerson, Chair**

**Testimony of YMCA of Greater New York
Submitted by Sharon Levy, Senior Vice President of Public Affairs**

**New York City Council Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget Hearing
March 23, 2026**

I respectfully submit the following testimony on behalf of the YMCA of Greater New York.

The YMCA of Greater New York is committed to empowering youth, improving health, and strengthening community. With 24 YMCA branches and more than 100 community sites across New York City, the Y is among the City's largest providers of human services spanning from infancy to older adult — and an important anchor, convener, and catalyst for transformational change in underserved communities. The YMCA is also a proud member and co-founder of the Interorganizational Lifeguards and Aquatics Taskforce, and a supporter of New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P).

One of the ways the Y reaches the community is through our aquatic programs, placing children and adults on the path to develop lifesaving skills in the water. Utilizing 22 aquatic centers across all five boroughs, the Y provides pool access to tens of thousands of New Yorkers every year. We do this through programs like Second Grade Swim, swim instruction, summer day camp, adult lap swim, and a variety of other programs. Furthermore, through our newly created Aquatics Center for Excellence (ACE) we have been providing free lifeguard training and certification programs since 2022. In 2025, through our branch-based program, the YMCA certified 246 lifeguards out of 319 participants and 18 lifeguards out of 29 participants in our second year of school-based program.

Despite being a waterfront city with 520 miles of shoreline, far too many New Yorkers never learn how to swim. With over 8 million residents—nearly half of New York State's population—and a warming global climate, our public pools are woefully insufficient to meet the growing need for swim instruction and recreation. A lack of accessible swim education and a shortage of lifeguards have created an urgent public health crisis. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1–4 in the United States and the second leading cause of unintentional injury or death for children ages 5–14. This preventable tragedy disproportionately impacts communities of color. The CDC reports that the

drowning death rate for Black Americans is 1.5 times higher than that of white Americans. Without immediate action, the ongoing lifeguard shortage will only deepen these disparities, limiting access to swimming education and increasing water-related accidents.

The national lifeguard shortage, amplified by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, had significant repercussions across the five boroughs of New York City. Exacerbating the problems, the City overall lacks sufficient public pools (per capita) to meet the demand for swim instruction, lifeguard training, and recreation. In fact, there are 18 council districts that do not have even a single public pool. Between the Parks Department and NYC Public Schools, there are far too few pools, and many of them require extensive renovations to remain operational.

In 2023 in response to these issues the YMCA, along with other organizations, convened the Interorganizational Lifeguard and Aquatics Taskforce, comprised of nonprofit providers and city agencies focused first on tackling the City's acute lifeguard shortage and then on the broader issue of water safety in our city. Over the last year, through the work of the taskforce, we have created new collaborations that have supported recruitment efforts, shared resources, and developed joint advocacy efforts to elevate these critical issues with our city and state elected officials, but there is still much to do.

Recommendations

We believe that addressing these challenges requires both immediate action and sustained, long-term investment. In the short term, the City must take decisive steps to improve coordination, expand access, and maximize existing resources.

Elevate Aquatics Leadership in City Hall.

- Establish a "Swim Czar" position (akin to the office of Food Policy or the Rat Czar) who can champion these issues, coordinate among agencies, and promote the collaboration across city and non-profit organizations necessary to address current aquatics needs.
- Identify "Aquatics" as a priority area within a Deputy Mayor's portfolio, which would further institutionalize its importance, align interagency efforts, and contextualize this critical work within a broader livability agenda. (Key agencies include Parks, DYCD, NYCPS, DOHMH, EDC, HPD, DCP).

Dramatically Expand Free Swim Lessons for New York City students

- Fund swim instruction for all second-grade students by:
 - Fully funding the Parks Department's Swim for Life program to reach as many youths as possible.
 - Establishing a funding and contracting mechanism for non-profit providers to extend this work, significantly expanding the public resources available.

Increase Access to Existing Pools

- Maximize the use of our limited existing pools by establishing a centralized, electronic system that tracks availability and capacity. Ensure that our indoor pools – primarily located in public schools - are being fully utilized during weekday, evening, weekend and summer hours.
- Modernize the “extended use permit” system to reduce barriers for private providers supporting these goals.

Expand Lifeguard and Swim Instructor Training and Certification

- To create a robust pipeline of youth prepared to undertake lifeguard training and certification, significantly expand the training programs available to our teens. Fund and offer both lifeguard and swim instructor training within high schools for Physical Education credit. Partner with non-profits that can provide additional capacity.
- Strengthen and expand swim teams, cultivating future lifeguards and instructors.

Fund and Prioritize a Land-based Water Safety Education Program

- Land-based water safety is an effective tool for drowning prevention. We recommend working in partnership with NYC Public Schools to establish a citywide approach to water safety, including consistent, accessible messages that can be shared with educators, families, and students.

Address Pool Deserts and the Pool Infrastructure Backlog by Investing in New and Existing Pools

- Proactively fund and resolve deferred maintenance

Additionally, we propose that the City Council creates a \$5 million discretionary initiative for nonprofits to support expanded aquatics safety programs within four critical categories:

- **Land-Based Water Safety Education.** A classroom-based set of lessons focused on water safety.
- **“Second Grade” Swim.** A partnership between nonprofits and NYC Schools that brings students (2nd grade or similar age) to pools for multi-week swim safety classes in the water.
- **Free Swim Lessons.** Free swim lessons provided to New York City youth & adults provided by community-based organizations in all five boroughs.
- **Lifeguard Training and Certification.** Free lifeguard training and nationally recognized certification programs provided across all five boroughs. Additionally, free lifeguard development programs across all five boroughs to create a robust pipeline of youth prepared to undertake lifeguard training and certification.

This aquatics initiative is both a lifesaving skills program and a workforce development program. In addition to stand alone programming, the four aquatics programs listed above can seamlessly push into existing youth programs managed by both the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development and NYC Schools. We urge the city to also consider beginning with pilot programs during this fiscal year at programs including but not limited to: 3K/PreK, Saturday Night Lights, Beacons and Cornerstones.

By implementing these solutions, we can make significant strides towards creating a city where every resident, regardless of background or circumstance, can dive into the joy and safety of swimming. Let's ensure that swimming truly becomes an accessible and inclusive activity for all New Yorkers.

We appreciate your leadership, and partnership in addressing the City's water safety challenges. Thank you so much for fighting for the children, families, and adults of New York City. We look forward to working with you on the efforts to make swimming access for all a reality.

If you have any questions, please contact Sharon Levy, Senior Vice President of Public Affairs, at slevy@ymcanyc.org or 917-575-2736.

Testimony of John Surico
Senior Fellow for Climate and Opportunity, Center for an Urban Future
Before the New York City Council
Committee on Parks and Recreation
March 23rd, 2026

Good afternoon. I'm John Surico, the Senior Fellow for Climate and Opportunity at the Center for an Urban Future, an independent think tank focused on creating a stronger and more inclusive economy in New York. Thank you to Chair Hankerson and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today.

Thriving parks and open spaces are essential to achieving the city's vision of an affordable, livable New York. But today, the system is struggling under the weight of four consecutive years of budget cuts—and lacks the maintenance funding and staffing needed to sustain the vibrant, equitable parks system that New Yorkers need and deserve.

Case in point: recreation. The city's athletic facilities and recreational programs—its pools, tennis courts, rec centers, fitness classes, sports leagues, and more—play an integral role in offering free and low-cost options for New Yorkers to move, play, and connect. That matters today more than ever, as over 40 percent of residents are grappling with chronic disease and loneliness, and more than half are overweight or obese. But decades of underinvestment mean we're only scratching the surface of its potential.

Our [recent report](#) found that recreation services once accounted for nearly one-third of NYC Parks' operating budget; today it represents around 5.3 percent. Full-time recreation staff has fallen from almost 2,000 in 1964 to 659 today. New York allocates among the lowest amount per capita on recreation of any major U.S. city. And many core recreation assets need urgent repairs or are closed entirely, with more than \$400 million in known capital needs for major facilities alone, and likely hundreds of millions more yet to be identified.

NYC Parks continues to do what it can with limited resources, but the gap between needs and capacity keeps widening. Going forward, the city should restore and expand critical staffing across parks operations, capital projects, forestry, and maintenance—while investing in recreation centers and program staff—to get parks clean, safe, and fully functional again. For instance, these investments could help address New York City's affordability challenges by [expanding](#) the parks system's summer day camp program—the best deal anywhere in the city—from roughly 500 participants today to 5,000.

To achieve this, the City Council should reverse the proposed cuts and expand city funding—but also create new, dedicated recurring revenue streams to put the system on stronger, more sustainable footing. In January of 2024, the Center [outlined](#) 20 specific, achievable ideas to do exactly that. And last year, we published briefs for two ideas in particular—a [modest surcharge](#) on tickets sold at stadiums located on parkland, and expanding [parks concessions](#)—laying out the steps needed to get them done. In the coming months, we'll release two more: the first on harnessing real estate revenue

to pay for parks care, and the next on expanding opportunities for public-private partnerships.

Money earned in parks should stay in parks—and the fact that it doesn't is a real 'only in New York' problem. In most major cities, revenue generated in parks is reinvested directly back into them. Here, it typically disappears into the general fund.

The City Council should create a Parks Improvement Fund to capture new revenue from sources like lease agreements with for-profit operators on parkland and a share of the value created through upzoning—and dedicate it to parks maintenance, operations, and programming. That funding should be distributed equitably, with a portion supporting the parks where it's generated and a portion directed to parks with the greatest needs. In neighborhoods without a conservancy, the city could partner with trusted local organizations to ensure those dollars support on-the-ground care, with clear guardrails in place.

The Center commends the City Council for its continued leadership in championing parks and open space, and for advocating the funding needed to meet the full scope of the city's parks needs. We also thank Chair Hankerson for his thoughtful engagement with the ideas we've put forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Related research from the Center for an Urban Future on parks and open spaces includes:

- [“The Park Queens Deserves”](#) (August 2025)
- [“Making It Easier for New Yorkers to Care for Their Parks”](#) (August 2024)
- [“Stretching New York City’s Capital Dollars”](#) (April 2021)
- [“A New Leaf: Revitalizing New York City’s Aging Parks Infrastructure”](#) (June 2018)



To: the NYC City Council, Committee on Parks and Recreation

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing in my position as Executive Director of the Friends of Hudson River Park (d/b/a Hudson River Park Friends), the designated private, nonprofit partner of the Hudson River Park Trust – the jointly controlled City/State public benefit corporation charged with the planning, design, construction, operation and maintenance of Hudson River Park.

Founded in 1999, Hudson River Park Friends is the principal advocacy organization working to garner public dollars for Hudson River Park's construction and monitor Park progress under the Hudson River Park Act. Friends' advocacy efforts helped secure over \$250 million in capital funding to design and build Hudson River Park, and to hasten the relocation of incompatible municipal facilities on designated parkland. Today, the park is a 4-mile 550-acre blue and green space on Manhattan's west side waterfront from Chambers St in lower Manhattan to W59th St in Hell's Kitchen. It is one of the city's flagship parks, with a local, regional, national and international audience, and is the largest park created in Manhattan since Central Park more than 150 years ago.

For FY27, Hudson River Park Friends is supporting the capital funding requests submitted by Hudson River Park Trust to continue its mission to maintain and improve conditions at the park including for the following project requests:

Capital Funding Requests

\$85MM from the City of New York for the Reconstruction of Pier 76

- Pier 76 is a former NYC Tow Pound, designated to become a new 50/50, 5.5-acre Park/Commercial pier located at 35th/36th St adjacent to the Javits Convention Center. NYS has budgeted \$85 million for pier redevelopment which must be matched by the City to be used. This new development would have broad open space and economic benefits for the adjacent Hell's Kitchen neighborhood, currently the least well-served by green space and public amenities of the Hudson River Park communities.
- Currently vacant, the pier's condition is rapidly deteriorating and needs a complete re-build in order to support both the long-term commercial and park development. Redevelopment is critical to the financial future of Hudson River Park, which depends on rents, leases, permit fees, private donation, etc. to fund its operating and maintenance needs. (The Park does not receive NYC and NYS operating dollars.) Pier 76 is one of its largest and last opportunities for major additional revenue generation.

Moving ahead with pier redevelopment requires roughly \$170MM in new capital funding to rebuild the pier, half (\$85MM) of which has been secured from NY State by the Hudson River



Park Trust. Throughout the 25+ years of the Park's development, NYC and NYS have shared equally in the capital costs of rebuilding the 4-mile stretch of waterfront. The Trust is seeking a NYC capital commitment to match the State's \$85MM and will add its own resources to complete the rebuilding effort.

In addition, Hudson River Park Friends is grateful for the City's historic investment in the park, and is especially excited about the \$8 million previously allocated for the Hudson River Park Estuarium, which will serve the entire city for field trips, hands-on marine science curricula, estuary management and habitat enhancement, and will serve as a base for the park's extensive "River Project" programming, which includes:

Delivering STEM education to 6,000 students from 115 K-12 schools from all 5 NYC boroughs -- 60% of which are for Title I students. Introducing over 30,000 children and adults to marine life in the Park's protected River Sanctuary through free Pier 40 Wetlab tours, Pier 57 Discovery Tank open hours, catch & release fishing. Partnering with 31 visiting scholars from 9 CUNY campuses and 22 other universities and environmental institutions to advance research and regional knowledge of marine and shoreline science. Conducting research with academic and environmental experts on the success of 2 large-scale habitat enhancement projects designed to restore 35 million oysters, enrich finfish habitat, and create Manhattan's first engineered salt marsh. Securing highly competitive federal and private grants from the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, Pinkerton Foundation, Lounsberry Foundation and FAO Schwarz Foundation. Implementing public environmental programming at 10 locations spanning the Park's four miles. And hosting the 11th annual SUBMERGE Marine Science Festival for 30 environmental partners to the Park for two days of public school and general public STEM programming.

Park Public Bathrooms

Hudson River Park has clean, functional public bathrooms located in all of the park's neighborhoods, providing maintenance and servicing with its own staff for Hell's Kitchen, Chelsea, Meatpacking District, Greenwich Village, Hudson Square and Tribeca facilities. These bathrooms, the oldest of which are more than 20 years old, serve the community and help fulfill the park's commitment to the goals of the Council and Mayor's office regarding public restrooms. Rehabilitation of the park's older bathrooms, benefiting the millions of park users each year, will be undertaken over the next several years.

Hudson River Park Friends helps leverage private dollars to support the city's public investments. Investing in Hudson River Park over the past two decades, the City and State have created more value than was even conceivable 20 years ago, which has brought in incredible private growth in businesses, neighborhoods, families and environmental benefits for the entire city.



Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Connie Fishman".

Connie Fishman, Executive Director
Hudson River Park Friends



Lower East Side Ecology Center
Testimony to New York City Council
Committee on Parks
FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 23, 2026

The Lower East Side Ecology Center has pioneered community-based models in urban sustainability since 1987. Today, we steward green spaces across the Lower East Side and East Village, including parks, community gardens, and street tree beds.

Our neighborhood is on the frontlines of the climate crisis. Many of the streets we serve are located within environmental justice areas and are designated by the City as Heat Vulnerability Index level 4 or 5, the highest-risk category, where residents, particularly from disadvantaged communities, face an elevated risk of heat-related illness and death. At the same time, our urban forest is in urgent need of care: hundreds of mature trees have been lost in recent years, and many young trees are struggling to survive. According to The Nature Conservancy, Manhattan Community District 3, in which we operate, has just 22% tree canopy cover, below the citywide average of 23.4% and well short of the 30% target mandated by Local Law 148 of 2023 and identified by researchers as the minimum threshold for meaningful cooling benefits.

For our community, parks, gardens, and street trees are essential green infrastructure. The urban forest, in particular, is one of the most powerful tools we have to mitigate the urban heat island effect, improve air quality, and build long-term climate resilience.

We are deeply concerned that Mayor Mamdani's FY27 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks falls \$33 million short of the FY26 Adopted Budget and continues a troubling pattern of disinvestment. The elimination of 100 Parks staffing lines, on top of 600 positions cut since 2023, has left the agency struggling to deliver even basic services. Only 65% of parks currently meet the agency's own maintenance standards.

The urban forest, one of the most labor-intensive and time-sensitive components of the parks system, is directly affected. NYC Parks responds to more than 80,000 forestry-related service requests annually, yet chronic understaffing and contracting challenges have led to a backlog of more than 20,000 uninspected trees and over 35,000 open work orders.

Deferred maintenance accelerates canopy loss in neighborhoods that can least afford it. Compounding this issue, the agency's new nine-year planting cycle does not ensure that trees are replaced after loss due to storms or other causes. Young trees face a 25–30% mortality rate in their early years, placing recently planted neighborhoods like ours at risk of further canopy decline. Without urgent investment, we risk replacing a mature, resilient urban forest with one that is significantly weaker.

Without urgent investment in forestry capacity, the city cannot maintain, let alone grow, its tree canopy. We therefore urge the Mayor and City Council to make the following targeted investments in the City's urban forest:



- **Add 227 forestry staff** to address the backlog of uninspected trees and open work orders. This direct investment in the urban forest is key to its future.
- **Baseline 276 Parks workers** currently funded through annual City Council one-shots. Parks stewardship requires consistent, year-round staffing, not temporary positions that disappear each fiscal year.

New Yorkers are eager for parks investment. In a recent New York Times poll, a 35,000+ reader majority chose increased funding for parks as their top policy.

As the City prepares to release its first Urban Forest Plan this spring, it is critical that this vision is matched with the resources needed to make it a reality, on the Lower East Side and across all five boroughs. This will only be possible through robust investment in green spaces.

We call on the Mayor and City Council to restore Parks staffing, prioritize forestry investment, and move decisively toward dedicating 1% of the city budget to parks -a goal the Mayor has previously committed to.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with the City to protect, sustain, and grow New York City's urban forest.

Sincerely,

NAME

ROLE

Lower East Side Ecology Center

New York City Council Committee on Parks - Preliminary Budget Hearing

Monday, March 23, 2026

Testimony By: Siddhartha Sánchez, Bronx River Alliance, Executive Director

My name is Siddhartha Sanchez and I am the Executive Director of the Bronx River Alliance. I've dedicated my career to building, improving, programming, and leveraging Bronx parks for the many community benefits they provide. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about the proposed FY27 budget and the importance of restoring full funding to our vital parks.

The Bronx River Alliance is a nonprofit formed by community activists and government partners in 2001 to protect, improve and restore the Bronx River corridor and greenway so that they can be healthy resources for the communities through which they flow. We work in close partnership with NYC Parks and dozens of community-based organizations. We are also a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, a citywide coalition led by New Yorkers for Parks, New York League of Conservation Voters, and District Council 37 and including more than 450 organizations that steward, advocate for, and rely on NYC's parks and open spaces. We are achieving what many thought was impossible - the creation of new and improvement of existing waterfront parks, the restoration of unique floodplain forests and vibrant salt marshes, leading to the return of migratory fish and unique wildlife like beavers and dolphins - right here in the heart of the South Bronx. Most importantly, together community transformed what was once an abandoned dumping ground and toxic waterway into a cherished community asset.



In 2020, our parks demonstrated how essential they are. They were one of the few places that remained open during the darkest days of the pandemic. And yet, NYC Parks sustained a devastating budget cut. We all saw the impact of inadequate funding for our parks - they were full of garbage, abandoned and neglected by the city. Parks were in their worst condition in two decades. Our parks suffered, and by extension NYC residents suffered, layering additional challenges in an inexpressibly difficult year.

Now in 2026, NYC Parks has fewer workers than it did before the pandemic despite increased demand and clear need for these spaces, and thousands fewer workers than it had decades ago. After years of cuts, Parks staff are stretched thin and basic services are suffering. Only 65% of parks meet the agency's own

maintenance standards.

Mayor Mamdani's FY27 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks is \$33 million less than the FY26 Adopted Budget and does not provide critical restorations after four years of cuts. The Preliminary Budget maintains the status quo of underinvestment rather than putting Parks funding on a path toward 1% of the city budget, a goal the Mayor committed to.

The Mayor's budget eliminates 100 Parks staffing lines as a condition of the end to the hiring freeze. Following 600 staffing lines cut since 2023 under the Adams Administration, these cumulative losses limit the agency's ability to rebuild its workforce. It also fails to safeguard the 276 Parks workers set to lose their jobs at the end of this fiscal year, since they are dependent on annual one-shot City Council funding. These positions must be baselined to ensure stability and consistent service.

In order to ensure a safe, well-maintained parks system and deliver basic services, the City must:

- Add 460 Second-Shift workers to keep 400 high-use parks and restrooms clean
- Restore 59 Capital Projects staff and add 60 more so that nearly 100 stalled capital projects can resume, unlocking nearly \$450 million in green space and resiliency investments
- Add 227 forestry staff to address the backlog of 20,000+ uninspected trees and 35,000+ open work orders
- Add 130 tradespeople—including plumbers, electricians, carpenters, masons, roofers, and painters—for faster repairs and violation clearing
- Add 80 dedicated lawn-care positions to keep lawns and playing fields usable
- Invest \$21.2M to expand hours and services at all 36 recreation centers

NYC's 30,000 acres of parkland are essential public infrastructure supporting public health, climate resilience, recreation, and quality of life in every neighborhood. Our parks system is one of NYC's most important affordable resources for working class immigrant communities of color like ours, providing free programming and critical places for neighbors to exercise, play, and commune with nature in a dense urban landscape. Especially in the Bronx, our parks are our backyards - and we deserve better than trash strewn playgrounds, delayed activation of sprinklers amidst unprecedented summer heat, long term bathroom closures, and neglected tree canopy care in the midst of a climate crisis. Parks are critical to our public health and safety, and are drivers of livability and social equity; they should be funded as such.

Today, the Bronx River Alliance stands with all those calling for the City to "Play

Fair.” We urge the Mayor and City Council to restore staffing, invest in park maintenance, and move toward dedicating 1% of the city budget to parks.

Thank you again for your leadership and for the opportunity to express the Bronx River Alliance’s support for increased investment in NYC Parks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Siddhartha Sánchez", written in a cursive style.

Siddhartha Sánchez
Executive Director
Bronx River Alliance



Hunters Point Parks

CONSERVANCY

Dear Chair Hankerson and members of the Parks Committee,

My name is Jessica Sechrist, and I am the executive director of Hunters Point Parks Conservancy, a community based parks nonprofit that has been supporting Long Island City's waterfront parks since 1998. We are a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, a citywide coalition led by New Yorkers for Parks, New York League of Conservation Voters, and District Council 37 and including more than 450 organizations that steward, advocate for, and rely on NYC's parks and open spaces.

As an organization that supports adjacent parks, one run by New York City Parks and one by New York State Parks that each see 3 million annual visitors, we are well positioned to see the impact of parks funding and the lack thereof on parks maintenance, long-term capital investment, daily upkeep and cleaning, recovery after busy events and weekends like the 4th of July, and even on clearing snow after blizzards. The dedicated NYC Parks workers at Hunter's Point South Park work extremely hard to keep the park green and welcoming, but lack of staffing and limited shifts, especially in the busy season, mean they cannot keep up with everything that needs to be done. We've watched the impact of repeated cuts on the quality of the park, while at the same time the number of users continues to increase since Queens Community Board 2 ranks 57 out of 59 in parks space per capita while being the fastest growing community in the city.

We are extremely concerned that Mayor Mamdani's FY27 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks is \$33 million less than the FY26 budget and doesn't provide restoration of critical funding after 4 years of cuts under the previous administration. This budget keeps NYC on its path of investing significantly less in the parks department than any other major city in the US, and further delays the path towards making parks funding 1% of the city budget, a pledge the Mayor committed to as part of his campaign. The elimination of 100 staffing lines, on top of the 600 lines cut under the Adams Administration, limits the Parks Department's availability to do its job while removing jobs from hard-working New Yorkers who depend on them to support themselves and their families at a time when expenses continue to rise for everyone in the city, while directly cutting jobs from 276 workers whose jobs were funded on an annual basis by one-shot City Council funding. In addition to the impact on these workers and their families, this further limits the Parks Department's ability to effectively manage the more than 30,000 acres in their portfolio due to the loss of trained staffers and of their associated institutional knowledge.

We know parks are an essential part of our communities. People depend on them for a place to interact with their neighbors, spend time in nature, and have free spaces to be active. They have been repeatedly shown to be essential for mental health and overall quality of life. They are also crucial infrastructure to address climate change, helping to absorb water from the more frequent storms, mitigate the increasingly hot summers and the impact of the urban heat island effect, helping to address food insecurity at community gardens, and helping to preserve native species in our city.

In order to ensure a well-maintained and safe parks system, the budget must: add 460 second shift workers to support the highest-used parks and restrooms in the system; restore and increase the Capital Projects staff team to restart the nearly 100 stalled capital projects; allowing the City to access the \$450 million pledged for investments and helping reform the current extremely delayed and ineffective capital process; add 227 forest staff to address the more than 20,000 uninspected trees and 35,000 open work orders to ensure both climate resilience, help address the urban heat island effect, and ensure parks are safe for all visitors; add 130 tradespeople to address the ongoing delays in essential repairs and removal of violations; add 80 lawn-care positions; and invest \$21.2 million to expand services and hours at the city's recreation centers.

We know the City is facing serious funding challenges, but our parks system is one of NYC's most important and affordable resources, providing essential services to New Yorkers from all walks of life. We urge the Mayor and City council to restore staffing, invest in park maintenance and capital projects, and move towards dedicating 1% of the city budget to parks.

Hello,

My name is Acacia Thompson, Environmental Justice Coordinator at Brooklyn Public Library. Our library system is a member of Forest for All NYC coalition which seeks to justly and equitably protect, maintain, expand and promote the NYC urban forest.

The urban forest matters to Brooklyn Public Library because it is an essential component to the quality of life and health of all New Yorkers, cleaning and cooling the air we all breathe and reducing heat-related illnesses so prevalent in our urban environment. Trees help tackle the causes and effects of the climate crisis by supporting energy efficiency, strengthening our shoreline, and absorbing stormwater before it pollutes our waterways.

NYC's first ever Urban Forest Plan, required by Local Law 148 of 2023, will be released this spring and chart a path for NYC to equitably expand tree canopy cover to 30% citywide. Implementing this Plan will require resources!

We call on Council and the Mayor to allocate \$150M to fund the initial implementation of the 10-year Urban Forest Plan, including baselining and expanding NYC Parks forestry staff positions and funding to support other City agencies that will expand tree canopy under their jurisdiction.

NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC, but the Parks staff and programs that support the urban forest have continued to be cut. **We ask that Council and the Administration work together to deliver on Mayor Mamdani's campaign commitment to double the NYC Parks budget, and ensure full funding for the staff and programs that are critical to the protection, maintenance, and planting efforts that will enable the City to reach its 30% tree canopy goal.**

Thank you for your time and attention.

Acacia Thomspon

Environmental Justice Coordinator

Brooklyn Public Library



Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing – New York City Council Committee on Parks – March 23, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Hankerson and members of the City Council's Parks Committee,

My name is Asenhat Gomez and I am the Senior Director of Programs at El Puente.

El Puente is a 42-year-old community human rights organization that promotes leadership for peace and justice in North Brooklyn and Puerto Rico. We represent a historic environmental justice community, where poor air quality—driven largely by vehicular pollution—remains one of the greatest threats to public health.

Approximately 6% of our residents report having asthma, linked to our community having the eighth-highest concentration of fine particles, otherwise known as “PM2.5”, in New York City—one of the most dangerous air pollutants. As a result, respiratory-related hospitalizations in our neighborhoods are twice the rate of the entire borough of Brooklyn and New York City overall.

Access to healthy, open green space is essential to mitigating these severe public health outcomes. Yet the lack of sufficient parks and green infrastructure in our community only worsens air quality and compounds environmental risks.

For our community, parks and public spaces are not optional—they are essential. We need quality parks where residents can gather, heal, and thrive. If the COVID-19 pandemic taught us anything, it is how vital parks are. They became lifelines—safe, accessible spaces for the most vulnerable New Yorkers when other public spaces were closed.

We urge the Council and the Administration to work together to deliver on Mayor Mamdani's commitment to double the NYC Parks budget, and to ensure full funding for the staff and programs critical to the maintenance, protection, and tree planting efforts that will help the City reach its 30% tree canopy goal.

NYC Parks is responsible for caring for more than half of the city's tree canopy, yet the staff and programs that sustain this urban forest continue to face cuts. This is unsustainable and inequitable.

We need sustained, equitable investment in our parks—not just to maintain them, but to ensure environmental justice, public health, and climate resilience for all New Yorkers.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.



FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing | New York City Council Parks Committee

Mar 23, 2026

Testimony of the Broadway Mall Association

Good afternoon Chair Hankerson and members of the Parks Committee. My name is Andrew Genn and I am here representing the Broadway Mall Association. I am testifying today as a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, a citywide coalition led by New Yorkers for Parks, New York League of Conservation Voters, and District Council 37 and including more than 450 organizations that steward, advocate for, and rely on NYC's parks and open spaces.

For nearly 40 years, the role of the Broadway Mall Association has been to support NYC Parks by maintaining 83 planted medians along 5.5 miles of Broadway in Manhattan from 70th Street to 168th Street. Our work is done in collaboration with NYC Parks, but let us be clear, we were founded in 1987 to fill a budget gap that existed then and still exists today. By privately fundraising, the BMA annually secures approximately \$1million in operating funds annually. These funds allow us to deploy contracted maintenance crews that clean, garden, plant annuals twice a year, and water tens of thousands of plants, including over 1,100 trees.

In addition to maintenance, using a mix of private grants and NYS matching funds, the BMA has taken on the first large-scale restoration of the malls with native plants. Our Great Green Way project, endorsed by the Parks Department, will fully restore 20 malls by removing invasive weeds that contribute little to the environment, replacing them with a rich variety of plants that not only beautify but also increase habitat value.

So far, BMA has successfully completed restoration plantings on 10 malls in 2024 and 2025 located at 73rd, 74th, 75th, 93rd, 94th, 98th, 119th, and 120th. In these restorations, we planted over 10,000 perennials, grasses and shrubs, and 61 new trees representing a diversity of resilient native species. Tree species planted include Sweetgum, American Elm, Eastern Redbud, and American Basswood among several other native species. These plantings add substantial biodiversity to the malls, creating genuine habitat on the historic street corridor.

Through these efforts, we have been able to partner with the NYC Bird Alliance to document the species of birds that live or pass through the malls every year. Researchers found that the Broadway Malls serve as a migratory stopover and habitat for 39 species of birds. Nearly five

times more bird species were found on the Broadway malls than on neighboring Amsterdam and Columbus avenues.

In addition to the environmental enhancements we provide, over the past 20 years, BMA has participated in the Art in the Malls program with NYC Parks Art & Antiquities. Since 2005, BMA has produced 15 public art shows that bring to all the communities we serve a mix of artists that range from internationally renowned artists like Sean Scully and Manolo Valdez to local artists identified through partnerships we foster with organizations like the West Harlem Art Fund.

All of the work I am describing cannot be successful without a healthy NYC Parks Department. While we are proud of how our work, at the end of the day, we still rely on the resources of the Parks Department to provide daily cleaning, pruning of tree canopies, large-scale maintenance of concrete retaining walls, positive interventions for neighbors in distress, bench maintenance and coordination with other agencies like DOT and the MTA. As a small nonprofit that relies on annual fundraising that can vary greatly from year to year depending on economic conditions in the wider world.

For these reasons, we urge strong consideration of the Play Fair Coalition's budget requests. These steps will ensure a safe, well-maintained parks system and deliver basic services in the following ways:

- Restore 59 Capital Projects staff and add 60 more staff to unplug the capital project pipeline;
- Add 227 forestry staff to address the backlog of uninspected trees and open work orders;
- Add 130 tradespeople—including plumbers, electricians, carpenters, masons, roofers, and painters—for faster repairs to broken infrastructure;
- Invest \$21.2M to expand hours and services at all 36 recreation centers.

The current FY27 Preliminary Budget proposed by the Mayor offers less than the FY26 Adopted Budget and will continue a fifth year of cuts to the NYC Parks budget. By perpetuating this underinvestment in parks and reducing staffing levels, including those lost by attrition, the City's parks face the potential of returning to the bad old days when poor park conditions created unsafe neighborhoods resulting in residents leaving the City. The response in the 1970s and 1980s was the creation of nonprofits such as the Broadway Mall Association. Our partnership with NYC Parks eventually stabilized conditions and in recent years, as noted above, we are able to enhance these unique "parklets" with native plants creating environmental benefits during challenging times. Our ability to do these local improvements that result in a better quality of life for residents depends on adequate baseline funding for the NYC Parks Department.

Thank you.

Andrew Genn, Executive Director
Broadway Mall Association



Written Testimony for FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing

To: NYC Council Parks Committee
From: Dale Henderson
Date: 03/26/2026

Good afternoon Chair Hankerson and members of the Parks Committee,

My name is Dale Henderson, and I am here representing Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC). I am testifying today as a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, a citywide coalition led by New Yorkers for Parks, New York League of Conservation Voters, and District Council 37 and including more than 450 organizations that steward, advocate for, and rely on NYC's parks and open spaces.

Mayor Mamdani's FY27 Preliminary Budget is \$33 million below the FY26 Adopted Budget yet it does not restore the cuts NYC Parks has absorbed over the past four years of underinvestment. Instead of moving toward the Mayor's commitment of dedicating 1% of the city budget to Parks, it continues a harmful pattern of underfunding that puts our cities parks and natural areas at risk.

The FY27 preliminary budget also eliminates 100 Parks staffing lines further limiting the capacity of NYC Parks which has lost 600 positions since 2023. This makes it extremely difficult for the agency to rebuild its workforce to the levels needed to maintain our cities parks and natural areas. An additional 276 Parks workers remain at risk of losing their jobs at the end of this fiscal year because their roles rely on inconsistent funding from City Council. These positions must be baselined to ensure the continuation of essential NYC Parks services.

Years of cuts have stretched staff thin, and basic maintenance is suffering—**only 65% of parks meet the agency's own standards**. To restore safe, clean, and resilient parks for all New Yorkers, the City must:

- **Add 460 Second-Shift workers** to keep 400 high-use parks and restrooms clean.
- **Restore 59 Capital Projects staff and add 60 more** to restart nearly 100 stalled projects and unlock **\$450 million** in green space and resiliency improvements.
- **Add 227 forestry staff** to address a backlog of more than **20,000 uninspected trees** and **35,000 open work orders**.
- **Add 130 skilled tradespeople** to accelerate repairs and clear violations.

New York City's parks and natural areas are essential infrastructure for cultivating healthy environments and communities. To serve every community fairly and adequately, the FY27 budget must reverse years of cuts and rebuild the Parks Department's capacity. Commit to 1% of the city budget for Parks!

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony,

Dale Henderson



March 23, 2026

Dear Members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation,

On behalf of the East Coast Greenway Alliance, a member of the Play Fair Coalition, I am writing to call for the City to fully fund the operation, maintenance, and growth of New York's parks. Our parks and greenways are essential, beloved infrastructure that support public health, safety, community connection and wellbeing, climate sustainability and resilience, and more.

Many of New York's parks make up essential pieces of the citywide greenway network, which links New York City neighborhoods through ribbons of green infrastructure and shared use paths. Park greenways have regional and national significance as part of the East Coast Greenway, a 3,000-mile walking and biking route from Maine-to-Florida. Last year, the City adopted the Greater Greenways Plan as mandated in LL 115, which calls for the expansion of park greenway paths.

In order to fulfill the promise of the Greater Greenways Plan and our sustainability goals, we need a robust, fully funded Parks Department. We are calling on the administration and our City Council to move towards 1% of the City budget for Parks. Full funding for Parks will allow us to:

- Add 460 Second-Shift workers to keep 400 high-use parks and restrooms clean
- Restore 59 Capital Projects staff and add 60 more so that nearly 100 stalled capital projects can resume, unlocking nearly \$450 million in green space and resiliency investments
- Add 227 forestry staff to address the backlog of 20,000+ uninspected trees and 35,000+ open work orders
- Add 130 tradespeople—including plumbers, electricians, carpenters, masons, roofers, and painters—for faster repairs and violation clearing
- Add 80 dedicated lawn-care positions to keep lawns and playing fields usable
- Invest \$21.2M to expand hours and services at all 36 recreation centers

New Yorkers agree: maintaining, stewarding, and sustainably growing the City's parks and greenways system is a smart, cost-effective investment in our future. In a recent [New York Times survey](#), a 35,000+ reader majority chose increased funding for parks as their top policy. We join them in urging the City to make this investment today for a healthier, more sustainable, more livable New York for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Sofia Barandiaran
New York & New Jersey Greenway Manager
East Coast Greenway Alliance
sofia@greenway.org

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Dennis Markatos-Soriano



March 23, 2026

New York City Council
Committee on Parks and Recreation
Preliminary Budget Hearing

Re: Fort Greene Park Conservancy's Testimony on Preliminary Budget

Good afternoon, my name is Rosamond Fletcher, and I'm Executive Director of the Fort Greene Park Conservancy. I am testifying today as a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition which includes over 450 organizations from across the five boroughs. We thank Chair Hankerson and members of the Parks Committee for holding this hearing.

CITY FUNDING FOR PARKS IS GROSSLY INADEQUATE and Mayor Mamdani's Preliminary Budget makes it worse. His proposed budget for Parks is \$33 million less than Mayor Adams' last budget and does not restore harmful cuts.

This is NOT the promised pathway toward 1% of the city's budget.

How does this affect Fort Greene Park and its community of users? At 30-acres, the Park is neither large nor small but it is incredibly well-used. Park use per acre is actually double that of Prospect Park, and nearly the same as Central Park.

Fort Greene Park is directly adjacent to Downtown Brooklyn. The density of the area has increased dramatically since its rezoning in 2004. 35,000 new residential units have come online but only one new 1-acre park. We all know we need this level of housing production, but the investment in parks has not kept pace.

The impact of this planning failure is the ongoing degradation of Fort Greene Park's landscape and the unsustainable upkeep of its public space: erosion of the park's hills, exposed tree roots that threaten its canopy, barren "moonscape" lawns that require intensive seasonal restoration, and overflowing trash cans that require frequent day and evening pickups. **These are maintenance and operational challenges that require more baselined park staffing.**

In order to ensure a safe, well-maintained parks system, the City must:

- Add 460 Second-Shift workers to keep 400 high-use parks and restrooms clean (FGP has benefited from second-shift workers in the past)
- Restore 59 Capital Projects staff and add 60 more so that nearly 100 stalled capital projects can resume, unlocking nearly \$450 million in green space and resiliency investments
- Add 227 forestry staff to address the backlog of 20,000+ uninspected trees and 35,000+ open work orders
- Add 130 tradespeople—including plumbers, electricians, carpenters, masons, roofers, and painters—for faster repairs and violation clearing
- Add 80 dedicated lawn-care positions to keep lawns and playing fields usable
- Invest \$21.2M to expand hours and services at all 36 recreation centers

We urge the Mayor and City Council to restore staffing, invest in park maintenance, and move toward dedicating 1% of the city budget to parks.

Funding parks is funding affordability AND livability.

Thank you for your time,



Rosamond Fletcher
Executive Director

From: [The Fresh Creek Association](#)
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Play fair
Date: Wednesday, March 25, 2026 12:17:22 PM

Dear all,

I'm asking the major and city council to consider the parks needs for the 1% funds for parks, parks play a never important part in low income communities because it's a place where families and older adults go to exercise and do sport activities.

I'm and older adult who use the park weekly. We need the park workers to keep the parks clean and safe for park users. The park dept. can not afford anything more cuts. Please restore the 1% funding.

Regards,
Maria Garrett
Fresh Creek Nature Association
freshcreekassociation@gmail.com

Carol Zakaluk, Board Member, Friends of Brook Park Community Garden

Thank you to Chairman Tyrell Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Carol Zakaluk, and I am a Board Member for Friends of Brook Park Community Garden, located in the Bronx. I have been very involved in this and other community gardens in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx for over 20 years. Our garden, Brook Park, has a compelling history of community involvement and has been an important green space in our neighborhood.

The leadership at Brook Park has, from the beginning, sought to connect people with nature. Early members worked tirelessly to remove shoulder-high weeds, break and remove hundreds of square feet of cracked asphalt, and plant fruit trees, bushes, vegetables and flowers. The garden is used as an outdoor classroom by local public schoolteachers and by The Fieldston School which sometimes sends teens and a teacher to volunteer. The recent addition of ADA-compliant paths now opens the park up for folks in wheelchairs to plant in raised beds. There is a group who built and maintain a chicken coop, a group that manages composting, and there have been (and will soon be again) thriving bee hives. The Arts Committee has hosted many exhibit and workshop events, and there have been lively indigenous peoples' celebrations. An artist created an outdoor pizza oven which has been the site of nutrition workshops, following which kids make pizza topped with greens grown in the garden. Neighbors constantly use the park for birthday parties. I know of two wedding receptions held there! Best of all, everyone is welcome in Brook Park. It is a place where cooperation naturally unfolds—we have no violence, no bad behavior. It's a crucial, key oasis.

NYC's preliminary budget does not allocate much to the Department of Parks and Recreation. I respectfully ask that as much funding as possible be restored to GreenThumb so they can continue to support our garden and others around the city. Without financial assistance, GreenThumb will be seriously curtailed. Gardens are an essential community resource and they should continue to be valued.

Thank you,

Carol Zakaluk
Friends of Brook Park Community Garden



FRIENDS OF CITY HALL PARK

New York City Council Committee on Parks

March 23, 2026

Budget Hearing

Skip Blumberg, Friends of City Hall Park

CityHallParkNYC.org

I submit **support for New Yorkers for Parks “Play Fair” recommendations.**

New Yorkers deserve a fully-funded, safe, clean, green and resilient parks system. The budget cuts to NYC Parks jeopardize all these righteous objectives.

It is unacceptable that, after campaigning to double the Parks budget(!) which is still lower than many other large city’s budgets per capita, our new Mayor proposes an impactful reduction (!) of NYC Parks budget!

The importance of parks is clear, especially with another Covid lurking. Not just for the benefits to physical health and mental health that are available equally to all, parks provide solutions to climate change’s devastating impact. Parks throughout the city can **provide crucially needed climate fixes**, including assisting with rainwater runoff and as compost centers.

Less than 1% for DPR makes it even more difficult for the already understaffed, under-resourced Parks Department to carry out the basic work needed to ensure parks are equitable and accessible for all New Yorkers. Essential staff, like PEP and Foresters, must be fully restored.

City Hall Park is most apparent as a disaster currently by looking at the unenforced encroachment on to CHP’s Northeast Plaza, next to City Council Chambers, by a growing number of unneeded polluting, trash-generating, annoyance vendors. With PEP shortages **our quality of life and our safety are threatened.**

The one-third-staff of CHP CPW’s is visible in the **overflowing trash cans** as you walk into City Hall.

The unhealthy workers’ shed are more than unproductive, they are inhuman conditions within sight of the Mayor’s office!

The **dangerous CHP pavement** resulting from shortage of capital repairs remain hazardous.

The lack of gardeners **harms all our parks' valuable forest and plantings costing tax payer money as well as diminishing enjoyment.**

There are more than 100 billionaires and 350,000 millionaires in our city. The wealthiest city in the wealthiest country in the world **should be able afford the best parks**, as well as the best police, health care, education, housing, and including the best salaries for City Hall and City Council staff.

In addition to everything else, **well-maintained parks are a symbol of a city's effective government.**

Conversely what does the current deplorable state of our whole city's parks say about the lack of effectiveness of our municipal government???

City Hall Park is a 6-acre precious neighborhood park in one of NYC's fastest growing neighborhoods, as well as all New Yorkers' historic city commons.

Due to neglect from years of short staff and lack of budget, as well as the botched renovation of the 1999 renovation, CHP has become in the **most deplorable condition** in FCHP history (since 1995).

We know that the most important way to make our neighborhood park better, and to keep it better, is adequate NYC Parks funding.

IT'S UP TO YOU TO RESTORE THE PROPER PARKS DEPARTMENT BUDGET FOR THE BIG APPLE.

Thank you ~

Skip Blumberg
Friends of City Hall Park

Play Fair for Parks Coalition Written Testimony

FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing | New York City Council Parks Committee, Monday, 3/23

Chair Hankerson and members of the Parks Committee: **My name is Anne Saxon-Hersh, and I represent the Friends of Dag Hammarskjold Plaza.** I submit this written testimony as a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition to advocate for NYC's parks and open spaces. You have already heard the math from the Coalition so I will not repeat the chilling \$ figures provided by our leadership.

We all know that great cities provide great parks. The public ranks parks as a Number-One priority for quality of life, health, neighborhood property values, and climate resiliency, yet the beleaguered Parks agency continues to be the first on the chopping block to suffer budget cuts.

Groups like ours are encouraged to serve as stewards of the city's greenspaces, but we face an uphill battle, governed by an agency that has been reduced to skeleton staffing levels over a long period of disinvestment.

As a founder of this nonprofit 501c3 organization with more than 25 years of service, **I have yet to see the city allocate 1 percent of its annual operating budget to Parks, regardless of campaign promises and economic cycles.** While the city council does its best to negotiate on behalf of parks, we are left with the same system.

Mayor Mandami's Preliminary Budget not only fails to allocate 1% of the city budget to Parks, it eliminates 100 Parks staffing lines as a condition to end the agency's hiring freeze, adding to the 600 staffing lines cut since 2023 under the Adams Administration.

Hammarskjold Plaza accommodates numerous protests and cultural rallies as gateway to the United Nations. This 1.6 acre Plaza served as the epicenter of the 1917 Women's March, the largest in NYC history. In an area starved for parkland, this commons is the largest open space in east midtown Manhattan, providing an urban oasis for local residents and workers. Its Katharine Hepburn Garden appears in tourism and hotel guidebooks.

- While Hammarskjold Plaza stands to benefit from a \$4 million capital renovation, we witness first hand the overwhelming workload imposed on a skeleton staff, making it difficult to organize our own activities, inform the public and galvanize resources to fill a formidable maintenance and operations gap.
- As the largest urban forest in east midtown Manhattan, Hammarskjold Plaza requires professional pruning. Dead tree limbs continually put the public at risk in a park that accommodates huge crowds (capacity 8000).

- Further, we are informed by DPR that there is no replacement for the gardener who serviced the Plaza once weekly and used power equipment, including a chain saw to remove dead trees and limbs.
- Hammarskjold Plaza's SIX fountains require skilled plumbers and electricians to stay in good repair. While capital funding builds and restores fountains, there is no operational budget to maintain them.

We are exhausted! Flagship parks with licenses to operate multi-million dollar budgets are held up as models, but the formula does not fit most neighborhoods.

NYC's 30,000 acres of parkland are essential public infrastructure supporting public health, climate resilience, recreation, and quality of life in every neighborhood.

Our parks system is one of NYC's most important affordable resources, providing free programming and places for neighbors to exercise, play, and commune with nature.

We urge the Mayor and City Council to restore staffing, invest in park maintenance, and move toward dedicating 1% of the city budget to parks.

END

Dear Committee Members:

I have lived across the street from Fort Greene Park for 20 years. My name is Izabela Frank and I am a member of Friends of Fort Greene Park, whose mission it is to preserve the healthy, mature trees in Fort Greene Park for the benefit of the surrounding community whose health and wellbeing these trees serve. For 10 years we have been opposing the planned “Park Without Borders” 2015 initiative that would uproot 78 healthy, mature shade trees in the park, 58 of them clustered in the northwest corner, the most underserved and historically neglected area of the park, the “backyard” for the residents of multiple NYCHA buildings.

Every community member I have approached in our advocacy has been aghast at this planned arboricide and that the Parks Dept. plans to pave over 13,000 sq. ft. of current green space and install yet another concrete plaza in the park. Both of these plans are in direct contradiction to the city’s aims to increase green canopy in the city by 30% by 2035. If allowed to proceed, this WILL HARM the ecosystem of the park and the surrounding community AND require significant expenditure. If this plan were to move forward it would take approximately 35 years to achieve the canopy that already exists! This is NOT what the community wants or needs, nor is the cost warranted. There are plenty of necessary improvements in the original plan that we support and would like to see funds going to projects that improve drainage, increase accessibility, maintain paths, and augment and preserve the canopy by introducing new trees without removing the healthy mature ones. We have an alternate plan that both saves the trees AND saves money:

<https://www.friendsoffortgreenepark.org/>. It is **significantly less expensive and would enable funds to be spent for other environmental justice areas in NYC.**

According to *Forests for All*, in addition to the demonstrated value of capital investment in tree planting, the data make a strong case for the need for maintenance and protection of mature trees. A coarse proximity analysis of tree canopy change suggests that most of the citywide gain in tree canopy from 2017 to 2021 can be **attributed to the growth of existing trees rather than new plantings.**

Friends of Fort Greene Park call on you to preserve the continuous grove of mature trees that extends from the NW entrance of Fort Greene Park to the top of the Monument steps. We believe this new administration will see the wisdom in our [proposed plan](#) and we look forward to working together to preserve and maintain these incredible trees and park for all! Thank you for your attention and service.

With gratitude,

Izabela Frank

Friends of Fort Greene Park

www.friendsoffortgreenepark.org

March 18th, 2026

Testimony to NY City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

Re: FY27 Budget Priorities and the Protection of the Urban Forest in Fort Greene Park

How can urgently needed funds for the City's strained FY27 budget effectively "appear" without new taxes or cuts? How do we protect and nurture our city's precious Urban Forest? Friends of Fort Greene Park stands ready with a practical remedy and alternative that does exactly that, We welcome an opportunity to present this plan in greater detail and to work collaboratively toward a solution that protects both the public purse and the public's health.

As a member of Friends of Fort Greene Park, I submit this testimony to urge the Committee to align the FY27 City Budget with New York City's stated environmental, fiscal, and public health priorities by rejecting the current \$24 million capital project slated for the northwest section of Fort Greene Park and adopting aour responsible, community-driven alternative.

At a time of clear budgetary strain, of course the City must exercise disciplined stewardship of public funds. It is therefore deeply troubling that a substantial portion of this \$24,000,000 allocation is earmarked not for essential repair, but for the unnecessary destruction of critical green infrastructure: 78 mature, healthy trees with expansive canopies. These trees are not expendable amenities—they are frontline defenses against climate change, delivering carbon sequestration, air filtration, stormwater absorption, and heat mitigation.

This project is in direct conflict with the City's own goal of achieving 30% tree canopy coverage by 2035. It is fiscally contradictory and environmentally regressive to fund the removal of precisely the kind of mature canopy the City claims it seeks to expand.

The impacts will fall most heavily on an environmental justice community. Fifty-eight of the trees slated for removal are located in the park's northwest quadrant, directly adjacent to a large NYCHA development. For residents there, this section of the park functions as a vital backyard—providing shade, cooling, and breathable air in a neighborhood already burdened by elevated asthma rates and heat vulnerability. The plan to replace 13,000 square feet of green space with a 43-foot hardscape plaza will intensify the urban heat island effect, degrade air quality, and increase stormwater runoff.

The loss of this mature canopy will not be meaningfully offset for decades. Newly planted trees require 20 to 30 years to approach the environmental performance of those being removed. In the interim, an entire generation will experience the consequences: hotter summers, dirtier air, and diminished public health.

Equally concerning is the lack of transparency that has characterized this project. Friends of Fort Greene Park has been forced to file multiple FOIL requests and pursue litigation simply to access basic project information. This has imposed avoidable costs on both the community and the City—further underscoring the need for a more accountable and fiscally responsible approach.

There is a better path forward.

Friends of Fort Greene Park has developed a practical, cost-effective alternative plan for the "Lower Plaza and Sidewalks" area that achieves the stated goals of the capital project—repairing deteriorated walkways, improving drainage, upgrading recreational infrastructure, and enhancing accessibility—without destroying mature trees or compromising the park's historic character. This approach preserves the urban forest, reduces unnecessary capital expenditures, and allows scarce City funds to be redirected to other parks and environmental justice communities that urgently need investment.

In the context of the FY27 budget, the choice is stark:

- Spend \$24 million on a project that undermines climate resilience, public health, and fiscal prudence; or
- Embrace a community-driven solution that saves money, protects vital canopy, and advances equity.

We respectfully urge the Committee to reject the current plan, support the Friends of Fort Greene Park alternative, and ensure that capital allocations reflect the City's commitments to environmental justice, climate adaptation, and responsible budgeting.

Further details on the community proposal can be found here:

<https://www.friendsoffortgreenepark.org/>

<https://sites.google.com/view/fortgreeneparkrenovation/home>

Thank you.

Sandy Rayburn-Friends of Fort Greene Park member

Testimony 3-23-26, Friends of Fort Greene Park, Brooklyn, NY- ALTERNATIVE TO 2016 REDESIGN to preserve trees/canopy

I am Valerie Francis, a part of the Friends of Fort Greene Park and from a family living opposite this park for 3 generations. I had been part of the process of previous redesign process of this park with a group known as the Society Of Old Brooklynites. That redesign that took 15 years to complete, was a vast success under the administration of City Council person, Mary Pinkett. My 1 block coop, immediately downhill from the park, has a 2 way bike lane on 1 side which appeals to our homeowners who pay for bike shelter there. In September 2023, our Ashland Place bike lane and street were flooded for a length of 2 blocks (along the width of the park), along with uphill subway stations and streets next to Prospect Park and the Prospect Park Zoo. At the time of the flooding Prospect Park had completed a Parks Without Borders redesign which was associated with the same kind of approach planned for Fort Greene Park. That flagship park now has a new flood mitigation plan.

I am testifying since the trees in Fort Greene Park are in a sanctuary, compared to street trees. Maintaining these park trees and the lawns around them, is the most effective method to manage stormwater. My aged development of 5 buildings, a garden community, does its part to limit flooding. We do not have control over other external activities, namely: deforestation and retaining permeable surfaces ie., the stand of huge Myrtle Av oak trees removed for new buildings by NYCHA; or the renovations to LIU campus that destroyed a 1 block strip of Ashland Place street trees and elimination of a corner grass lawn. The current renovation plan of the Fort Greene Park with 78 trees, with as many as 54 healthy trees being removed in adjacent to Myrtle Av for design revision, is a “public health doomsday plan” for my community. We are surrounded by traffic to 2 bridges and an elevated highway.

I was educated in forestry in college and work as a certified arborist with Parks Department, where I have worked for 30 years, mostly as an educator. I therefore understand the value of the canopy and have noted the high failure associated with planting new trees, that recently had their guaranteed care period reduced from 2 year to 1 year. Between the attachment of electric bikes to these young trees, not being planted with tree guards, to the new dispensaries or other businesses that chop these up to make their signage visible, the failure rate of 9 out of 10 is not astonishing. Many trees met their demise as the outdoor dining was initiated during the COVID pandemic.

For these reasons and others (like management of BBQ smoke or from fires in Canada, buffering noise from parks events or the ambulances going to Brooklyn Hospital) the Friends of Fort Greene Park has sued NYC 2 times to stop the madness. We have presented a more sustainable design option that preserves trees vs clear cutting a strip for a paved plaza, assess for police vehicles (when drones are an option) and sidewalk level seating. We are now part of a 150 member organization called Forests For All, which established an Urban Forest Master Plan in 2021 to retain tree canopy.

Please review our plan at our website, <https://www.friendsoffortgreenepark.org>

Thank you for your attention to the matter.

Valerie Francis,

██████████, Brooklyn, NY 11201, ██████████

WRITTEN TESTIMONY for Parks and Recreation Committee Hearing 3/23/26

by Maria Kessler , Executive Director, Friends of the East River Esplanade

Hon. Chair Hankerson and members of the Parks Committee, my name is Maria Kessler, and I represent **Friends of the East River Esplanade**. My testimony is part of our membership in the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, a citywide coalition led by New Yorkers for Parks, New York League of Conservation Voters, and District Council 37 and including more than 450 organizations that steward, advocate for, and rely on NYC's parks and open spaces.

- Mayor Mamdani's FY27 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks is \$33 million less than the FY26 Adopted Budget and does not provide critical restorations after four years of cuts.
- The Preliminary Budget maintains the status quo of underinvestment rather than putting Parks funding on a path toward 1% of the city budget, a goal which the Mayor committed to.
- **In particular, we ask the City to:**
 - Restore 59 Capital Projects staff and add 60 more so that nearly 100 stalled capital projects can resume, unlocking nearly \$450 million in green space and resiliency investments
 - There are a number of phased projects along **Bobby Wagner Walk** which includes **Pier 107** that received capital funding in 2019 during the DeBlasio administration. The delays in project staff diminishes the initial value of this funding and adds to the overall cost.
- The East River Esplanade is an open air gem that runs from East Midtown through East Harlem. This is one of the parks in our system that is an affordable resource, providing free programming and places for neighbors to exercise, play, and commune with the waterfront.
- We urge the Mayor and City Council to restore staffing, invest in park maintenance, and move toward dedicating 1% of the city budget to parks.



March 25, 2026

Dear Chair Hankerson and members of the Parks Committee,

My name is Kathleen Corrigan, a volunteer representing Friends of Tompkins Square Park.

We are proud members of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, a city-wide coalition led by New Yorkers for Parks, advocating for full restoration of the NYC Parks funding in the FY27 budget.

In 2025, our all-volunteer group hosted 24 events attended by 512 volunteers with 25% of our volunteers returning from 2024.

We planted:

Spring bulbs x 2040: Daffodils, Tulips, Iris, Blue Squill, Bluebells, Hyacinth and an early Spring mixture of Woodland bulbs.

Seeds x 1950: Sunflowers, Zinnias, Milkweed, Boneset, Lobelia, Asters & Rudbeckia.

Perennials, annuals & grasses x 115 / 21 species

Shrubs x 40/ 11 species

We established a wildflower meadow at the entry to the North facing playground at Avenue B & 7th St where a damaged 90 ft American Elm was removed in April 2025 by NYC Parks.

Amended the soil with countless wheel barrows of compost ,soil and mulch and hand watered everywhere.

HOWEVER, we are not a substitute for the 700 lost staff jobs in the parks.

The budget fails to safeguard the 276 workers set to lose their jobs at the end of this fiscal year since they are dependent on annual one-shot City Council funding.

We advocate for permanent staffing in our park because it builds community by connecting the Parks staff to our neighbors who love talking with the staff about the park and appreciate that someone is listening to their concerns and thoughtful suggestions.



**Council of Gardeners
FY27 NYC Budget Priorities**

The Green Guerillas [Council of Gardeners](#) is a dynamic coalition that unites community gardeners from across New York City. Our mission is to advocate for the needs of gardeners, initiate collective actions, explore funding opportunities, foster connections between well-resourced and under-resourced gardens, and provide mentorship opportunities for emerging leaders.

The City's Preliminary Budget for FY27 proposes allocating 1% of its total city budget to the Department of Parks & Recreation. While this benchmark has long been championed by advocates, reaching 1% alone does not address the chronic under investment the department has faced. Within the Department of Parks & Recreation, GreenThumb, the primary support system for over 550 community gardens, still remains severely under-resourced. Without sustained and expanded operating and capital investments to our community gardens we are left increasingly vulnerable.

It is time for New York City to fully recognize, invest in, and permanently protect our community gardens. This platform is a call for bold investment, strong protections, and policies that uplift the work of community gardeners, ensuring that these green spaces remain cornerstones of equity, environmental justice, and community well-being. Therefore, we call upon the city to invest in:

Policy Recommendations:

- **Parks Equity Initiative**

- We urge the NYC Council to boost funding for the Parks Equity Initiative (PEI). This initiative fosters a more equitable park system by providing discretionary funding for park and garden maintenance, beautification, security, and community engagement projects, thus enabling community gardens to strengthen their role in local communities.
- We urge the Council to allocate \$300,000 of PEI funds to create a pilot program empowering garden groups to access funds directly, through a simplified application and reporting process, fostering equity and sustainability. Funding can be distributed through a re-granting partnership with community-based organizations, like Green Guerillas or the City Parks Foundation, to ensure equitable distribution of resources and support for under-resourced gardens.

- **Preserve Our Gardens, Protect Our Future**

- We call on New York City officials to take immediate action by introducing strong, enforceable legislation that permanently protects NYC community gardens from development that threatens the cultural fabric and sustainability of our neighborhoods. For decades, community gardens have provided essential green space, food access, climate resilience, and cultural preservation, yet they remain vulnerable to displacement. Since the Bloomberg administration, there has been no significant policy change to strengthen protections for these vital spaces. It is time for elected officials to step up and secure the future of community gardens for

generations to come. This legislation must include clear language that excludes all NYC community gardens located on city-owned land from rezoning and development—ensuring that these irreplaceable spaces remain safeguarded as public assets, not bargaining chips in land use decisions. The time to act is now. We demand a commitment from our city leaders to preserve and protect our community gardens before it's too late

- **A Greener NYC**

- Continue investment to empower local organizations in providing youth with green jobs, infrastructure, and advocacy opportunities. Ensure community gardeners receive support from youth-focused organizations for effective garden maintenance and expand funding opportunities for programs that promote environmental education, advocacy, and community service, contributing to the improvement and conservation of the City's natural resources.

- **Get Stuff Clean Initiative**

- Community gardeners have been experiencing an overwhelming amount of rodent infestation and illegal dumping since the COVID-19 pandemic. These rodents are affecting our food production and our ability to create organic compost in our gardens. We ask council members to implement community-driven solutions to enhance cleanliness and safety in and around community gardens, ensuring they remain vibrant spaces for community engagement and environmental stewardship by:
 - Increasing funding to address rodent infestation and illegal dumping impacting community gardens.
 - Strengthening collaboration between the Department of Sanitation (DSNY) and GreenThumb to promptly address reported issues.
 - Strengthen relationship and outreach between [Department of Health & Mental Hygiene Rat Academy](#) Training program and community gardeners so they can access this citywide resource effectively.

Playfair Coalition

- We support the [Play Fair Coalition](#) in asking for the Mayor to dedicate 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation. The \$25 million dollar in budget cuts to the Parks Department that resulted in 600 job losses, unsafe parks and playgrounds; dirty bathrooms that close early; delayed opening of sprinklers and fountains; reduced recreation center hours and programming; trees that go unmaintained for far too long. It is important for our parks and open green spaces to stay safe for the public and our communities.

The Green Guerillas Council of Gardeners urges the city council to prioritize the needs of community gardeners and allocate adequate resources to support their essential work. By investing in community gardens, the city can promote environmental sustainability, food security, youth empowerment, and community resilience, fostering healthier and more vibrant neighborhoods for all residents.



925 Bergen Street, Brooklyn, NY 11238

FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Committee on NYC Parks and Recreation
Monday, March 23, 2026

Iyeshima Harris, Executive Director, Green Guerillas

Good day, Chairperson Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Iyeshima Harris, and I serve as the Executive Director of Green Guerillas, a nonprofit that has, since 1973, supported New York City's community gardeners and cultivated youth leadership in food and environmental justice.

I want to begin with something personal. When I immigrated to the United States at 12 years old, community gardens were where I found belonging. In these spaces, I found people who reflected my culture, shared food and stories, and taught me lessons that extended far beyond gardening—from the healing properties of bitter melon to the power of community care. These gardens grounded me, mentored me, and ultimately shaped my career and purpose.

For the past 16 years, I have grown alongside these spaces. Community gardeners, many of whom are here today, have been my teachers, my neighbors, and my inspiration. These are not just green spaces; they are critical infrastructure for food access, climate resilience, public health, and cultural preservation.

And yet, despite their immense value, community gardens continue to operate without the level of investment and protection they deserve.

We are at risk of losing these vital community anchors—not because they are failing, but because they are under-resourced.

We hear, again and again, from gardeners across the city: they are dealing with aging infrastructure, increasing public health concerns like rat infestations, limited access to funding, and ongoing threats of land insecurity. While we understand that no system can address every issue at once, we are asking for meaningful, sustained support that matches the essential role gardens play in our city.

Specifically, we urge the City to:

- Restore the previously allocated \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb to ensure gardens receive consistent, baseline support.
- Recognize community gardens as essential public assets by advancing legislation that permanently protects all gardens on City-owned land from rezoning and development.
- Allocate \$300,000 through the Parks Equity Initiative for direct funding to community gardens, ensuring resources reach those most impacted.

- Invest in community-based organizations that are deeply rooted in neighborhoods to equitably distribute resources, provide technical assistance, and build long-term resilience.
- Fund initiatives like A Greener NYC to expand green jobs for youth, while strengthening environmental education and advocacy pathways within community gardens.
- Strengthen the Get Stuff Clean Initiative by increasing coordination with DSNY and DOHMH, expanding access to Rat Academy training, and ensuring timely sanitation services to address illegal dumping and rodent infestations.

Community gardens have long filled gaps where systems have fallen short. But they cannot, and should not, do it alone.

If we are serious about equity, climate resilience, and public health, then we must be serious about investing in the people and spaces that have been doing this work for decades.

I stand here today not only as an Executive Director, but as someone whose life was shaped by these spaces. I ask that you invest in them—not just as gardens, but as lifelines for our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Iyeshima Harris-Ouedraogo

Iyeshima Harris - Ouedraogo

iyeshima@greenguerillas.org

**Testimony Provided by
Derrick Whitehorn, Community Engagement Coordinator, Green Guerillas
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Preliminary Hearing
on the FY27 NYC Budget**

March 23, 2026

Good afternoon. Thank you to Chair Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit testimony today. My name is Derrick Whitehorn, and I am the Community Engagement Coordinator at Green Guerillas, a nonprofit organization that supports community gardeners and youth engaged in food access and environmental justice across New York City.

In my role, I manage the Tool and Seed Library, providing gardeners across all five boroughs with essential tools, seeds, and materials. I am also a product of the Youth Empowerment Pipeline, an experience that shaped my path into environmental and community work and strengthened my commitment to supporting gardeners and youth citywide.

Green Guerillas provides critical resources to community gardens, and I would like to highlight three priorities that would significantly benefit gardeners:

First, restore the \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.

Community gardens continue to face challenges due to limited resources and support. Many gardeners rely on Green Guerillas for basic tools and materials because GreenThumb's budget constraints reduce their ability to provide consistent support. Restoring funding for GreenThumb is essential to ensuring that gardens can operate effectively and continue serving their communities.

Second, continue investing in A Greener NYC.

Programs like Youth Tillers provide young people with hands-on experience in gardening, leadership skills, and community engagement. Having participated in a youth empowerment pipeline myself, I know firsthand how transformative these programs can be, empowering youth to take ownership of their neighborhoods and build meaningful skills.

Third, increase funding for the Parks Equity Initiative and allocate \$300,000 for a pilot program. Many under-resourced gardens face barriers when applying for funding for critical infrastructure. A pilot program with direct, simplified access would allow gardens to acquire essential tools, such as wood chippers and generators, supporting their long-term sustainability.

In conclusion, I urge the Council to restore funding for GreenThumb, continue investing in youth programs through A Greener NYC, and increase support for the Parks Equity Initiative. These investments will strengthen community gardens and ensure they continue to provide food, education, and safe green spaces for neighborhoods across New York City.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Derrick Whitehorn
Community Engagement Coordinator
Green Guerillas



**Testimony Provided by
Fatoumata Traore, Intern, Green Guerillas
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Preliminary Hearing
on the FY27 NYC Budget**

March 23, 2026

Good afternoon. Thank you to Chairman Hankerson and the members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Fatoumata Traore and I am representing Green Guerillas as a youth intern a part of the Youth Empowerment Pipeline Program. Green Guerillas is a non profit organization that specializes in engaging with community gardeners, advocating for them all across NYC to promote food and environmental justice.

From my time as an intern, I've learned valuable skills and lessons from community gardens. I have been able to see first hand how community gardeners support their community, maintain sustainable practices, as well as working with limited resources to transform vacant areas to beautiful green spaces.

From my 3 years of experience, I want to highlight some recommendations and improvements I've witnessed that should be made to help community gardeners continue their work.

First, an increase in funding to gardens that need access to utility resources including, running water, electricity, and gardening tools. This will ensure that green spaces are receiving the opportunities they need to create a fully functional environment.

Second, increase funding to youth gardening programs, like A Greener NYC which provides organizations like Green Guerillas funding to create job opportunities for the youth to aid community gardens.

Youth programs are vital to community gardens because it exposes the younger generation to building essential green spaces. Passing the torch on to the next generation of gardeners. Youth action is the future of community action.

In conclusion, I urge the city to prioritize youth internships and accessibility to tools for all gardens across NYC to ultimately create thriving community spaces.

**Fatoumata Traore
Green Guerillas**

Testimony Provided by

Jess Frost, Communications Coordinator & Master Composter, Maple Street Community Garden

For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Preliminary Hearing

on the FY27 NYC Budget

March 23, 2026

Thank you to Chairman Tyrell Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Jess Frost, and I am a Communications Coordinator and Master Composter at Maple Street Community Garden in Brooklyn. Our garden is a Green Thumb supported, volunteer-run green space that functions not only as a neighborhood resource, but as active environmental infrastructure.

In my role, I manage communications, coordinate volunteers, and aid in compost operations that divert organic waste, reduce rat attractants, and produce soil for local growing. This work sits at the intersection of DSNY, DOHMH, and NYC Parks, and when those systems are underfunded or disconnected, the burden falls directly onto volunteers to fill operational gaps.

As a member of the Green Guerillas Steering Committee of Council of Gardeners, a coalition uniting community gardeners across New York City, I want to highlight several crucial recommendations for advancing a sustainable and equitable food system.

The Preliminary FY27 budget allocates only 0.6% of the total city budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). This level of underinvestment continues to weaken NYC Green Thumb, a program that community compost sites and gardens rely on for basic infrastructure, materials, and technical support. Without consistent investment, community composting, one of the city's most accessible and cost-effective climate and waste solutions, remains fragile and unevenly supported.

Looking ahead, there is also an opportunity to more intentionally connect community gardens through NYC Parks as a coordinated network of composting and environmental stewardship sites. With the right support, gardens could function as distributed "compost hubs," expanding capacity, sharing resources, and creating clearer pathways for public participation across neighborhoods.

Therefore, we call upon the city to invest in:

1. Increasing funding to the Parks Equity Initiative (PEI) and allocating \$300,000 to create a pilot program that allows garden groups to directly access funds through a simplified process—particularly for compost infrastructure, tools, and site maintenance.

2. Continuing to invest in A Greener NYC to expand youth green jobs, with a specific emphasis on composting, waste reduction, and hands-on environmental stewardship.
3. Increasing funding to the Get Stuff Clean initiative to strengthen DOHMH Rat Academy outreach and coordination with compost sites, while improving collaboration between DSNY, GreenThumb, and community gardens to address illegal dumping and rodent pressure at the source.
4. Restoring \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb to ensure consistent support for compost systems, volunteer training, and material distribution.
5. Supporting the Play Fair Coalition's call for the Mayor to dedicate 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Community composting sites and gardens have long operated as informal extensions of the city's waste and environmental systems; diverting organic material, educating residents, and maintaining neighborhood health with minimal resources. Continued underfunding limits the city's ability to scale these efforts meaningfully. With targeted investment, these sites can function as reliable, community-based infrastructure supporting climate goals, public health, and waste reduction.

Jess Frost

Maple Street Community Garden

Testimony Provided by
Leslie Gomez Rivera, Policy Associate, Green Guerillas
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Preliminary Hearing
on the FY27 NYC Budget

March 23, 2026

Good afternoon. Thank you to Chair Tyrell Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Leslie Gomez Rivera, and I am the Policy Associate at Green Guerillas, a nonprofit organization that supports community gardeners and youth engaged in food and environmental justice across New York City.

I am also speaking as part of the **Green Guerillas Council of Gardeners**, a coalition of over 300+ community garden members across New York City working together to advocate for stronger investment and protections for our city's gardens.

New York City hosts over 550 community gardens that are an essential asset to every neighborhood. Community gardens serve their neighborhoods in a multitude of ways like providing food access, environmental education, climate resilience as well as safe green spaces for our communities.

Today, I urge the Council to take actions:

Restore the previously allocated \$2.6 million to GreenThumb. Greenthumb is an essential program that aids most of our gardens with needed materials, tools, and seeds.

Second, we call on the council to introduce stronger legislation that permanently protects community gardens located on city-owned land from development and rezoning.

Third, we also call on the council to increase funding to the Parks Equity Initiative, and in addition allocate \$300,000 to create a pilot program that allows garden groups to directly access funding through a simplified application process.

We ask the city to **continue investing in A Greener NYC**, which supports youth employment, green infrastructure, and environmental education in our gardens.

Finally, we ask the Council to strengthen the **Get Stuff Clean initiative** by addressing rodent infestations and illegal dumping that have increasingly affected community gardens.

By investing in community gardens today, the city is investing in healthier neighborhoods, stronger communities, and a more resilient New York for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Testimony Provided by
Marissa Lachica, Youth Program Coordinator, Green Guerillas
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Preliminary Hearing
on the FY27 NYC Budget**

March 23, 2026

Thank you to Chairman Tyrell Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Marissa Lachica, I am the Youth Program Coordinator at Green Guerillas, a nonprofit organization that supports community gardeners and youth engaged in food and environmental justice across New York City.

In my role, I oversee two youth programs serving 15 Youth Empowerment Pipeline interns during the year and 30 summer youth. Through this work, I see firsthand how important it is to create meaningful job opportunities for young people.

One of my interns, Fatoumata, joined the program in 2023 shy but eager to learn. Over time, I watched her confidence grow through leadership opportunities and public speaking practice. She is now a third-year returning intern and a mentor to our summer youth, supporting the next generation of leaders.

Through our programs, youth build leadership skills, develop responsibility, and form strong community connections. That is why I strongly support continued investment in A Greener NYC. This funding allows organizations like Green Guerillas to provide green jobs, hands-on learning, and advocacy opportunities in community gardens. It also strengthens intergenerational relationships and ensures that gardening knowledge continues to be passed down, while youth bring these skills back to their own communities.

I also urge the Council to fund community-based organizations to ensure resources are distributed equitably. For over 50 years, Green Guerillas has been a vital resource for community gardens. Continued investment allows us to expand opportunities for youth to gain skills and grow into leaders.

Another intern, Sophia, joined last year with little knowledge of food justice or community gardening. Today, she is a program leader, confidently advocating for her community and local gardens.

In closing, I urge the Council to continue investing in A Greener NYC and to increase funding for community-based organizations like Green Guerillas.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Preliminary Budget Hearing - Parks and Recreation
Monday, March 23, 2026

Sophia Zongo, YEP Intern, Green Guerillas

Thank you to Chairman Tyrell Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Sophia Zongo, and I am a second-year Youth Empowerment Program intern with Green Guerillas. Through my work, I volunteer in community gardens across all five boroughs of New York City, supporting gardeners with planting, maintenance, composting, and general upkeep. While I am not based in a single garden, I have worked alongside many community gardeners that have a rich history of community involvement and serve as vital green spaces in their neighborhoods.

Through my experience, I have seen firsthand how important community gardens are—not just for growing food, but for building community, providing safe green spaces, and supporting environmental education. However, the recently released preliminary budget allocates less than 1% of the total city budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation. This limited funding places programs like GreenThumb at risk. I urge the Council to restore the previously allocated \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb, which supports hundreds of gardens citywide.

Community gardens must be recognized as essential public assets and protected from development. I strongly support introducing legislation to permanently protect all NYC community gardens on city-owned land from rezoning and development. These spaces are critical to the health and resilience of our neighborhoods.

Additionally, I ask that the Council allocate \$300,000 through the Parks Equity Initiative for direct funding to gardens and invest in community-based organizations like Green Guerillas that distribute resources equitably. Programs like A Greener NYC are also vital—they create green jobs for youth like myself and provide opportunities for environmental education and advocacy.

Thank you,

Sophia Zongo

Green Guerillas

New York City Council
Legislative Oversight Hearing: Intro. 0577 - Trails Formalization
Committee on Parks and Recreation
April 1, 2026

Good afternoon, my name is Michael Rosalie and I am a volunteer Pathkeeper Super Steward in The Greenbelt, a gem of a NYC Parks forest preserve located in Central Staten Island. I am also a resident of Council District 49. Thank you to Chair Hankerson and the Committee for the chance to submit public comment for today's hearing.

As a Pathkeeper, much of my work involves regularly volunteering to care for segments of our 300-mile network of nature trails. This work involves assisting with corridor pruning to keep pathways clear and accessible, closing desire lines to discourage the public from accessing parts of our natural areas that are ecologically fragile or unsafe for public use, and helping to maintain and build structures that allow for greater public access on our trails.

Regarding Intro. 0577, I support the Natural Areas Conservancy in asking the Council to consider the following changes to the proposed legislation that would strengthen its intent and impact:

- The legislation should be reworded to describe "trails" as "nature trails", which would help distinguish these special and unique spaces from other public paths such as greenways, which involve hardscape infrastructure and have very different maintenance and management needs than our nature trails.
- I encourage the Council to consider adding language around improved signage at trailheads to improve wayfinding and convey critical information about trail length, difficulty, and accessibility for park goers.
- The Council should also consider adding language to the bill that would require NYC Parks to provide details for the agency's management planning for trail improvements and formalization.
- In order to help increase access to our natural areas, the Council should consider adding language to the bill that would require NYC Parks to provide a plan on public programming and activation plans for our nature trails.

While the proposed legislation does not come with funding attached, we also support the NAC's call to restore \$2.4 million in baselined funding that was allocated by Mayor Adams in Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24), which would have supported the creation of a permanent citywide Trails team of 26 full-time staff at NYC Parks. These positions were unfortunately eliminated in the FY24 November Plan, leaving NYC Parks with just three full-time staff to manage our 300 miles of nature trails citywide. Restoring this funding would mean improved trails in every borough, improving public safety, accessibility to our natural areas, and would help protect our city's forests and wetlands.

Thank you.

Michael Rosalie

**Testimony Provided by
Ixchel Austin, Grant Shade Garden, Harlem
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Preliminary Hearing
on the FY27 NYC Budget**

March 23, 2026

Thank you to Chairman Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Ixchel Austin, a longtime gardener.

For the past 3 years I have been the group leader of Grant Shade Garden in Harlem. Our garden is ornamental because several London plane trees completely cover the garden which makes it impossible to grow food.

As a member of the Green Guerillas' Council of Gardeners, I want to highlight crucial recommendations for advancing a sustainable and equitable food system in our city.

The City's Preliminary FY27 budget allocates only 0.6% of the total funding needed to support the Department of Parks and Recreation, and continues to fall short.

Under the Adam's administration, this underfunding has led to continued cuts to GreenThumb, weakening a vital support system for over 550 community gardens. This has limited its ability to provide technical assistance, supplies and staffing.

Therefore, we call upon the city to:

- Restore the previously allocated \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.
- Create stronger legislation to protect our gardens from rezoning and redevelopment of city-owned land.

Grant Shade Garden needs an arborist to seasonally prune the London plane trees.

During storms dangerous falling branches accumulate in the garden.

Pruning the trees would also reduce the canopy allowing sunlight into the garden which would enable us to grow fruits and vegetables for the surrounding NYCHA community members.

With newer, younger people in government it's the perfect opportunity for the city to invest in its communities by supporting community gardens and highlighting what they contribute to neighborhood success.

Ms. Ixchel Austin
Grant Shade Garden
Manhattan

NYC FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Committee on Parks And Recreation

March 23,2026

Springtime Greetings to Committee on Parks And Recreation members,

I am writing in support & advocacy on behalf of the more than 550 NYC community gardens for full funding of these city departments.

As a co-founder of Le Petit Versailles garden located on the Lower East Side I can testify to the essential need for these gardens. In addition to the clean air factories they create, gardens provide countless ways of bringing communities together by growing food, social programs and workshops and in our case, arts programming that brings an international audience to appreciate the flexibility of such spaces. Our motto is “We Grow Culture” and have been focused on giving a voice and platform to communities of LGBTQ, People of Color, and Women for more than 30 years.

Speaking more personally, having sero-converted with HIV in 1992, the chance to create the garden gave me a life affirming purpose and mission which speaks to the importance of both gardens and art. Through our non profit arts organization, Allied Productions, we have presented thousands of artists with the support of the Department of Cultural Affairs, New York Council on the Arts and Discretionary Budgets of the City Council. We invite you to visit April 18th for our Growing Culture and Community event*

Please fully fund any and all monies required by Greenthumb and Parks and Recreation to keep the gardens and parks flourishing and blooming with the resources these entities provide.

Thank you for your attention and support.

Sincerely,
Peter Cramer
Co-Founder Le Petit Versailles
Board President Allied Productions, Inc.

* <https://www.nycgovparks.org/events/2026/04/18/growing-culture-community>

Preliminary Budget Hearing - Parks and Recreation

Monday, March 23, 2026

Thank you to Chairman Tyrell Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

My name is Peter Cramer and I am a member and co-founder of Le Petit Versailles Garden located in Manhattan. Our garden has a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our neighborhood since 1995.

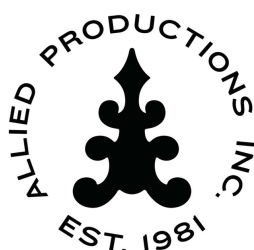
- The recently released preliminary budget has allocated less than 1% of the total city budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation. This leaves GreenThumb facing budget constraints. **PLEASE** restore the previously allocated \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.
- Gardens need to be recognized as an essential public asset and they need to be protected from development. **PLEASE** Introduce legislation to permanently protect all NYC community gardens on city-owned land from rezoning and development.
- Allocate **\$300,000 through the Parks Equity Initiative** for direct funding to gardens. **Fund community-based organizations to distribute resources equitably. Invest in A Greener NYC to create green jobs for youth and support environmental education and advocacy in gardens.**
- Strengthen the Get Stuff Clean Initiative to combat rodent infestations and illegal dumping in and around gardens by:
 - Increasing DSNY and DOHMH support for gardens.
 - Expanding access to Rat Academy training and sanitation services.

Thank you,



Peter Cramer, Co-Founder, Le Petit Versailles

P.O. Box 20260 Tompkins Square Station, New York, NY 10009. USA



Preliminary Budget Hearing - Parks and Recreation

Monday, March 23, 2026

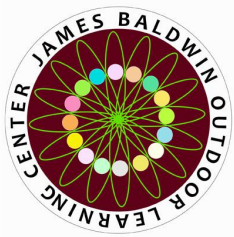
Arlene M. Roberts
Co-Chair, External Affairs Committee
Co-Chair, Garden Minders Committee
Maple Street Community Garden, CB9
Flatbush, Brooklyn NY

Thank you to Chairman Tyrell Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Arlene M. Roberts and I am a member of Maple Street Community Garden located in CB9 in Flatbush, Brooklyn. Since 2014, I have been a member participating in different capacities, first on compost crew, then watering/gardening, later as Chair of Harvest Festival and founder of the Fresh Food Box Program. Currently, I serve as Co-chair of both External Affairs Committee and Garden Minder Committee.

Maple Street Community Garden has been a vital green space in our neighborhood and has a rich history of community involvement – from collaborating with neighbors to co-host a block party to offering educational workshops on green burials, arts workshop, community tea and much more. Our community engagement has been recognized by Brooklyn Botanic Garden. In 2025 at the annual Making Brooklyn Bloom Conference, I co-presented a workshop on the topic, “Community Gardens, Growing Engagement”. In 2024 and 2025, Maple Street Community Garden received a GreenThumb Community Cultivators Certificate for hosting 5+ public events for everyone to enjoy.

- The recently released preliminary budget has allocated less than 1% of the total city budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.
- This leaves GreenThumb facing budget constraints. **Restore the previously allocated \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.**
- Gardens need to be recognized as an essential public asset, they need protected from development.
- Introduce legislation to permanently protect all NYC community gardens on city-owned land from rezoning and development.
- Allocate **\$300,000 through the Parks Equity Initiative** for direct funding to gardens
- Fund community-based organizations to distribute resources equitably
- Invest in **A Greener NYC** to create green jobs for youth and support environmental education and advocacy in gardens.
- Strengthen the Get Stuff Clean Initiative to combat rodent infestations and illegal dumping in and around gardens by: a) increasing DSNY and DOHMH support for gardens; and b) expanding access to Rat Academy training and sanitation services.

Thank you,
Arlene M. Roberts
Maple Street Community Garden



JAMES BALDWIN OUTDOOR LEARNING CENTER, INC.

We strive for project based solutions at the juncture of food, environmental and social justice.

March 23, 2026

Dear Council Committee Members,

My organization, James Baldwin Outdoor Learning Center, is a member of the Forest for All NYC coalition which seeks to justly and equitably protect, maintain, expand and promote the NYC urban forest.

The urban forest matters to my organization/community because increasing the tree canopy in New York City is the most reasonable, cost efficient and effective way of improving the air quality for all New Yorkers. The urban forest is essential to our quality of life. Planting and caring for trees and increasing our urban canopy is a remarkably effective and multifaceted strategy for mitigating air pollution because trees act as natural air filters, absorbing pollutants through their leaves and releasing clean oxygen. This process, coupled with their ability to sequester carbon dioxide, a major greenhouse gas, contributes significantly to improving air quality and combating climate change. You probably already know this, now is the time to act upon this widely accepted and shared knowledge.

NYC's first ever Urban Forest Plan, required by Local Law 148 of 2023, will be released this spring and chart a path for NYC to equitably expand tree canopy cover to 30% citywide. Implementing this Plan will require resources! To ensure the plan is successful, the City will need to plant additional trees, but it will also need to baseline existing staff and expand the workforce that protects and maintains trees, as well as invest in workforce development programs, tree nurseries, tree health research and monitoring, wood salvage, and more.

NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC, but the Parks staff and programs that support the urban forest have continued to be cut. We at Forests For All call on Council and the Mayor to allocate \$150M to fund the initial implementation of the 10-year Urban Forest Plan, including baselining and expanding NYC Parks forestry staff positions and funding to support other City agencies that will expand tree canopy under their jurisdiction.

I trust that you will ensure that the Urban Forest Plan has legs to stand on. It is the absolute right thing for us to do, especially in this era of Climate Change. It is not a hoax!

Thank you and sincerely yours,

Raymond Pultinas
Founder and Director

Address: 600 West 246th Street, #416, Bronx NY 10471

Phone: 917-755-3559

Email: contact@jamesbaldwinoutdoorlearningcenter.org

Website: www.jamesbaldwinoutdoorlearningcenter.org



Testimony Provided by

Elizabeth O'Connor, Cofounder/Treasurer, Moore Jackson Community Garden

*For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Preliminary Hearing
on the FY27 NYC Budget*

March 23, 2026

Thank you Chairman Hankerson and members of the Committee (especially our own Councilmember Krishnan) for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Elizabeth O'Connor, and I am a founding member of Moore Jackson Community Garden, located in Woodside, Queens. Our garden is entering into its ninth growing season and we've been fortunate to be able to offer this vibrant community green space to our neighbors who seek out nature, a place to teach their children about where food comes from, a site to drop off food scraps and see it become a soil amendment rather than methane gas, and a neighborhood hub for free herbalism workshops, Zumba classes, and creative arts programming.

As a Steering Committee member of the Green Guerillas' [Council of Gardeners](#), I want to focus on the continuity of investment in *A Greener NYC* which empowers local organizations to provide youth with green jobs, infrastructure, and advocacy opportunities. I have seen the benefits of this initiative firsthand as we had paid Youth Interns from Green Guerillas at our garden during the summer and these young people learned a ton about farming, the environment, composting, and food equity. One youth, Travis, went on to continue working with Green Guerillas, and every time I see him at events, he tells me how pivotal that internship was for him and his path forward.

Community gardeners have been left to make ends meet on their own for decades. It's time for the city to invest in these incredibly vibrant neighborhood spaces and spotlight the educational and mental health benefits community gardens contribute to their neighborhood's success. We've had multiple garden volunteers tell us that, especially during COVID (and beyond as well), the garden literally saved their lives. We can't let places like these become a budget line item that gets slashed because it's deemed non-essential. We are VITAL to this city's 'Greener' success! Thank you.

Elizabeth O'Connor

[Moore Jackson Community Garden](#)



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Dear Members of the Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the FY27 Preliminary Budget for the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation.

Landscape Architects devote their lives toward the stewardship of the natural environment, creating equitable public open space in NYC in the way of parks, streetscapes and natural areas that are essential to the health and well-being of its inhabitants, as well as to the city's overall natural systems. This was the philosophy that inspired the first landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, to design Central Park.

NYC Parks has unfortunately seen a significant decrease in funding over the years, and we are concerned, as New Yorkers and as Landscape Architects, that the current budget will not support the staffing levels needed to adequately care for the parks and open space that get built through capital funding, nor for the care and development of New York City's urban forest at large.

My organization, ASLA New York, is a member of the Forest for All NYC coalition, which works to protect, maintain, and expand the city's urban forest. We believe in equitable access to open green space, and the urban forest is fundamental to the health, resilience, and quality of life of all New Yorkers.

With the release of the City's first Urban Forest Plan this spring, New York has a clear path toward achieving 30% tree canopy coverage. However, this goal will only be possible with sustained investment. NYC Parks manages more than half of the city's tree canopy, yet staffing has been dramatically reduced in recent years. Without restoring and expanding this workforce, NYC cannot meet these needs.

We urge the Council to fulfill the Mayor's commitment to double the NYC Parks budget and to allocate the funding needed to support the initial implementation of the Urban Forest Plan. This includes expanding forestry staff, increasing tree planting, strengthening maintenance and inspection capacity, and investing in long-term forest management and workforce development.

It is fiscally irresponsible to spend billions of capital dollars on developing new resiliency parks, for example, only to let the trees and other natural infrastructure fail due to a lack of maintenance.

New York City's urban forest is critical to the well-being of New Yorkers. With adequate, sustained funding, it can continue to deliver climate resilience, public health benefits, and environmental equity for all communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
David Russo

Executive Director
New York Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects



NEW YORK CITY COMMUNITY GARDEN COALITION

New York City Council

Committee on Parks and Recreation, Hon. Ty Hankerson, Chair

Preliminary Budget Hearing, Parks and Recreation, GreenThumb

March 23, 2026

Written Testimony Submitted by

Raymond Figueroa, Jr., President

New York City Community Garden Coalition

Greetings, Chairman Hankerson. My sincere thanks to you for this opportunity to submit testimony. My thanks as well to your colleagues – the distinguished members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation.

My name is Raymond Figueroa, Jr., and I am President of the New York City Community Garden Coalition (NYCCGC/the Coalition). NYCCGC's work utilizes various approaches to policy, including: regulatory, legislative, litigation as well as community organizing strategies – all focused on securing the necessary land tenure protections for community gardens.

The purpose for this testimony is to underscore the profound urban – municipal and communal – ethical issues that surface as a result of the advent and presence of community gardens in New York City. Discussion of those issues is further intended to serve as justification as to why budgeting for community gardens via the Department of Parks and Recreation GreenThumb Program budget should not be decreased but rather should be increased or – at the very least – be restored to the fiscal year 2026 level.

Community gardens are not mere landscaping amenities that serve some special interest group/garden club of the socially privileged. In reality, community gardens represent social justice initiatives that are very much needed by the city's disproportionately socio-economically disenfranchised communities – for three fundamental reasons:

- firstly is the demographic geography of their respective surrounding communities – across the city – where community gardens are located – that is, where community gardens are serving community residents living on the social economic periphery of concentrated high unemployment, poverty, and pollution;



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- secondly is the centralized geography of municipal governance and its institutional history – since the 1930’s – of the structural exclusion of BIPOC (primarily Black and Brown constituent) communities from meaningful choice that is truly participatory and transparent when it comes to land use decision-making. This exclusionary structure of governance has included commissions and agency administrators – not duly elected by the people of impacted BIPOC communities – and they have functioned as the institutional vanguard for summarily implementing policies of displacement. Where the City of New York has implemented such policies, there is no record of Black and Brown community residents having given their consent to have their socially cohesive albeit struggling communities subjected to destruction as a consequence of being devaluedⁱ by Redliningⁱⁱ; physically demolished by Urban Renewalⁱⁱⁱ; and burnt down by Planned Shrinkage^{iv} in order to benefit white people^v and rapacious real estate development interests. Specifically, since the 1930’s, New York City’s implementation of Redlining, Urban Renewal, Planned Shrinkage, and, of late, Gentrification has resulted in a consistent pattern of serial displacement, destabilization, and abandonment of entire communities that while being so adversely impacted by these destructive policies, these communities have not had a choice in the matter. According to Paul E. Farmer et al. (2006, Oct 24) this is structural violence, which they describe as follows:
 - **“social structures—economic, political, legal, religious, and cultural—that stop individuals, groups, and societies from reaching their full potential** [emphasis].... Structural violence is often embedded in longstanding ubiquitous social structures, normalized by stable institutions.... Disparate access to resources, political power, education, health care, and legal standing are just a few examples.... **The idea of structural violence is linked very closely to social injustice and the social machinery of oppression**” [emphasis]”
- thirdly (at the intersection of the first two reasons) is the geography of community gardens themselves in these neighborhoods that represents how community residents have nevertheless collectively engaged in not accepting the government-induced legacy of poverty



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and pollution as their destiny, but have engaged instead in making choices at the hyper-local level on behalf community place-reclamation in order to:

- **a)** recover their *communal means* by which to take responsibility for meeting their needs without the residents from these historically impacted communities having to pay, and,
- **b)** most fundamentally, to recover their *communal place* by initiating place-rebuilding and place-preservation whereby social capital can develop & be leveraged and a genuine sense of community can once again flourish while stewarding the composting and the cultivation of food, flowers, and trees – and all while reconnecting community members with each other and connecting them to the nature-based resources of Mother Earth’s green infrastructure and ecosystems services that are restoring their community’s living environment by healing it of the multiple forms of pollution.

The New York City Community Garden Coalition is clear about the need for Land Justice by which community residents – through their community gardens – can steward the place-based resources of land to meet their essential needs for food & health.

During the Pandemic, these needs were existential, and community gardeners across the city organized and worked concertedly to meet these needs. In many cases, resident community gardeners (some facing the threat of eviction from their homes) were intentionally growing even more food and medicinal plants in order to save money for paying their rent. And that practice of protecting themselves and their neighbors from hunger, sickness, and homelessness continues to this day. Indeed, one NYCHA resident who, during Pandemic, would obtain fresh fruits and vegetables from the regular food distributions coordinated by a hub of community gardens in the South Bronx described to the community gardeners how she was able to lower her diabetes medication as a result of her eating the community garden-cultivated food. (This anecdote can be verified by the BRONX GREEN UP Senior Program Director at the NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN).

In this way as well as numerous others, community gardens have been demonstrating how powerfully cost effective they are at meeting the basic human needs of communities that otherwise would not be able to do so.



NEW YORK CITY COMMUNITY GARDEN COALITION

To be sure, the Coalition’s mission-driven work is in recognition of the consequential contributions of community gardens that serve as they do to catalyze local communities’ respective capacities for self-reliance, resilience, and self-determination – in a manner that is just, healing, and sustainable; and in a manner that honors their sense of human dignity.

Given this context – in addition to supporting 1% for Parks, we support an increase in the budget for GreenThumb or at the very least supporting the restoration of the \$2.6 million fiscal 2026 funding level in FY 2027 – the Committee on Parks and Recreation should consider adding relevant policy initiatives in support of urban Land Justice via relevant land use reparations for historically displaced & marginalized communities to their committee’s oversight functions.

As an example, the Committee can explore Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), i.e., the air rights of community gardens so that a) those air rights can be deployed to develop housing and specifically b) deployed in the large lot-low density areas of the outer boroughs to allow for housing to be developed there. Utilized in this way, TDR’s would serve the dual benefits of promoting housing while preserving community gardens in perpetuity. To be sure, Mayor Mamdani has been quite vociferous about the rich paying their fair share of taxes. The rich should also pay their fair share in terms of land use for housing development in the large lot-low density areas where they live. Community garden TDRs can help.

Another example of the rich paying their fair share in terms of land use, the Committee could explore how NYC Parkland that is currently designated as 14 golf courses (totaling between 1,500 and 3,500 acres). Such an expanse of land area has low density usage by default – which could be reclaimed and converted for housing and community garden/farms. If for no other reason, the global crises of the pandemic, the climate-induced extreme weather events, and the Middle East & Russian-Ukraine wars all serve to expose and exacerbate the supply chain vulnerabilities that are drastically inflating food prices and expose the need to radically hyper-localize our food chains by making more of New York City’s land available for growing food. Certainly, where there are such needs as food insecurity, luxury land uses such as golf courses should not be a priority. The golf course in the Bronx at Ferry Point could be considered in this regard (along with others around the city); and by utilizing Eminent Domain (which too often has been used to the detriment of Black and Brown communities) the land could now be used to truly promote the public good with, for example, the economic development potential of



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BIPOC residents from historically adversely impacted communities being employed in ancillary value-adding production as well as being employed as community garden/farmers – productively addressing the food insecurity issues and other economically related issues within local communities.

These are just two examples of Land Justice via land use reparations that could demonstrate win/win benefits both for local communities as well as the City – and thereby dispel the false binary of community gardens vs, affordable housing that regrettably has gained currency in some policy circles. Perhaps, an oversight hearing can be coordinated in order to further discuss the relevant opportunities.

Thank you, again, Chairman Hankerson, and distinguished members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for this opportunity to submit testimony and for your commensurately thoughtful consideration. I would be more than happy to respond if you have any questions. I can be reached at rfigueroa@pratt.edu.

Two FYI's I'd liked to share. First, I am on the MS in Sustainable Environmental Systems faculty at the Pratt Institute Graduate Center for Planning and the Environment (GCPE). And I would love to engage in discussions as to how our graduate students might be able to help in exploring the feasibility of potential projects such as I alluded to above. Second, NYC Council Member, Pierina Ana Sanchez's Deputy Chief of Staff, Benjamin Ratner, whom she initially hired as her Director of Land Use, Policy and Budget, is a former student of mine at Pratt GCPE. I served as one of his Master's Thesis readers and advisors, which was focused on finding solutions to complex community gardens policy issues. So, this is all by way of communicating that I hope we can collaborate going forward.

Most Respectfully,

Raymond Figueroa, Jr.

President

New York City Community Garden Coalition



NEW YORK CITY COMMUNITY GARDEN COALITION

Footnotes

ⁱ FEDERAL HOUSING ADMINISTRATION. Underwriting Manual: Underwriting and Valuation Procedure Under Title II of The National Housing Act. Washington, D. C. (1938). This Federal Underwriting Manual is what has guided Redlining decisions.

ⁱⁱ Id. at Part II: Rating of Location, Section 233. ***"The Valuator should investigate areas surrounding the location to determine whether or not incompatible racial and social groups are present, to the end that an intelligent prediction may be made regarding the possibility or probability of the location being invaded by such groups.... A change in social or racial occupancy generally leads to instability and a reduction in values. The protection offered against adverse changes should be found adequate before a high rating is given to this feature.*** [emphasis]"

ⁱⁱⁱ Marc A. Weiss. The Origins and Legacy of Urban Renewal. in FEDERAL HOUSING POLICY AND PROGRAMS PAST AND PRESENT. J. Paul Mitchell, Editor. page 269. RUTGERS UNIVERSITY. https://www.globalurban.org/Urban_Renewal.pdfhttps://www.globalurban.org/Urban_Renewal.pdf (1986) (accessed March 25, 2026) ***"[National Resources Planning Board's] definition of progressive planning [in 1942] did not include participation by other groups in ...[that is] 'the needs of other segments of the community (Chicanos, blacks,) seem to have been ignored with impunity,' leading to the now familiar practice of demolishing inner-city ghettos uprooting ethnic minorities, and replacing them with high-rent commercial and residential dwellings occupied by well-to-do-whites.*** [emphasis]"

^{iv} Deborah Wallace & Rodrick Wallace. Death and Destruction by Algorithm: A Mask for Human Rights Abuses. DIVISION OF EPIDEMIOLOGY, NEW YORK STATE PSYCHIATRIC INSTITUTE <https://christianregenhardcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/wallace-death-and-destruction-by-algorithm-04282018.pdf> (2018.) (accessed March 25, 2026) "As an example of policy-by-algorithm, we examine operations research models adopted by the FDNY in the 1970s. The algorithms were used to justify immense service reductions mainly in densely populated, high re incidence neighborhoods of color, neighborhoods where, in earlier years, fire companies had been opened precisely because of extreme re hazard. ***The algorithms served as a smoke screen for [Planned Shrinkage] policies of ethnic cleansing directed against minority voting blocs*** [emphasis]. The service reductions accelerated a combined fire/abandonment epidemic that destroyed many neighborhoods, forced mass migrations, and triggered a public health and safety crisis ***There is strong indication that as neighborhoods deteriorated, the fire department redlined [them]*** [emphasis]... ***[There] are indications that the City Planning Commission and other agencies condoned [fire service] reductions in the context of a planned shrinkage policy ... [which has] resulted in the unwarranted loss of life and destruction of city neighborhoods.... We are led to estimate that the fire/abandonment epidemic triggered by planned shrinkage fire service reductions focused on ethnic minority voting blocs resulted in as many as 100,000 premature mortalities over a 30 year period.***[emphasis]; see also Deborah Wallace & Rodrick Wallace, Origins Of Public Health Collapse In New York City: The Dynamics Of Planned Shrinkage, Contagious Urban Decay and Social Disintegration. New York State Psychiatric Institute, BULLETIN OF THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/20899449_Origins_of_public_health_collapse_in_New_York_City_The_dynamics_of_planned_shrinkage_contagious_urban_decay_and_social_disintegration , (1990), (accessed March 25, 2026). "DR. WALLACE [quoted]: ***As far as the political analysis goes, it is quite straightforward. In 1970 Gibson became the first black mayor of Newark. People who ran New York felt threatened by [the Puerto Rican mayoral candidate, Herman] Badillo's very powerful campaign in 1969 and they had these in-house predictions that this process was coming, 1970, 1969. And we gave one of these talks at Downstate Medical once and somebody stood up in the back and said, 'I worked for the Lindsay [mayoral] Administration then and they knew the burnout was coming and they decided to let it go. They broke the black voting bloc.***"[emphasis]

^v Richard Rothstein. 2017. THE COLOR OF LAW: A FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF HOW OUR GOVERNMENT SEGREGATED AMERICA. pages 153 & 154. W. W. NORTON AND COMPANY."



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“So an account of de jure residential segregation has to include not only how public policy geographically separated African Americans from whites but also how federal and state labor market policies, with undisguised racial intent [emphasis], depressed African American wages [emphasis]..... [W]e cannot understand the income and wealth gap that persists between African Americans and whites without examining governmental policies that purposely kept black incomes low [emphasis] throughout most of the twentieth century. Once government implemented these policies, economic differences became self-perpetuating [emphasis]”



**Testimony of Alia Soomro, Deputy Director for New York City Policy
New York League of Conservation Voters
City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 23, 2026**

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

Access to parks, green spaces, and tree canopy is essential for the overall health, affordability, and liveability of New York City. Our city's parks system increases quality of life, promotes climate resilience, provides union jobs, and fosters social and economic growth in every borough. As co-founders of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, along with New Yorkers for Parks, DC37, and over 400 organizations, we advocate for a City budget that gives NYC Parks the fair funding they deserve. NYLCV is also a member of Forest for All NYC (FFANYC), a coalition of nearly 140 organizations committed to protecting, maintaining, and expanding the City's urban forest and equitably achieve 30% tree canopy cover by 2035 from the current 23%.

If we want to maintain our parks system, invest in our city's workforce, increase our tree canopy, and prepare our open spaces for climate change, first and foremost, NYLCV urges our elected officials to increase funding for our city's parks system to at least 1% of the city's budget and develop new funding models to raise revenues for parks.

FY27 Budget

The City's parks workforce is operating at a historic low, which means more trash and longer clean-up times, less frequent tree maintenance and planting, fewer safety patrols and PEP officers in parks, delays in capital projects and park repairs, and reduced programming for youth, families, and seniors.

Mayor Mamdani's FY27 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks is \$33 million less than the FY26 Adopted Budget and does not provide critical restorations after four years of cuts. The Preliminary Budget maintains the status quo of underinvestment in our parks system, leaving the Parks Department with 0.5% of the total city budget, rather than putting NYC Parks on a path toward 1% of the budget, a goal which the Mayor committed to on the campaign trail.

For FY27, the Mamdani Administration and City Council has the opportunity to rebuild an agency crippled by decades of disinvestment. NYC Parks has lost 795 critical positions due

to budget cuts and attrition. While NYLCV appreciates that [the Mayor recently pledged](#) \$50 million to reconstruct 10 parks across New York City, we need to ensure that NYC Parks has the staffing it needs to carry out capital projects as well as maintain our parks.

As members of the Play Fair for Parks and Forest for All NYC Coalitions, NYLCV's FY27 parks budget priorities include the following:

- The Preliminary Budget eliminates 100 Parks staffing lines as a condition of the end to the hiring freeze. Following 600 staffing lines cut since 2023 under the Adams Administration, these cumulative losses limit the agency's ability to rebuild its workforce. We urge the restoration of these positions.
- The Preliminary Budget also fails to safeguard the 276 Parks workers set to lose their jobs at the end of this fiscal year since they are dependent on annual one-shot City Council funding. These positions must be baselined to ensure stability and consistent service.
- Add 460 Parks Second-Shift workers to keep 400 high-use parks and restrooms clean.
- Add 227 forestry staff to address the backlog of 20,000+ uninspected trees and 35,000+ open work orders
- Create borough-specific mowing crews by adding 80 dedicated lawn-care positions to address the agency's documented inability to care for park lawns and playing fields.
- Restore 59 Capital Projects staff and add 60 more so that nearly 100 stalled capital projects can resume, unlocking nearly \$450 million in green space and resiliency investments
- Add 130 tradespeople—including plumbers, electricians, carpenters, masons, roofers, and painters—for faster repairs and violation clearing
- Invest \$21.2 million to expand hours and services at all 36 recreation centers so 22 centers can operate 7 days/week, providing more programming and access.
- Add 250 PEP officers to increase the uniformed presence at 120 high-need parks.
- Increase overtime funding to \$40 million so Parks can respond to storms, emergencies, and routine repairs outside regular hours.
- Commit \$1 million for the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to publicize and begin implementing Local Law 148 of 2023, the city's first Urban Forest Plan, along with non-NYC Parks agencies tasked with heightened maintenance and expansion of trees in their jurisdictions.
 - Funding should also be allocated to protect, maintain, and expand the NYC urban forest in a way that is just and equitable, including to NYC Parks, NYCHA, public schools, and many other city agencies with trees in their care.
- Follow through on the commitments in *PlaNYC* to increase access to quality green spaces for all New Yorkers and reinstate the Citywide Trails Program.
- Invest in natural and nature-based solutions that protect residents from coastal and inland flooding. This includes green infrastructure projects, such as rain gardens, bioswales, water squares, green and blue roofs, daylighting rivers, and permeable pavements to help absorb stormwater, purify the air, and mitigate the urban heat island

effect. DPR must continue working with DEP to provide access to quality green infrastructure, especially in NYCHA campuses.

Address Longstanding Environmental Injustices

Despite the benefits of parks and tree canopy, due to historic disinvestment and structural racism, such as residential redlining, our trees, parks, green spaces, and access to the City's waterfront are not equitably distributed. Access to parks and tree coverage is on average much lower in environmental justice neighborhoods that are already plagued by adverse health problems and high levels of pollution. Poorer neighborhoods and neighborhoods populated by people of color have [access to 21% and 33% less park space respectively](#). Parks serving primarily non-white populations are also [half the size of parks](#) that serve majority white populations and are five times more crowded. Continued disinvestment in parks will only continue to widen the gap of how New Yorkers experience and benefit from their parks.

As mentioned above, NYLCV strongly supports allocating \$1 million to MOCEJ to release and implement the city's first-ever Urban Forest Plan to ensure our city's tree canopy is not only properly maintained but equitably expanding. New York City's urban forests and natural areas provide countless environmental and social benefits to city residents, including reducing urban flooding and managing stormwater runoff which keeps pollutants out of waterways and mitigating the impacts of extreme heat. Trees also play a critical role in reducing outdoor temperatures. Urban trees can cool city streets up to 2°F, while forested natural areas are on average 6°F cooler than surrounding neighborhoods. We look forward to working with the Council, Administration, Forest for All coalition, and other parks advocates to ensure our city's tree canopy is invested in.

Raising New Parks Revenue

In addition to increasing the parks budget, NYLCV also recommends that the City explore innovative, revenue-generating models and public-private partnerships to ensure long-term, dedicated funding streams for parks. We support several of the recommendations in the Center for an Urban Future's [2024 Report](#) outlining pathways to fund our parks, such as attaching a 50 cent or \$1 surcharge on arena and stadium events to support parks maintenance, soliciting contributions during hotel stays for a new 'NYC Parks and Cultural Fund,' and creating new mechanisms for private developers to support parks maintenance and creation. We urge the Mamdani Administration to work with parks groups, advocates, stewards, and elected officials to study and develop innovative ideas.

Weather events over the past couple of years, such as extreme heatwaves, air quality emergencies, and flooding, underscored the urgency of addressing the climate crisis. Parks and green spaces are essential infrastructure, serving as New Yorker's backyard, providing safe areas for recreation, offering relief from extreme heat, and absorbing stormwater, air pollution, and carbon dioxide. Allocating 1% of the budget to parks is not only necessary but also reasonable, especially when compared to other major cities that [consistently allocate between 2-5%](#) of their budget to parks each year.

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

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.



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March 23, 2026

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New York, NY 10007

*Testimony of Saman Mahmood, Director of Advocacy and Engagement,
NYC Bird Alliance to the NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
for the Committee Hearing on the FY27 Preliminary City Budget*

Dear Committee Chair Hankerson and distinguished members of the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation:

Thank you for inviting NYC Bird Alliance to submit testimony regarding the need for adequate funding for NYC Parks.

NYC Bird Alliance (a chapter of National Audubon) is a nonprofit organization that works to protect birds and strengthen urban biodiversity across New York City through science, advocacy, and community engagement. Through this work, we protect more than 500 species of birds that live in and migrate through New York City's beaches, wetlands, forests, and grasslands, and engage tens of thousands of New Yorkers each year with our public programs and volunteer opportunities across the city's parks. We work closely with NYC Parks and partner organizations to advance conservation practices across the five boroughs. NYC Bird Alliance is a member of Play Fair for Parks, Forest for All, and Parks & Open Space Partners coalitions.

Birds Are Essential to a Healthy Urban Ecosystem

Birds are a critical part of a healthy urban environment, yet they are in steep decline across North America. Because birds respond quickly to environmental change, their decline is an early warning sign of broader ecosystem distress.

Birds help support New Yorkers and their environment by controlling pests, pollinating plants, and dispersing seeds. Their presence supports healthy ecosystems that store carbon, reduce flooding and extreme heat, and make the City more livable for people and wildlife alike. Birdwatching supports the regional economy, contributing notable \$1.6 Billion to ecotourism revenue annually, with much of that activity centered in New York City.

When we make New York safer for birds, we strengthen urban biodiversity and climate resilience for all New Yorkers.

Parks are Vital Habitat

Both large and small parks in New York City provide critical migratory stopover, nesting, and wintering habitat for birds. Green spaces also reduce energy consumption and fossil fuel use by mitigating the “heat island effect” in our metropolis. Our city’s habitats, having been transformed over hundreds of years, often require human intervention to be productive for wildlife and people. A well-funded NYC Parks is needed to make these natural areas richer and safer for birds and other wildlife.

Parks Connect People to Nature

Parks are essential to the quality of life of all New Yorkers: time in green space has been shown to significantly improve physical and mental health. Parks also provide opportunities for New Yorkers’ connection to birds and nature often lacking in underserved communities. NYC Bird Alliance runs hundreds of public programs annually that encourage New Yorkers to go outside and engage with nature at the City’s parks. With NYC Parks underfunded, parks maintenance and operations, and care for green spaces, has fallen into disrepair, leading to negative experiences for parkgoers.

Parks Need Increased Funding and Support

Given the importance of parks for New York City’s birds and people, NYC Bird Alliance supports efforts to fund and baseline NYC Parks forestry staff positions. **We call on the City Council and Mayor to allocate \$150M to restore the hundreds of other Parks staff positions and tree programs that were cut in the past few years that are critical to public safety, workforce development, community health and wellness, and climate resilience.** Doing so will protect New York’s birds and make the City more sustainable for all.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the need to protect parks. Should you need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 347.267.8612 or smahmood@nycbirdalliance.org.

Respectfully,



Saman Mahmood
Director of Advocacy and Engagement
NYC Bird Alliance

Tarek Pertew

Founder & CEO, NYC Footy

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Submitted to:

New York City Council — Committee on Parks and Recreation

March 2026

My name is Tarek Pertew. I am the Founder and CEO of NYC Footy, New York City's largest adult recreational soccer organization. We represent nearly 60,000 adult New Yorkers across all five boroughs — men and women of every background, age, and ability level — who come together week after week to play, compete, and build community on the city's parks fields.

I submit this testimony in support of increased investment in parks infrastructure, permitting staffing, lighting, field equipment, and the repair and replacement of unsafe playing surfaces across the city. These are not niche concerns for a narrow constituency. They are investments in the physical and mental well-being of millions of New Yorkers, in the economic vitality of surrounding neighborhoods, and in the city's ability to fulfill its stated commitment to public health and community resilience.

I have worked within this system for more than fifteen years. What follows is not theoretical. It is drawn from direct, daily experience operating programs at parks throughout New York City.

1. New Yorkers Want to Play. The Demand Is Unambiguous.

Participation in adult recreational sports in New York City has never been higher. Our waitlists are growing. Our programs fill within hours of opening. The appetite to play — to be outside, to move, to connect — is real, powerful, and citywide. NYC Parks records 527 million park visits per year, and 99% of New Yorkers live within a ten-minute walk of publicly accessible green space. The potential is enormous.

Soccer, in particular, has seen sustained and accelerating growth. It is uniquely accessible: it requires minimal equipment, accommodates a wide range of ages, genders, skill levels, and cultural backgrounds, and allows large numbers of people to share space efficiently. As the World Cup comes to New York City this summer — the single largest sporting event this city has ever hosted — the moment to invest in the infrastructure that supports this participation has never been more clear.

New Yorkers want to be outside. They are showing up, in growing numbers, every single week. The barrier is not desire — it is infrastructure.

2. Lighting: Darkness Is Eliminating Access for Working New Yorkers

For working adults, evening hours are when play happens. A field that is dark at 5:30 p.m. is a field that does not exist. Once daylight savings ends and sunset drops below 6:00 p.m., unlit fields become entirely unusable for the working men and women who rely on them. This effectively eliminates months of play for a significant portion of our participants.

The solution does not have to wait for permanent infrastructure. Fuel-powered temporary lighting is already operational at three parks in our network, and has experienced zero incidents of vandalism

or theft. This is a proven, lower-cost bridge solution that could activate fields across the city immediately. We respectfully urge the Committee to support a dedicated budget line for temporary lighting at high-demand permitted fields during fall and winter months, alongside continued investment in permanent lighting infrastructure.

We also note that when fields are closed due to significant snowstorms, permit holders lose hours of paid time with no credit or refund. This is a financial hardship for organizations that budget tightly to keep participation affordable. We ask the Committee to examine this policy directly.

- Fund a pilot program for fuel-powered temporary lighting at high-use unlighted fields during fall and winter.
- Prioritize permanent lighting installation at fields with demonstrated high permit demand.
- Establish a credit or refund policy for permit hours lost to weather-related closures.

3. Field Conditions: Dangerous Turf Is Not Acceptable

High participation numbers are being celebrated by city leadership, and rightly so. But the fields where that participation happens are, in many cases, dangerously deteriorated. Worn turf, uneven surfaces, exposed infill, and deteriorating equipment create real injury risk for the New Yorkers using these spaces every week.

Three fields our participants use regularly — Murray Playground, Marx Brothers Playground, and Sara Roosevelt Park — are in conditions that require immediate attention. These are not marginal facilities. They are among the most heavily used fields in our network. The fact that they are heavily used should be celebrated as proof of demand; it should not be the reason maintenance is deferred.

Across the system, too many fields sit in chronic disrepair. The Trust for Public Land's analysis of NYC Parks found that the system generates over \$9.1 billion in annual recreational value to New Yorkers. That value depends entirely on the fields being safe and usable.

4. Permitting Staffing: The Bottleneck That Blocks Access

NYC Parks is operating with nearly 1,000 fewer workers than the prior year. The NYC Council has called for a \$38.2 million restoration to bring back 659 positions that were eliminated through budget cuts and a citywide hiring freeze. The permitting office is among the most in need.

The consequences are felt directly by the organizations and individuals trying to access parks. Permit processing times have lengthened significantly. Renewal timelines are unpredictable. Communications go unanswered for weeks. The staff that remain are clearly working hard under impossible conditions, but the system is not resourced to serve the demand placed upon it.

This is not a minor administrative inconvenience. Delays in permitting translate directly to lost play time, reduced program enrollment, and organizations being unable to plan the schedules their participants depend on. For a family trying to sign a child up for a Saturday program, or a working adult planning an evening soccer league around their childcare schedule, permitting delays have real, material consequences.

This doesn't factor the growing demand to host community events in the build up (and during) the World Cup, but all requests for tournaments have gone unanswered to date, making our ability to leverage NYC Parks for these community events all but impossible.

Every week a permit is delayed, New Yorkers lose access. Staffing the permitting office is not overhead, it is access.

- Fully restore the 659 Parks Department positions recommended by the NYC Council, with priority hiring in the permitting office.
- Establish permitting response time standards with public accountability metrics.
- Invest in permitting technology to reduce administrative burden and processing time.

5. The Loneliness Epidemic: Parks Are the Prescription

New York City is facing a loneliness crisis. According to the NYC Department of Health, more than half of all New Yorkers report feeling lonely at least some of the time. The U.S. Surgeon General has designated loneliness a public health epidemic, comparable in its health consequences to smoking 15 cigarettes per day, with documented links to elevated risk of depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, dementia, and premature death.

Recreational parks and permitted programs are among the most effective and scalable antidotes to social isolation we have. They provide what technology and remote work have taken away: a predictable, recurring reason to show up in person, alongside the same people, week after week. The social bonds formed in a recreational soccer league — the teammates who know your name, the opponents who see you every Saturday — are not trivial. They are the connective tissue of a resilient, healthy community.

In a dense and often isolating city like New York, parks infrastructure is mental health infrastructure. It is a community health infrastructure. Failing to invest in it is not a budget-neutral choice. Instead, it shifts costs onto emergency services, mental health systems, and healthcare, where the price tag is far higher.

The data make the case plainly: physical activity, consistent social interaction, and access to outdoor green space are among the best-documented predictors of long-term physical and mental health. The city has, within its parks system, one of the most powerful and underutilized public health tools available. We are asking the Committee to treat it that way.

6. The Economic Case: Parks Pay For Themselves

Investing in parks infrastructure is not a budget burden, but an **economic driver**. The Trust for Public Land's comprehensive analysis of the NYC Parks system found that it generates \$9.1 billion in annual recreational value, contributes over \$15.2 billion in increased property values for homes within 500 feet of parks, and translates to at least \$101 million in annual property tax revenue for the city.

NYC residents spend an estimated \$681 million annually on sports, recreation, and exercise equipment, which flows directly through local businesses. And domestic travelers who visit New York City in part to participate in outdoor recreational activities spend an estimated \$17.9 billion in a typical year. Every park that is well-lit, well-maintained, and accessible activates that spending. Every field that sits dark or unusable does not.

The business corridors and neighborhoods surrounding active parks — delis, cafes, pharmacies, retail stores, restaurants — all benefit when those parks draw people in. The expanded investment

needed to properly fund parks infrastructure is not a cost to the city. It is a return on investment that pays back in property values, tax revenue, local spending, and avoided healthcare costs.

The question is not whether the city can afford to invest in parks. The question is whether it can afford not to.

7. Summary of Recommendations Informing a Critical Budget Increase in Parks

- Restore the 659 Parks Department positions, with priority staffing for the permitting office, to address permit processing delays that directly block access.
- Fund a pilot program for temporary fuel-powered lighting at high-use unlighted fields during fall and winter months, building on the zero-incident track record already established.
- Accelerate permanent lighting installation at fields with documented high permit demand, prioritizing locations with the greatest adult recreational use.
- Immediately inspect and repair or replace the playing surfaces at Murray Playground, Marx Brothers Playground, and Sara D. Roosevelt and establish a transparent, rolling lifecycle plan for all synthetic turf fields.
- Establish a formal, sanctioned equipment partnership pathway for responsible permit holders to donate and maintain goals and basic field equipment at specific parks, with a roadmap to expand equitably across the system.
- Implement a credit or refund policy for permit hours lost to weather-related closures, preventing financial harm to organizations that keep programs affordable for New Yorkers.
- Recognize parks investment as public health investment, and budget accordingly, with the understanding that every dollar spent on safe, accessible, well-lit parks returns multiples in tax revenue, local economic activity, and avoided downstream healthcare costs.

New York City is on the eve of hosting the world. Soccer, the most inclusive, accessible, and globally unifying sport, is about to be at the center of the world's attention here. This is not a moment to let fields sit dark, surfaces go unrepaired, or permits go unprocessed. This is a moment to lead.

I represent tens of thousands of New Yorkers who want nothing more than to be outside, to move, to connect, and to play. They are showing up. The infrastructure needs to show up too.

I welcome the opportunity to provide any additional data, meet with Committee staff, or support the work of strengthening the parks system for every New Yorker it serves. Thank you for your time and your service to this city.

Respectfully submitted,

Tarek Pertew

Founder & CEO, NYC Footy

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FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing | New York City Council Parks Committee
Monday, March 23, 2026
Testimony submitted on behalf of NYC Plover Project

To Mayor Mamdani and the New York City Council Parks Committee:

The NYC Plover Project is a nonprofit based in Rockaway Park, Queens, with the mission of protecting endangered Piping Plovers and other fragile beach-nesting birds on New York City's beaches through education, community engagement, and volunteer stewardship. Part of this mission is done through partnering with the NYC Parks and Recreation's Wildlife Unit in on the ground conservation of the Rockaway Beach Endangered Species Nesting Area (RBESNA), a protected and fragile Piping Plover nesting area located in the Rockaway communities of Edgemere, Arverne, and Far Rockaway. This special site is a true biodiversity hotspot, and the only area under NYC Parks and Recreation that is home to endangered and threatened beach-nesting shorebirds, like American Oystercatchers, Least and Common Terns, Black Skimmers, and Piping Plovers.

Without the necessary funding and investment by NYC Parks into this biodiversity hotspot site, this site faces a huge environmental and conservation loss to both its wildlife inhabitants and humans alike. Mayor Mamdani's FY27 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks is \$33 million less than the FY26 Adopted Budget and does not provide critical restorations after four years of cuts. The Mayor's budget eliminates 100 Parks staffing lines as a condition of the end to the hiring freeze. Following 600 staffing lines cut since 2023 under the Adams Administration, these cumulative losses limit the agency's ability to rebuild its workforce. It also fails to safeguard the 276 Parks workers set to lose their jobs at the end of this fiscal year since they are dependent on annual one-shot City Council funding. These positions must be baselined to ensure stability and consistent service. Parks workers are critical to the management and regulation of RBESNA. PEP plays a critical role at RBESNA in ensuring that both wildlife and beachgoers are protected.

In order to ensure a safe, well-maintained parks system and deliver basic services, the City must:

- Add 460 Second-Shift workers to keep 400 high-use parks and restrooms clean
- Restore 59 Capital Projects staff and add 60 more so that nearly 100 stalled capital projects can resume, unlocking nearly \$450 million in green space and resiliency investments
- Add 227 forestry staff to address the backlog of 20,000+ uninspected trees and 35,000+ open work orders

- Add 130 tradespeople—including plumbers, electricians, carpenters, masons, roofers, and painters—for faster repairs and violation clearing
- Add 80 dedicated lawn-care positions to keep lawns and playing fields usable
- Invest \$21.2M to expand hours and services at all 36 recreation centers

Our parks system, totaling to 30,000 acres, is one of NYC's most important affordable resources, providing free programming and places for neighbors to exercise, play, and commune with nature. Our parks system is also home to an endless variety of wildlife who also deserve safe and healthy parks to call home. We urge the Mayor and City Council to restore staffing, invest in park maintenance, and move toward dedicating 1% of the city budget to parks.

Thank you from NYC Plover Project team,

Chris Allieri
Executive Director and Founder
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Oral Testimony

March 23rd 2026

Thank you Chairman Tyrell Hankerson, my district council member for myself and my garden, as well as the members of the committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Sonia Ferraro, I've been a community gardener for over 40 years and I am a GreenThumb gardener for 12 years. I am the founder and Leader of Paradise Community Garden NY located in Jamaica, Queens. Paradise has a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our community.

As a member of the Green Guerillas Council Of Gardeners, I want to express my support for the policy initiatives that have been uplifted today.

In addition, I would like to amplify the needs of community gardens. In particular the much needed infrastructure upgrades and repairs are vital to ensure that gardens are also safe for the seniors who steward them.

Many community gardens across New York City remain inaccessible to people with disabilities, limiting who can fully participate in and benefit from these vital green spaces. To ensure equity and inclusion, gardens should be equipped with ADA-compliant infrastructure, including accessible driveways/street cuts, as well as safe, navigable pathways throughout the garden. Gardeners like myself need designated handicap parking on the street of the garden.

Therefore, additional funding to agencies like Greenthumb and organizations like Green Guerillas is very important. Community gardeners have felt firsthand the effects of the reduced funding.

I urge each council member to visit community gardens in their districts to hear our needs and walk alongside each gardener to better understand the needs of community gardeners.

Thank you, once again, for the opportunity to share with you 40 years of experience.

Monday March 23rd 2026: City Council's Preliminary Budget Hearing on NYC Parks

Good afternoon Chair Hankerson and members of the Park Committee. My name is Alma Reyes, and I am representing Queens Community House. I am testifying today as a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, a Citywide coalition led by New Yorkers for Parks, New York League of Conservation Voters, and District council 37 and including more than 450 organizations that steward, advocate for, and rely on NYC's Parks and open spaces.

I am here to urge you to increase funding to our city parks - we need to restore the 1% of the NYC budget for parks. The preliminary budget for NYC parks maintains the status quo of underinvestment and is even \$33 million LESS than last year's budget. After 4 years of cuts to the budget, our parks are suffering from staffing losses, a decrease in maintenance and delayed capital projects.

As a resident of Queens since 1992 and a longtime user of Flushing Meadows Corona Park, I hold a deep affection for this space—just as many others do, from nearby neighborhoods and across the city. This park is one of the most important public spaces in our city. It serves hundreds of thousands of people from many cultures, languages, and generations. For countless Queens residents, the park is where children play after school, elders walk to stay healthy, vendors earn a living, and communities gather to celebrate, exercise, and breathe. For many residents, this park is the only free and safe outdoor space available to them.

Yet its condition does not reflect how essential this park is. For over a year, Queens Community House has been hosting monthly park cleanups at Flushing Meadows Corona Park. While volunteer stewardship is essential for the well-being of our parks, volunteers will never accomplish as much as parks maintenance staff. Through our cleanups, we connect with community members who consistently raise concerns about the maintenance, cleanliness, lighting, restroom access, and safety of the park. These are not minor inconveniences; they affect whether people feel welcome, whether seniors can walk safely, and whether families allow their children to play. When a park of this scale is underfunded, the message received by the community is clear: **OUR NEEDS ARE NOT PRIORITIZED**. Increasing the parks budget is not optional - it is urgent-- as a matter of public health, equity, and dignity.

Parks are not a luxury. For many New Yorkers, especially in working class neighborhoods, they're our backyards, our wellness centers, and our gathering spaces. But with under-resourced parks, we see broken equipment, poor lighting, and not enough staff to keep spaces clean and safe. Investing in parks is an investment in climate resilience, public health, youth development, and community well-being. Well maintained parks reduce isolation, support stress relief, and create spaces where neighbors can build trust and belonging.

We urge the Mayor and City Council to restore 1% of the city budget to parks to ensure a safe, well maintained parks system that delivers basic services and meets the needs of our communities!

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Kaitlin Krause, and I am the Founder and Executive Director of Rising Tide Effect, where we work to expand access to water safety education and swimming for the most vulnerable and at risk communities across New York City.

I am here today to strongly advocate for allocating **at least 1% of the City's budget to Parks and Recreation**.

Because recreation is not a luxury line item—it is **public health and public safety infrastructure**. In fact, this 1% investment works upstream—it helps support and reduce pressure on the other 99% of the City's budget, from healthcare to public safety.

Parks and Recreation operate upstream of so many of the challenges we are trying to solve as a city. It supports **physical health, mental health, stress relief, sleep, routine, and social connection**. And when multiple crises hit at once, the most valuable investments are the ones that address many problems at the same time. Parks and Recreation is one of the rare tools that improves **health, safety, resilience, and community cohesion—all in a single footprint**.

And when we talk about recreation, we have to talk about **pools**.

A pool is the only recreation asset that can literally **save your life**.

Yet across New York City, access to pools—and more importantly, access to **usable pool time**—remains limited. This is not just about building more pools. It is about ensuring they are **open, staffed, programmed, and accessible**.

A pool that is closed or understaffed does not teach anyone to swim.

If we want safer neighborhoods, we must invest in the places people go—to gather, to learn, and to build skills that keep them safe. That means **reliable staffing, extended hours that work for families, school-day access, and indoor, year-round options**.

And that requires restoring what has already been lost.

We are calling for the **restoration of full-time, year-round aquatics positions that were previously promised and then cut in the last administration**. Without a stable, year-round workforce, we cannot maintain consistent pool access, expand programming, or build a sustainable pipeline of lifeguards and instructors. We must create a culture of water safety.

And critically, it means investing in **free, accessible swim instruction**.

Through partnerships with community-based organizations, we can provide **free swim lessons to youth and adults across all five boroughs**—ensuring that access to life-saving skills is not determined by income or zip code.

Because drowning is preventable—but prevention requires access.

If we are serious about safety, equity, and resilience in New York City, then we must treat recreation—and especially aquatics—as essential infrastructure.

The 1% investment is not just a funding decision. It is a commitment to the health, safety, and future of our city.

Thank you.



Sara Roosevelt Park Community Coalition
<http://sdrpc.mkgarden.org/>

March 18, 2026

FY27 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks

Good afternoon Chair Hankerson and members of the Parks Committee. My name is K Webster and I am here representing The Sara Roosevelt Park Community Coalition.

I am also testifying today as a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, a citywide coalition led by New Yorkers for Parks, New York League of Conservation Voters, and District Council 37 and including more than 450 organizations that steward, advocate for, and rely on NYC's parks and open spaces.

Last week a large London Plane tree in our Park crashed into the adjoining street - hitting vehicles and grazing two people. Likely, this means other trees are vulnerable. With the current Parks' budget, will Forestry have enough workers to come here to examine our trees?

Despite four decades of hands-on organizing: of volunteers joining together to create and maintain beautiful gardens throughout our park, of volunteers building and staffing a chicken coop and a turtle and Coy pond, of artists performing and creating celebrations to honor communities here, of children's butterfly and ladybug releases, of advocating for Parks funding, of NYTimes and other Op Eds, of repeated efforts to get basic health and safety needs met...

Despite crews of social service workers (whether volunteer, city, or privately-funded)

and Despite a hardworking and beleaguered Parks Staff ?...

...An 84 year old woman was sexually assaulted here last week, one of our most intrepid organizations is considering pulling out of this park due to assaults and dangers to their volunteers and staff, our park has a stolen goods market, an open air drug market, we are home to many vulnerable and desperate homeless people - some plagued by addiction, we have deaths from violence or cold or poverty, teenagers sleeping in the middle of a playground for safety, and Amazon cargo-bikes racing dangerously through the Park by a playground and children's garden.

We don't have enough PEP officers - despite an entire building in this park *dedicated* to Communications and Safety for all of NYC.

We don't have enough park workers to clear trash, maintain sports areas - we don't pay them what they are worth and we don't honor those who work hard with a steady, reliable career.

We're still waiting for the results of infrastructure funding granted from a former Council Member and Borough President -who left two terms ago - nothing they funded has yet been built.

We've been unable to re-purpose a Parks Storehouse for a youth center in this park because the replacement building can't seem to get built - a 30+ year promise.

We have a senior center and a senior protected garden here for decades that hasn't been able to get a ADA ramp built from the senior center to the garden. Despite an outpouring of local offers (including from Partnerships for Parks).

We can't get permeable pavers in that garden so visitors don't trip over the broken asphalt paths - though the project was funded long ago by our State Senator.

When Park Projects in poor communities are delayed *this* long? It doesn't feel accidental. In Manhattan, allowing neglect as monied interests grow nearby, means nearby properties are bought cheap by real estate firms for eventual sale to the wealthy. When, suddenly, a park and a neighborhood are "transformed" and low-income communities don't live to see the park they fought for.

It also means that our diverse communities grow weary of working together since they see few results from those efforts – and instead are offered to blame each other, especially blaming those people suffering the most visible damage. They become *the* enemy and *the* problem.

You've heard the specifics from PlayFair – please fund our Parks.

- Mayor Mamdani's FY27 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks is \$33 million less than the FY26 Adopted Budget and does not provide critical restorations after four years of cuts.
- The Preliminary Budget maintains the status quo of underinvestment rather than putting Parks funding on a path toward 1% of the city budget, a goal which the Mayor committed to.
- The Mayor's budget eliminates 100 Parks staffing lines as a condition of the end to the hiring freeze. Following 600 staffing lines cut since 2023 under the Adams Administration, these cumulative losses limit the agency's ability to rebuild its workforce.
- It also fails to safeguard the 276 Parks workers set to lose their jobs at the end of this fiscal year since they are dependent on annual one-shot City Council funding. These positions must be baselined to ensure stability and consistent service.
- After years of cuts, Parks staff are stretched thin and basic services are suffering. Only 65% of parks meet the agency's own maintenance standards.
- **In order to ensure a safe, well-maintained parks system and deliver basic services, the City must:**
 - Add 460 Second-Shift workers to keep 400 high-use parks and restrooms clean
 - Restore 59 Capital Projects staff and add 60 more so that nearly 100 stalled capital projects can resume, unlocking nearly \$450 million in green space and resiliency investments
 - Add 227 forestry staff to address the backlog of 20,000+ uninspected trees and 35,000+ open work orders
 - Add 130 tradespeople—including plumbers, electricians, carpenters, masons, roofers, and painters—for faster repairs and violation clearing
 - Add 80 dedicated lawn-care positions to keep lawns and playing fields usable
 - Invest \$21.2M to expand hours and services at all 36 recreation centers
- New Yorkers are eager for parks investment. In a recent [New York Times poll](#), a 35,000+ reader majority chose increased funding for parks as their top policy.
- NYC's 30,000 acres of parkland are essential public infrastructure supporting public health, climate resilience, recreation, and quality of life in every neighborhood.
- Our parks system is one of NYC's most important affordable resources, providing free programming and places for neighbors to exercise, play, and commune with nature.
- We urge the Mayor and City Council to restore staffing, invest in park maintenance, and move toward dedicating 1% of the city budget to parks.

Yours,

K Webster

President, Sara Roosevelt Park Coalition <http://sdrpc.mkgarden.org/> Facebook <http://bit.ly/4haH0v5>
Twitter @SaraRPCC BlueSky <http://bit.ly/42FzQJc> Instagram <http://bit.ly/46URTw0>

Testimony by Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles of The Brotherhood Sister Sol

For over 30 years, The Brotherhood Sister Sol (BroSis) has been at the forefront of social justice; educating, organizing and training to challenge inequity and champion opportunity for all. With a focus on Black and Latinx youth, BroSis is where young people claim the power of their history, identity and community to build the future they want to see. BroSis provides around-the-clock support and wraparound programming, making space for Black and Latinx young people to examine their roots, define their stories and awaken their agency.

All youth deserve safe, high-quality, holistic, and positively transformative educational experiences. If we believe in equity and want to create the futures all New Yorkers deserve, we must build within our schools systems of accountability, restorative justice, and behavioral management that do not include the NYPD *and* holistically support student success. Our vision for education in New York public schools includes safe, restorative, and healing environments where all students have the opportunity to learn and grow. To meet this goal, we must equitably resource New York State public schools and defund the tactics that push out marginalized students.

Faced with mental health, loneliness, and homelessness polycrises, now more than ever, our youth need city officials to do *more*. The current budget is a step in the right direction. That said, our communities are contending with federal threats to our education system and our LGBTQIA+ and non-citizen family members. Our city budget, therefore, needs to fully fund meaningful Restorative Justice, mental health, and immigrant protections in schools. City Council members should redirect the funding currently going to school police and policing infrastructure to the healing-centered programs and staff our schools, without which our schools cannot thrive. Moreover, we ask that you divest from school policing, including ceasing all NYPD recruitment, hiring and training of school police, and funding for surveillance technology.

Thereafter, the City Council should prioritize the following in budget negotiations:

1. Endowing access to childcare, 2K-12, and CUNY public education systems *and* ensuring any funding lost by due to historic or impending funding cuts is restored
2. Funding meaningful support for *all* marginalized New Yorkers – including legal, mental health, medical, and other essential services.
3. Allocating money to efforts that directly benefit NYC youth – YWI, SYEP, etc.
4. Investing in Crisis to Care and Wellness continuua that transform, not end, lives
5. Staking money on housing efforts prioritized in City for All efforts of 2025
6. Underwriting opportunities for NYC youth to access Parks and green spaces as needed

To advance and protect our city and this next generation, we must provide them with the academic, social, and life skills necessary to be engaged and innovative world citizens. We need elected officials to invest in our students, our communities, and our success – now more than ever.

For more information, contact the Senior Organizing Strategist, Dr. Marsha Jean-Charles at mjc@brotherhood-sistersol.org.



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My name is Penn Genthner, and I'm here with The Classical Theatre of Harlem. I'd like to thank the Committee for this time, and especially Council Members Salaam and Krishnan. Your support and the work you do to help leverage City assets for cultural events and economic development is deeply appreciated.

For fourteen years, The Classical Theatre of Harlem has had a residency at the City's Richard Rodgers Amphitheatre in Marcus Garvey Park. Being there has helped our organization profoundly. It helped us grow and make a name for ourselves as an important component to the cultural life of the City every summer. It helped us achieve a sustainable operation while staging shows for free for more than 30,000 New Yorkers each July.

When this park stage enabled us to offer the City's first outdoor production to open following the pandemic, the Park and its staff enabled us to become something new. Working with a coalition of organizations from our peer cultural groups, to health and human services nonprofits, to over a hundred unique local street vendors, in 2022 we began leveraging the crowds we're able to draw to establish a vendor fair. This now creates over \$615,000 in economic activity for participating microbusinesses and the neighborhood's shops and restaurants in the month we're there. The Classical Theatre of Harlem also shares its lighting and sound equipment with groups like Jazzmobile, the Harlem Chamber Players, and Young People's Chorus of New York, enabling more performances by other groups during our residency than at any other time of the year.

Our organization, artists, and audiences are directly impacted by Parks' budget. When it isn't there, restrooms are unusable, trash cans overflow, and you've got to watch your step. When fully funded, the facilities are maintained with care and attention to detail. Our parks are leverageable economic assets. At our tiny organization working in July alone, Marcus Garvey Park creates jobs for over a hundred cultural workers, business opportunities for 112 local entrepreneurs, and over half a million dollars in taxable productivity.

Thank you again for this time, and your valuable work.

Preliminary Budget Hearing - Parks and Recreation

Monday, March 23, 2026

Jackie Rogers, President, The Garden by the Bay

Thank you to Chairman Tyrell Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Jackie Rogers, I am the President of The Garden by the Bay, a GreenThumb community garden, located in Edgemere, Queens, Council District 31.

I am also a member of Green Guerillas' Council of Gardeners, a coalition of over 550 community gardens across NYC. Today, I write in support of, and call on the City Council to restore the previously allocated \$2.6 Million in funding to GreenThumb. Restoration of the \$2.6M would greatly help support GreenThumb's ability to meet the needs of all its gardens, especially in the areas of Operations support, Workforce Development and equitable distribution of resources and supplies. A large percentage of GreenThumb gardens are managed by women and seniors, who are doing strenuous tasks for free without compensation. Restoring funding can and should go towards providing physical manpower support in grounds keeping, snow removal, ensuring all garden grounds are safe and walkable for gardeners and the public alike.

Our garden has a rich history of community involvement and serves as a vital green space for our Edgemere community. We are an EJ community that is both federal and state designated as a disadvantaged community and suffered years of disinvestment and environmental neglect. Without the additional funding, we believe gardens such as ours, that are located in underserved and marginalized communities will continue to suffer even more due to these drastic cuts. Garden members are already supplementing the needs of the garden by purchasing a lot of our own garden maintenance equipment, weed trimmers, mower, garden fertilizers, supplies, including portable toilet rentals out of their own pockets, with their own money.

This past Saturday, GT hosted their Spring Supply Distribution and ran out of supplies. Garden members traveled from Far Rockaway to Brooklyn, stood in a line for an hour and 20 minutes only to be told they ran out of wheel barrels, something this garden needs. GreenThumb is already lacking the funding to be able to adequately provide equitable resources to all its gardens. The Garden has been requesting an In-Garden RPZ Vault - Above Ground Coupler for the last 2 years to make watering the garden easier and safer for our gardeners who are predominantly women. The wear and tear we are placing on our gardeners' bodies is extremely taxing for volunteerism without compensation. The Garden's community structure that won a Public Design Award and featured in a 6 month exhibition at MOMA in 2023 has been weather compromised and in serious need of weatherproofing, pest management from bird droppings and new windows to prevent further moisture damage per former Parks Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa 2 years ago. GreenThumb says it doesn't have the resources or funding to address these issues. Once again this expense falls on the shoulders of gardeners to remediate. It has become very frustrating as a community member, stakeholder and volunteer to constantly hear there's a lack of funding and witness the disparity first hand.

In conclusion, with the hope that equity and fairness is implemented across the board with Parks & Recreation networks including GreenThumb. I stand in support of GreenThumb, Green Guerillas and the Play Fair Coalition in requesting Mayor Mamdani and the Council dedicate 1% of the New York City's Fiscal Year Budget to Parks & Recreation. Along with the following:

- Protection for Community Gardens from ReZoning and Development

- Increase Direct Funding to Parks Equity Initiatives (PEI) with the allocation of \$300,000
- Invest in Youth & Workforce Development for Gardeners (Stipend funded)
- Address Sanitation, Health and Pest Control (Rodents and Birds droppings) in Gardens

Thank you,

Jackie Rogers, President

The Garden by the Bay

Where Hope, Inspiration and Tranquility Reside

GREEN-WOOD

Good afternoon, Chair Hankerson and members of the Committee. My name is Joseph Charap, and I serve as Vice President of Horticulture at The Green-Wood Cemetery, a National Historic Landmark and accredited arboretum spanning 478 acres in Brooklyn. Green-Wood is a proud member of the Forest for All NYC Coalition, and I am pleased to offer testimony in support of the coalition's asks for this budget cycle.

Mayor Mamdani campaigned on a clear commitment: dedicate 1% of the City's budget to parks. The FY 2027 Preliminary Budget proposes approximately \$654 million for the Department of Parks and Recreation out of a \$127 billion budget. That is roughly 0.5%, half the stated goal, and a cut of \$33.7 million from the prior year.

Outside our fence, I see what this underfunding produces: neglected tree canopy, bathrooms closed for years, and forestry crews too thin to respond to storm damage or complete routine pruning. The Parks Department's own data shows it has failed to meet its annual target of 65,000 street trees pruned for multiple consecutive years. That is a budget failure, not a staffing failure.

This spring, the City will release its first-ever Urban Forest Plan under Local Law 148 of 2023, charting a path to 30% tree canopy cover citywide. That plan will only succeed if it is resourced. The Forest for All NYC Coalition has called for \$150 million to fund initial implementation. Green-Wood strongly endorses that ask.

On staffing: we were encouraged that the Mayor lifted the hiring freeze and two-for-one hiring ratio. But the preliminary budget eliminates an additional 100 vacant positions on top of the roughly 600 cut since 2023, making 700 positions effectively permanent losses. We urge the Council to press the Administration to restore and fill all of them, and to baseline the 276 positions currently funded on one-year contracts.

Green-Wood is a model of what sustained, climate-conscious landscape stewardship looks like. We want to be part of a city where the public parks around us are held to the same standard. We encourage this Council to close the gap between the Mayor's stated commitment and the current proposal, and to establish a clear, funded path to 1% for parks.

GREEN-WOOD

Thank you.

Joseph Charap
Vice President of Landscape

MAS Testimony on the FY27 Budget for the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation

March 23, 2026

The Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS) has long championed New York City's public realm, advocating for equitable design and maintenance to meet the needs of New Yorkers across all five boroughs. As a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition and the Forest for All NYC Coalition, **we stand with our partners in urging the City to allocate 1% of the City budget to the Department of Parks & Recreation (NYC Parks).**

Mayor Mamdani committed to 1% funding for NYC Parks during his election campaign and since holding office. Yet, the Fiscal Year 27 (FY27) preliminary budget only allots 0.5% of the budget for NYC Parks, half of what the mayor had pledged, and \$33 million less than last year's adopted budget. While 700 staffing lines have been lost since 2023, 276 additional Parks employees are set to lose jobs by the end of this fiscal year. These crucial positions must be baselined to carry out minimal work needed across over 30,000 acres of City parkland, including parks, plazas, recreation centers, and playgrounds.

In addition, the upcoming release of the Urban Forest Plan from the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice (MOCEJ) later this year must have adequate funding to reach its goal of 30% city tree canopy coverage by 2035. The city's urban forest is essential to livability by improving public health outcomes and mitigating environmental impacts, including the heat island effect and lowering emissions.

Devastating budget cuts will diminish public health and further limit accessibility to our parks system. The City budget must retain employees to end the growing burden on NYC Parks staff and to ensure these integral resources are useable and can continue to serve New Yorkers with open space, programming, and environmental protection.

Our parks system is the backbone of our city's vital public infrastructure that supports and protects our environment, our future resiliency, and residents and visitors alike. Investing in our public realm today returns greater cost-savings in the future and avoids growing challenges. **The City must reaffirm the 1% for NYC Parks pledge and baseline the 276 staffing positions in the FY27 budget to sufficiently maintain our parks system and public realm, delivering a safe, equitable, and green future for the next generation of New Yorkers.**

Sincerely,



Keri Butler
President, Municipal Art Society of New York

**Testimony before the NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
by Walter Mugdan, President of the Udalls Cove Preservation Committee
March 23, 2026**

My name is Walter Mugdan. I serve as president of the Udalls Cove Preservation Committee (UCPC, www.udallscove.org). UCPC was founded in 1969; its mission is the conservation, preservation and restoration of the last undeveloped natural areas in the Udalls Cove watershed in northeastern Queens. Udalls Cove is the eastern arm of Little Neck Bay, itself part of Long Island Sound. Much of the area has been protected as the Udalls Cove Park Preserve, a New York City *Forever Wild* area with trails winding through woods and along the shoreline.

We respectfully ask that the FY-27 budget provide a meaningful and significant increase towards the objective stated by Mayor Mamdani during his campaign, which is that the budget for the Department of Parks and Recreation should be 1% of the overall City budget.

In particular, we urge increased appropriations for the Parks Department's Natural Resources Group, which has broad responsibilities for natural areas throughout the City, but is seriously understaffed and challenged by having employees who are not on "permanent" budget lines but are subject to year-to-year confirmation that they can retain their jobs.

The Parks Department manages 14% of the City's land area, but has in recent years received only about one half of one percent of the City budget. Parks of all sorts are vital to the quality of life of all New Yorkers and, in particular, those who have the least economic means to enjoy the benefits of nature and outdoors recreation. This includes a wide range of types of parks -- small, vest pocket parks; basketball and handball courts and larger ballfields; playgrounds; community gardens; large public spaces like Central Park in Manhattan, Moshula Park in the Bronx, and Cunningham Park in Queens (to name just a few); and small but precious nature preserves such as Udalls Cove Park Preserve. City parks, **and particularly our natural areas**, provide critical benefits to combat global warming and climate change and minimize flooding.

My organization has raised and spent over \$350,000 in the past 20 years to combat invasive species, to increase critical tree canopy, and to carry out park restoration and improvement projects, many of them in collaboration with the Parks Department and pursuant to construction and forestry permits issued by the Department. We conduct annual cleanups that routinely remove 25-30 cubic yards of trash from parklands each year. We maintain trails by trimming back excess vegetation during the growing season and removing trees and tree limbs that fall and block the trails. We are committed to continue our vigorous parks stewardship work, but to do so we need the Department to be adequately funded and staffed. We need our permit applications to be timely processed; we need knowledgeable staff in the Natural Resources Group with whom to consult and from whom we can receive guidance on the projects we pursue; we need support from the Department for our volunteer cleanup events and improvement projects; and we need an adequately funded Department to do the many kinds of things that are beyond the capacity of organizations such as ours and that only government can do.

Please act to increase the Parks budget in FY-27!

TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

**New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
Honorable Ty Hankerson, Chair**

**Submitted by:
Faith Behum, UJA-Federation of New York**

March 23, 2026

Thank you, Chairperson Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Faith Behum, and I am a Manager of Government and External Relations at UJA-Federation of New York.

Established more than 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to UJA's mission is to care for those in need—identifying and meeting the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. UJA supports an expansive network of nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services and allocates nearly \$200 million each year to combat poverty and food insecurity, nurture mental health and well-being, counter antisemitism and strengthen Jewish life, and respond to crises here and across the globe.

Many of the nonprofits in UJA's network have pools in their facilities. Those with indoor pools offer private and group swim lessons as well as opportunities for children, youth and adults to engage in other aquatic activities throughout the year. Those who have outdoor pools are usually located at camps and use these spaces to host swim lessons and aquatic activities for their camp participants. In a few instances, when they do not have access to their own indoor or outdoor pool, some nonprofits use New York City pools for swimming lessons and water activities for their campers.

The nonprofits in UJA's network are committed to providing swim lessons and water safety instruction to the communities they serve. In many instances, if these nonprofits did not offer this resource their communities would lose access to this life saving skill. UJA joined the New York City Lifeguard and Aquatics Taskforce in 2022 to partner with city agencies and local nonprofits to better understand why there is a lifeguard shortage and what can be done to address it. It soon became clear that to create a lifeguard pipeline, the Taskforce needed to broaden their focus by locating ways to increase access to swim and water safety training, as well as supporting nonprofits and municipal partners in building capacity. In many instances, access to swim lessons and water safety instruction is only available to those who can afford the classes and/or are fortunate enough to have access to a pool in their community.

The lack of broadly accessible swim instruction and sufficient lifeguards to staff beaches and pools has created an urgent public health crisis. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), more children in the United States, ages 1–4, die from drowning than any other cause of death. And for children ages 5–

14, drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional injury or death. This entirely avoidable public safety hazard has an outsize impact on communities of color. The CDC also reports that, on average, the drowning death rate among the Black community is 1.5 times that of the white population. As the lifeguard shortage continues to result in decreased access to swimming education programs, the racial disparities in drownings and water accidents are likely to continue to increase.

A challenge of this significance cannot be fully addressed by a single entity or solution. To achieve meaningful change, a multifaceted approach that meets people where they are and removes barriers to access is needed. As a first step, **UJA supports the New York City Lifeguard and Aquatics Taskforce’s proposal to create a \$5 million Aquatics Initiative to help nonprofits provide access to four categories of programming:**

1. Land-based water safety education consisting of classroom-based set of lessons focused on water safety.
2. “Second Grade” Swim- A partnership between nonprofits and the NYC Public Schools that brings students (2nd grade or similar age) to schools with pools for multi-week swim safety classes.
3. Swim Lessons- Free city funded swim lessons provided to New York City youth & adults overseen by community-based organizations in all five boroughs.
4. Lifeguard Training and Certification: Free lifeguard training and nationally recognized certification programs provided across all five boroughs. Free lifeguard development programs provided across all five boroughs to create a robust pipeline of youth prepared to undertake lifeguard training and certification.

This Aquatics Initiative is both a lifesaving skills program and a workforce development program. In addition to stand alone programming, the four aquatics programs listed above can seamlessly push into existing youth programs managed by both the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development and the New York City Department of Education. UJA urges the city to also consider beginning with pilot programs during this fiscal year at programs including but not limited to: 3-K and Pre-K, Saturday Night Lights, Beacons and Cornerstones.

To truly improve water safety at City pools and beaches, swim and water safety instruction must be made available to every resident in the city. New York City does not have enough pools to accomplish this. Nonprofits must be partnered with and funded adequately, particularly in poorer, under-resourced areas to increase the number of people accessing these life-saving lessons. The City already partners with nonprofits to provide a vast array of services to New York City residents. Nonprofits with pools have the infrastructure in place and connections to their local communities to support the city’s efforts in improving water safety for its residents.

Besides the \$5 million investment in the Aquatics Initiative, UJA with the Lifeguard and Aquatics Taskforce proposes the following recommendations to further address short and long-term needs:

- 1. Elevate Aquatics Leadership in City Hall**
 - *Establish a “Swim Czar” position* (similar to the office of Food Policy or the Rat Czar) who can champion these issues, coordinate among agencies, and promote collaboration across city and non-profit organizations necessary to address current aquatics needs.
 - *Identify “Aquatics” as a priority area within a Deputy Mayor’s portfolio*, which would further institutionalize its importance, align interagency efforts, and contextualize this critical work within a broader livability agenda. (Key agencies include Parks, DYCD, NYCPS, DOHMH, EDC, HPD, DCP)
- 2. Dramatically Expand Free Swim Lessons for New York City students**
 - *Fund swim instruction* for all second-grade students by:
 - i. Fully funding the Parks Department’s *Swim for Life* program to reach as many youths as possible.
 - ii. *Establishing a funding and contracting mechanism for non-profit providers* to

extend this work, significantly expanding the public resources available.

3. Increase Access to Existing Pools

- *Maximize the use of our limited existing pools* by establishing a centralized, electronic system that tracks availability and capacity. Ensure that our indoor pools – primarily located in public schools - are being fully utilized during weekday, evening, weekend and summer hours.
- *Modernize the “extended use permit” system* to reduce barriers for private providers supporting these goals.

4. Expand Lifeguard and Swim Instructor Training and Certification

- To create a robust pipeline of youth prepared to undertake lifeguard training and certification, *significantly expand the training programs available to our teens*. Fund and offer both lifeguard *and* swim instructor training within high schools for Physical Education credit. Partner with non-profits that can provide additional capacity.
- Strengthen and expand swim teams, cultivating future lifeguards and instructors.

5. Fund and Prioritize a Land-based Water Safety Education Program

- Land-based water safety is an effective tool for drowning prevention. The Taskforce recommends working in partnership with NYC Public Schools to *establish a citywide approach to water safety*, including consistent, accessible messages that can be shared with educators, families, and students.

6. Address Pool Deserts and the Pool Infrastructure Backlog by Investing in New and Existing Pools

- *Proactively fund and resolve deferred maintenance issues* within the aging public pool system, aiming to prevent peak-season closures.
- *Fund new construction of public pools in critical areas*.
- *Create new mechanisms for private developers to build new pools* in targeted neighborhoods. Work with HPD and Economic Development Corporation to explore new financial incentives; engage the real estate industry to surface new ideas, develop a “pool toolkit” to streamline exploration and development.

Conclusion

Improving water safety across New York City and increasing and maintaining enough lifeguards at beaches and pools are issues that will require both city agencies and nonprofits to work together to address effectively. Thank you for your time and if you have any questions about the recommendations in the testimony, please contact me at behumf@ujafedny.org.



**New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
March 23, 2026
Preliminary Budget Hearing - Parks and Recreation**

Good afternoon, I am Christina Taylor, Deputy Director of Van Cortlandt Park Alliance. I am testifying on behalf of VCPA's board and staff and as members of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, many of whom will testify today. We thank the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation and Chair Hankerson for holding this important hearing.

In a city battling record inequality, extreme heat and flooding, and declining quality of life, parks are not a luxury—they are essential infrastructure. Yet for decades, parks have been underfunded, understaffed, and unevenly maintained. In the last four years alone, the Parks Department has faced continued disinvestment, causing our parks system to tumble in national rankings. **While most major cities dedicate 2–5% of their budgets to parks, NYC has been stuck at just 0.6%—trailing the nation in nearly every park metric.**

We were extremely disappointed to see Mayor Mamdani's preliminary budget for NYC Parks, at \$33 million less than last year's adopted budget. I wish I could say we were surprised.

While it's great that the hiring freeze will finally be eliminated, it comes with the loss of nearly 100 unfilled staffing lines. In addition, 600 lines were lost in the Adams administration, through cuts and a hiring freeze. While NYC Parks is asked to do more and more each year, **NYC Parks has lost 700 positions in less than 5 years.**

The budget also fails to address the nearly 300 parks workers set to lose their jobs at the end of the fiscal year, because they were not baselined. We had hoped that Mayor Mamdani would put an end to the annual budget dance which, frankly, is exhausting. **These vital 300 positions need to be baselined.**

Year after year, NYC Parks staff does more with less. The staff is already stretched too thin. They are tired and frustrated, and so are we.

The preliminary budget maintains the status quo of historic underfunding, leaving communities without the safe, accessible green spaces they deserve.

The time is now. Mayor Mamdani and the City Council need to work together to dedicate 1% of the city budget to Parks. There is no substitute for public dollars for our parks. reality, NYC Parks needs and deserves well more than 1%, but let's at least start there.

Parks are essential! They should be funded and cared for accordingly.

Christina Taylor
Deputy Director
Van Cortlandt Park Alliance

NYC COUNCIL PARKS COMMITTEE BUDGET HEARING TESTIMONY

Good day, my name is Savona Bailey-McClain, and I am the Executive Director & Chief Curator of the West Harlem Art Fund. Our organization presents public art in West Harlem parks and across the City of New York. While I am saddened to hear Parks' Operations budget may be reduced by \$33 million, potentially resulting in the loss of 100 jobs, this can still be a chance to implement some innovative reforms.

In the meantime, what can we do? We can rotate staff between different units. This move can increase workforce flexibility, boost skills, and reduce boredom and burnout. Approximately 44% of Park staff are people of color with few opportunities for advancement or livable wages. Employees could benefit from exposure to other occupations and cross-training, which could raise morale, address staffing shortages, and improve loyalty. Like learning how to tree climb and prune. Pays very well. Trainees don't need advance skills.

Administration teams can work in the field to understand the challenges their colleagues truly face everyday and assist with problem solving.

Permitting special events should be made easier. For many, our parks serve as New Yorkers' backyards. They can't go

to the Hamptons or Long Island for recreation. Our local parks offer a quality of life. Let New Yorkers know their lives are valued. You can start by activating fewer clean-ups as a primary form of stewardship. Offer the public gardening opportunities or more nature-based programming.

Reevaluate capital projects. Select better materials to make capital projects last longer, 7-10 years before maintenance. Not 4-6 years if you are lucky.

Finally, get agencies to collaborate on climate change impacts. Example: New porous pavements are now available. Pair them with rain gardens, and you can mitigate flooding citywide and save money.

Let's leverage resources with agencies and their leaders until we can generate more revenue. Thank you.

I want to thank New Yorkers for Parks and the Play Fair Coalition for alerting fellow New Yorkers about this budget hearing.

My name is Adam Lazere and I have seen firsthand just how much staffing can improve the experience of park goers. Whether it's a maintenance worker keeping the park beautiful or a ranger brightening the day of parkgoers and acting as ambassadors for both the agency and the wildlife that many new yorkers forget.

Parks are an essential part of New York, every new Yorker depends on their local triangle, playground, or street tree to make the city more livable. Not only that but people travel to the city in part to see our parks across all 5 boroughs. With the smallest allotment per acre Parks have been left by the wayside constantly in threat of being cut further. Making the city more affordable means making it so quality recreation isn't something you need to leave your neighborhood or borough for. Increasing the parks budget and making good on the promise to permanently fund the playfair line would be a big step towards making the city more livable and more attractive to tourists

New York City Council
Legislative Oversight Hearing: Intro. 0577 - Trails Formalization
Committee on Parks and Recreation
April 1, 2026

Good afternoon, my name is Alicia Eames, and I am a volunteer Pathkeeper Super Steward in Alley Pond Park, located in Queens. I am also a resident of Council District 23. Thank you to Chair Hankerson and the Committee for the chance to submit public comment for today's hearing.

As a Pathkeeper, much of my work involves regularly volunteering to care for portions of Alley Pond Park. I've been assisting with corridor pruning to keep pathways clear and accessible, closing desire lines to discourage the public from accessing parts of our natural areas that are ecologically fragile or unsafe for public use, and helping to remove invasive species that threaten native plants and trees.

In case you're not familiar with Alley Pond Park, it's the second largest park in Queens and home to the Queens Giant, a tulip poplar tree that is among the oldest trees (possibly the oldest) in NYC. The park is home to forested nature paths that provide a respite from the daily stresses of crowded urban life. (If you've never been there, I suggest a spring visit; the park is especially lovely as nature blooms and migrating birds arrive.)

Regarding Intro. 0577, I support the Natural Areas Conservancy in asking the Council to consider the following changes to the proposed legislation that would strengthen its intent and impact:

- The legislation should be reworded to describe "trails" as "nature trails", which would help distinguish these special and unique spaces from other public paths such as greenways, which involve hardscape infrastructure and have very different maintenance and management needs than our nature trails.
- I encourage the Council to consider adding language around improved signage at trailheads to improve wayfinding and convey critical information about trail length, difficulty, and accessibility for park goers.
- The Council should also consider adding language to the bill that would require NYC Parks to provide details for the agency's management planning for trail improvements and formalization.
- In order to help increase access to our natural areas, the Council should consider adding language to the bill that would require NYC Parks to provide a plan on public programming and activation plans for our nature trails.

While the proposed legislation does not come with funding attached, I also support the NAC's call to restore \$2.4 million in baseline funding that was allocated by Mayor Adams in Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24), which would have supported the creation of a permanent citywide Trails team of 26 full-time staff at NYC Parks. These positions were unfortunately eliminated in the FY24 November Plan, leaving NYC Parks with just three full-time staff to manage our 300 miles of nature trails citywide. Obviously, that level of funding is severely inadequate. New Yorkers in every borough need green spaces that are well maintained; it's a matter of public health and safety.

Restoring this funding would mean improved trails in every borough, improving public safety, accessibility to our natural areas, and would help protect our city's forests and wetlands. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Alicia Eames

Oversight Hearing TESTIMONY

The NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

[hearing about the FY27 City Budget](#)

Monday, March 23rd at 11:30am (public comment starts at 1:30pm).

ALL WRITTEN TESTIMONY DUE By THURSDAY March 26th at 10am.

Register to Testify Here: [Hearing Testimony Registration - New York City Council](#)

Dear NYC Council and Budget Planning Committee

Hi, my name is **Alyson Grunder** and my organization, The Earth Care Action Group at The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York is a member of Forest for All NYC, a coalition of over 200 organizations committed to helping the city reach 30% tree canopy cover citywide by 2035 in an equitable manner.

The parks and urban forest matters to my organization/community because trees are the environmental bedrock for a healthy planet. They provide shade, save energy, absorb water to help prevent flooding, pull carbon dioxide out of the air to help with air pollution, add unlimited beauty to our lives, etc. AND LACK of trees in a neighborhood is a social injustice.

The urban forest is essential to the quality of life of all New Yorkers, and NYC Parks plays an invaluable role in caring for a significant portion of our city's trees and green spaces.

NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC, but the Parks staff and programs that support the urban forest have continued to be cut.

The FY27 Preliminary Budget allocation for the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) was slightly decreased from the adopted FY26 budget. While the overall City budget increased by approximately \$12B, the NYC Parks budget decreased by \$33M from FY26 to FY27, primarily due to a loss of Mayoral one-shot funding that was not carried over from last year. While there are reasons to be hopeful about this year's budget – despite a very tight fiscal environment, NYC Parks has not yet been hit with drastic cuts – **the Preliminary Budget does not restore NYC Parks to the level of staffing required to care for the NYC urban forest.**

The benefits of parks and trees are endless, you get so much bang for your buck when you manage and take care of trees and park property properly, and for that we need a larger budget. But just think about all of the other expenses, like energy that will go down.

We ask that Council and the Administration work together to deliver on Mayor Mamdani's campaign commitment to double the NYC Parks budget, and ensure full funding for the staff and programs that are critical to the protection, maintenance, and planting efforts that

will enable the City to reach its 30% tree canopy goal.

- My organization- The Earth Care Action Group of The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York is a member of the Forest for All NYC coalition which seeks to justly and equitably protect, maintain, expand and promote the NYC urban forest.
- The urban forest matters to my organization/community because the urban forest is essential to the quality of life of all New Yorkers. The shade, beauty, and water retention are just a few positive facts of trees and the life of Parks.
- NYC's first ever Urban Forest Plan, required by Local Law 148 of 2023, will be released this spring and chart a path for NYC to equitably expand tree canopy cover to 30% citywide. Implementing this Plan will require resources! To ensure the plan is successful, the City will need to plant additional trees, but it will also need to baseline existing staff and expand the workforce that protects and maintains trees, as well as invest in workforce development programs, tree nurseries, tree health research and monitoring, wood salvage, and more.
- **NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC, but the Parks staff and programs that support the urban forest have continued to be cut.**
- We call on Council and the Mayor to allocate \$150M to fund the initial implementation of the 10-year Urban Forest Plan, including baselining and expanding NYC Parks forestry staff positions and funding to support other City agencies that will expand tree canopy under their jurisdiction.

We ask that the Budget include approximately \$150 million for:

- Restoration, expansion, and baselining of NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) staff and programs to support ongoing operations and to grow the urban forest:
 - Expand NYC Park's capacity for tree risk management and inspections, including increasing and baselining the number of staff (climbers and pruners, foresters, and related management) and contract funding that are critical for caring for and managing the existing tree canopy across NYC.
 - Baseline NYC Parks positions currently funded by one-year contracts (approximately 276 positions including Parks Enforcement Patrol, Urban Forest Rangers, Forestry staff, etc.) to limit turnover and sustain the operational efficiency that come from retaining a stable workforce.
 - Provide \$16M in baselined annual funding to fully implement the Forest Management Framework for forested natural areas, including \$2.4M in annual capital funding for large scale restoration and contract work, \$11.2M in baselined expense funding for in-house staff to conduct maintenance and for materials and operating costs, and \$2.4M in baselined expense funding to provide one trails crew per borough supporting the formalization and maintenance of NYC's

nature trail network.

- Increase the number of tree planting staff (via Capital funded Interfund Agreement) to increase the number of street trees planted from just under 18,000 in FY25 to at least 25,000 per year, with the aim of shortening the 9-year Neighborhood Tree Planting Program.
- Increase funding for the trees and sidewalks program, to increase the City's capacity to respond to damage to sidewalks caused by tree roots.
- \$1M for the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to support non-NYC Parks agencies tasked with heightened management and expansion of trees in their jurisdictions (such as NYC Housing Authority, Department of Education, the School Construction Authority, Department of Sanitation, Department of Transportation, etc.) in implementing initial actions of the forthcoming NYC Urban Forest Plan. This includes funding for an updated citywide Lidar remote sensing data capture and analysis to monitor the canopy coverage of the urban forest and measure the growth or loss of tree canopy coverage and track progress towards the 30% goal, as required by Local Law 148 of 2023 to be completed every 5 years.

In addition to these budget requests, there are several staffing-related needs that are essential in rebuilding and expanding the City's urban forest workforce, including:

- Salary increases for the advanced and technical civil service roles like Foresters and Climber & Pruners, to help attract and retain the best candidates to manage the nation's largest urban forest.
- Expansion of City-led workforce training programs, including internal programs to train existing employees and create promotional opportunities like the NYC Parks Climber & Pruner program, as well as programs that bring in new workers to expand overall workforce capacity.
- We commend the Mayor for lifting the hiring freeze and 2-1 hiring ratio, but are disappointed that 100 vacant roles will be eliminated from Parks on top of the 600 positions previously cut since 2023 - effectively resulting in 700 positions being permanently lost. We encourage the Mayor and Council to restore and fill all these positions.

Additional background:

- The City of New York is required by Local Law 148 of 2023 to equitably expand tree canopy cover to reach 30% citywide, and the forthcoming NYC Urban Forest Plan will chart a path to reach that goal.

- To ensure the plan is successful, the City will need to plant additional trees, but it will also need to baseline existing staff and expand the workforce that protects and maintains trees, as well as invest in workforce development programs, tree nurseries, tree health research and monitoring, wood salvage, and more.

- The urban forest helps cool the city - reducing energy bills and decreasing heat-related public health risks. These investments can also help the Mayor meet his goals of improving livability and quality of life in NYC.

- In 2021, Forest for All NYC set the goal of achieving “30x35” in the NYC Urban Forest Agenda – 30% tree canopy cover equitably distributed across NYC by 2035. The NYC urban forest cools the air, offers shady respite from heat, sequesters carbon, increases energy efficiency, and contributes to New Yorkers’ health and wellbeing, and yet it does not serve New Yorkers equitably.

- Forest for All NYC has over 200 member organizations from the non-profit, government, and business sectors.

- The NYC urban forest is composed of all 7 million trees in the city, and the physical and social infrastructure that support them. It spans public and private property and every neighborhood in NYC - from street trees to private backyards to city parks.

- NYC Parks manages 53.5% of the total urban forest canopy in the city.

- Despite its laudable efforts, NYC Parks is chronically underfunded, particularly for management of the urban forest. It needs baselined and sufficient investment in the regular maintenance of the urban forest.

- Despite the importance of the urban forest and its perennial needs for stewardship, there is no dedicated, long-term funding for managing NYC’s trees in the years ahead.

Please, please, please vote for the budget required to manage half of the urban forest canopy. It has so many positive effects on our lives, on energy use, and infrastructure. AND it is SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR ALL!

Respectfully Submitted,

Alyson Grunder



New York, New York 10023

Ann-Marie Everitt



Brooklyn, NY 11220

Dear Members of the City Council,

My name is Ann-Marie Everitt, and I am here today as a New York City resident to speak in strong support of sustained—and increased—funding for NYC Parks, particularly at this pivotal moment as the city prepares to release its first-ever Urban Forest Plan.

New York City's urban forest is not an amenity. It is essential infrastructure.

Today, more than seven million trees across our city—on streets, in parks, and in natural areas—quietly perform work that would otherwise cost us hundreds of millions of dollars annually. These trees cool our neighborhoods, reduce air pollution, absorb stormwater, and improve both physical and mental health. In fact, NYC's urban forest already provides an estimated \$260 million in annual benefits, including removing over 1,100 tons of air pollution and significantly reducing stormwater runoff. ([urbanforestplan.nyc](https://www.nyc.gov/urbanforestplan))

And yet, at the very moment we have the opportunity to lead, the preliminary FY27 budget proposes a \$33 million decrease to NYC Parks.

This is not just a contradiction—it is a missed opportunity.

The forthcoming Urban Forest Plan sets a bold and necessary goal: expanding New York City's tree canopy to 30%. ([urbanforestplan.nyc](https://www.nyc.gov/urbanforestplan)) Achieving this would place New York among global leaders in climate-resilient urban design. But a plan without funding is not a plan—it is a promise deferred.

We do not have to imagine what success looks like. We can look to models across the United States and around the world.

In Detroit, large-scale reforestation efforts like Hantz Woodlands have transformed more than 140 acres of vacant land into the largest urban tree farm in the country—demonstrating how strategic investment in urban forestry can restore neighborhoods and create long-term ecological and economic value. ([Wikipedia](#))

Community-driven initiatives such as The Greening of Detroit have planted over 166,000 trees, proving that sustained investment, paired with public engagement, can rebuild a city’s environmental health from the ground up. ([Wikipedia](#))

Globally, cities are embracing innovative approaches like “pocket forests,” based on the Miyawaki method, which create dense, biodiverse ecosystems in small urban spaces. These forests—now appearing in cities from Los Angeles to Europe and Asia—cool neighborhoods, improve air quality, and strengthen climate resilience in just a few years. ([The Guardian](#))

New York itself has already begun to experiment with this model, demonstrating that we have both the creativity and the capacity to lead.

And leadership matters—because the benefits of urban forests are not distributed equally. Communities with fewer trees experience higher temperatures, worse air quality, and greater health risks. Investment in urban forestry is therefore not only an environmental imperative, but a matter of equity and public health.

Trees can reduce street-level temperatures, improve respiratory health, and even mitigate the impacts of extreme heat—one of the deadliest consequences of climate change in our city. ([urbanforestplan.nyc](#))

We know what works. We know what is needed.

What we require now is the political will to fund it.

Cutting the NYC Parks budget at this moment undermines years of progress and directly contradicts the stated goal of doubling parks funding. It risks leaving the Urban Forest Plan unrealized—and with it, the opportunity to build a cooler, healthier, and more resilient New York City.

Investment in our urban forest is not a cost. It is a long-term return—environmental, economic, and human.

I urge the Council to restore and expand funding for NYC Parks, to fully support the implementation of the Urban Forest Plan, and to ensure that every New Yorker—regardless of neighborhood—can benefit from the shade, safety, and beauty of a thriving urban forest.

New York has always been a city that leads.

This is our moment to lead again.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ann-Marie Everitt

Preliminary Budget Hearing - Parks and Recreation

Monday, March 23, 2026

Ashley Cruce, Gardener & Composter, BQLT's McIntosh Community Garden

Thank you to Chairman Tyrell Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. My name is Ashley Cruce, MA, MSW, and I am an Environmental Educator at Queens Botanical Garden and a volunteer gardener at McIntosh Community Garden. It is owned by the Brooklyn Queens Land Trust (BQLT) and located in E. Elmhurst, Queens. I have been involved at this garden for 15 yrs., and was truly honored to receive a **GreenThumb "2025 Going the Extra Mile Award."** Our garden was established in 1978 by African-Americans who formed a Neighborhood Association garden, and it was affiliated with GreenThumb the same year. McIntosh Community Garden has a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our neighborhood.

Sadly, the recently released preliminary budget has allocated less than 1% of the total city budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation. This leaves GreenThumb facing budget constraints. I urge you to restore the previously allocated \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb, which is VITAL for the 560 community gardens of NYC! **We can definitely attest to how important GreenThumb support is for all-volunteer community gardens like ours (e.g. Community Engagement Coord. support, skill-building workshops, conferences, free seedlings, hardscape supplies, and more).**

We recently did soil testing and found lead in the soil over the recommended levels. GreenThumb assisted us to get free supplies to solve our issues: lumber for new raised beds, landscape fabric to line the beds, new clean soil, and mulch (to put down on paths to decrease lead dust). GreenThumb got us the supplies in time for a partner--The Mission Continues-- to assist us with this heavy task endeavor.

All community gardens need to be recognized as an essential public asset and need to be protected from development. I implore you to introduce legislation to permanently protect all NYC community gardens on city-owned land from rezoning and development.

Please allocate **\$300,000 through the Parks Equity Initiative** for direct funding to community gardens. Please support **A Greener NYC** to create green jobs for youth and support environmental education and advocacy in gardens. Super vital is supporting the **the Get Stuff Clean** Initiative to combat rodent infestations and illegal dumping in and around gardens by:

- Increasing DSNY and DOHMH support for gardens.
- Expanding access to Rat Academy for Community Gardeners training and sanitation services.



Happy Spring and thank you for your dedication and consideration,

Ashley Cruce, MA, MSW

McIntosh Community Garden
E. Elmhurst, Queens

Good day, Chairperson Henkerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Benay Chisholm, and I am the Community Garden Coordinator for Pa'lente Community Garden in Upper Manhattan.

I'm here to express my support for organizations like Green Guerillas, which hosts the Council of Gardeners, and for programs like GreenThumb that provide critical support to community gardens across New York City. These resources help gardeners like me sustain spaces that serve as hubs for food access, education, and community connection.

At the same time, I believe the City can do more to support community gardens and address the challenges we face on the ground. For several years, my garden has been dealing with a serious rat infestation caused in part by an adjacent abandoned lot. That lot has become a site for illegal dumping, drug activity, and rodent nesting, creating ongoing safety concerns that directly impact our garden and the surrounding community.

The infestation has become so severe that I have literally had my foot caught in rat holes throughout the garden. Because of these conditions, I've had to limit community activities and public access due to safety and liability concerns. This undermines the very purpose of community gardens as safe, welcoming spaces for neighbors.

I strongly encourage the City to increase funding for the Get Stuff Clean initiative and other sanitation and rodent control efforts so that gardens facing these conditions can receive timely and effective support.

Community gardens contribute so much to the health, safety, and resilience of our neighborhoods. With stronger support from the City, we can ensure they remain safe and accessible spaces for all New Yorkers.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am grateful for this opportunity today.

Hello,

I am writing to urge City Council to fund Parks at \$1.2 billion. During the Mayor's campaigning he promised to dedicate 1% of the city's annual budget (\$1.2 billion) to the Parks Department. Instead, his preliminary budget provides \$654 million to parks, down from the \$687 million under Eric Adams.

Parks are a vital public service in our city that are open to all New Yorkers, providing crucial green space for community members. All New Yorkers deserve clean and well maintained parks, regardless of the socioeconomic status of the neighborhood. Thank you for considering this budget proposal.

Best,

Beth Williams

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Brooklyn, NY 11201

Biana Varga
New York City Council Testimony
Committee on Parks and Recreation
Monday, March 23

Good afternoon. It is an honor to be speaking before the New York City Council. I'm Biana Varga and I live in District 39 in Brooklyn. My neighbors and I are creating a pocket park on our block, and I want to thank Councilmember Shahana Hanif for stopping by our first volunteer day last fall, and for everything she does for our community.

I am here because I believe in the magic of trees and more than 80% of the city's trees are cared for by the Parks Department¹. Trees shade our sidewalks on summer days; they keep harmful particles out of our lungs²; they act as umbrellas during heavy rains and allow the soil to absorb more water³. They have even been shown to improve mental health⁴ and reduce crime⁵.

The leadership of New York City understands the important role that trees play in creating a climate resilient and livable city, which is why they invested in the MillionTreesNYC project⁶ and the Parks Department has committed to planting 18,000 trees per

¹ <https://www.nyc.gov/content/climate/pages/archives/ufp-release>

² <https://onetreepanted.org/blogs/stories/how-trees-clean-air>

³ <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/five-surprising-ways-trees-help-prevent-flooding>

⁴ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7345658/>

⁵ <https://research.fs.usda.gov/treesearch/40701>

⁶ <https://www.nycgovparks.org/news/daily-plant?id=23507>

year going forward⁷. However, not all trees are equally beneficial. A mature tree's canopy can shade an entire playground, making its surfaces safe for children in the heat of summer. A newly planted tree simply can't do that. A young tree is a promise; a mature tree is infrastructure.

This is why it is imperative that we invest not just in planting trees but in the people who steward them towards maturity.

We are currently in the middle of Trees Count, the city's decennial tree census. Last summer, over 2,500 volunteers (including me!) surveyed more than 46,000 trees and we will continue that work this spring⁸. In order to be able to act on the tree health data that we are collecting, allow our trees to grow and keep our urban forest thriving for the benefit of all New Yorkers, the Parks Department needs to be well-staffed and well-funded.

This is not the time to cut the funding for this invaluable agency. I urge the City Council to invest in Parks and the future of New York by joining cities across the country in allocating 1% of our budget to Parks⁹.

Thank you so much for your time and attention.

⁷ <https://www.nycgovparks.org/news/press-releases?id=22198>

⁸ <https://www.nycgovparks.org/reg/trees-count>

⁹

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/13/nyregion/one-percent-of-the-budget-for-parks-a-bargain-says-a-non-profit.html>

March 26, 2026

Dear Parks Committee and City Council,

I have sat on the Parks & Recreation Committee of my community board for 20 years. I was chair of that committee for 13 years. I also volunteer in Van Cortlandt Park, my local park.

I am familiar with the conditions of the parks in the northwest Bronx, where I live. Without volunteers, of which we fortunately have quite a few, these parks would be in far worse condition than they are because the resources allocated to our parks are inadequate. Worse yet, our parks are now threatened with further cuts to DPR.

It seems to be the case that candidates for mayor run on a platform of 1% of the city budget for parks, and then renege when they are elected. Parks need more money, not less. Without our parks, how would we ever have managed through the pandemic?

If we want safe parks with playground equipment and recreational facilities in good condition, we have to pay for them. If we want our parks maintained, we have to pay for staff, not rely on volunteers.

Please fund our parks as they should be funded.

Bob Bender

[REDACTED]

Bronx, NY 10471

[REDACTED]

Oversight Hearing TESTIMONY

The NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

[hearing about the FY27 City Budget](#)

Monday, March 23rd at 11:30am (public comment starts at 1:30pm).

ALL WRITTEN TESTIMONY DUE By THURSDAY March 26th at 10am.

Register to Testify Here: [Hearing Testimony Registration - New York City Council](#)

Dear NYC Council and Budget Planning Committee

Hi, my name is Carol A. Colone and my organization, The Earth Care Action Group at The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York is a member of Forest for All NYC, a coalition of over 200 organizations committed to helping the city reach 30% tree canopy cover citywide by 2035 in an equitable manner.

The parks and urban forest matters to my organization/community because trees are the environmental bedrock for a healthy planet. They provide shade, save energy, absorb water to help prevent flooding, pull carbon dioxide out of the air to help with air pollution, add unlimited beauty to our lives, etc. AND LACK of trees in a neighborhood is a social injustice.

The urban forest is essential to the quality of life of all New Yorkers, and NYC Parks plays an invaluable role in caring for a significant portion of our city's trees and green spaces.

NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC, but the Parks staff and programs that support the urban forest have continued to be cut.

The FY27 Preliminary Budget allocation for the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) was slightly decreased from the adopted FY26 budget. While the overall City budget increased by approximately \$12B, the NYC Parks budget decreased by \$33M from FY26 to FY27, primarily due to a loss of Mayoral one-shot funding that was not carried over from last year. While there are reasons to be hopeful about this year's budget – despite a very tight fiscal environment, NYC Parks has not yet been hit with drastic cuts – **the Preliminary Budget does not restore NYC Parks to the level of staffing required to care for the NYC urban forest.**

The benefits of parks and trees are endless, you get so much bang for your buck when you manage and take care of trees and park property properly, and for that we need a larger budget. But just think about all of the other expenses, like energy that will go down.

We ask that Council and the Administration work together to deliver on Mayor

Mamdani's campaign commitment to double the NYC Parks budget, and ensure full funding for the staff and programs that are critical to the protection, maintenance, and planting efforts that will enable the City to reach its 30% tree canopy goal.

- My organization- The Earth Care Action Group of The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York is a member of the Forest for All NYC coalition which seeks to justly and equitably protect, maintain, expand and promote the NYC urban forest.
- The urban forest matters to my organization/community because the urban forest is essential to the quality of life of all New Yorkers. The shade, beauty, and water retention are just a few positive facts of trees and the life of Parks.
- NYC's first ever Urban Forest Plan, required by Local Law 148 of 2023, will be released this spring and chart a path for NYC to equitably expand tree canopy cover to 30% citywide. Implementing this Plan will require resources! To ensure the plan is successful, the City will need to plant additional trees, but it will also need to baseline existing staff and expand the workforce that protects and maintains trees, as well as invest in workforce development programs, tree nurseries, tree health research and monitoring, wood salvage, and more.
- **NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC, but the Parks staff and programs that support the urban forest have continued to be cut.**
- We call on Council and the Mayor to allocate \$150M to fund the initial implementation of the 10-year Urban Forest Plan, including baselining and expanding NYC Parks forestry staff positions and funding to support other City agencies that will expand tree canopy under their jurisdiction.

We ask that the Budget include approximately \$150 million for:

- Restoration, expansion, and baselining of NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) staff and programs to support ongoing operations and to grow the urban forest:
 - Expand NYC Park's capacity for tree risk management and inspections, including increasing and baselining the number of staff (climbers and pruners, foresters, and related management) and contract funding that are critical for caring for and managing the existing tree canopy across NYC.
 - Baseline NYC Parks positions currently funded by one-year contracts (approximately 276 positions including Parks Enforcement Patrol, Urban Forest Rangers, Forestry staff, etc.) to limit turnover and sustain the operational efficiency that come from retaining a stable workforce.
 - Provide \$16M in baselined annual funding to fully implement the Forest

Management Framework for forested natural areas, including \$2.4M in annual capital funding for large scale restoration and contract work, \$11.2M in baselined expense funding for in-house staff to conduct maintenance and for materials and operating costs, and \$2.4M in baselined expense funding to provide one trails crew per borough supporting the formalization and maintenance of NYC's nature trail network.

- o Increase the number of tree planting staff (via Capital funded Interfund Agreement) to increase the number of street trees planted from just under 18,000 in FY25 to at least 25,000 per year, with the aim of shortening the 9-year Neighborhood Tree Planting Program.

- o Increase funding for the trees and sidewalks program, to increase the City's capacity to respond to damage to sidewalks caused by tree roots.

- \$1M for the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to support non-NYC Parks agencies tasked with heightened management and expansion of trees in their jurisdictions (such as NYC Housing Authority, Department of Education, the School Construction Authority, Department of Sanitation, Department of Transportation, etc.) in implementing initial actions of the forthcoming NYC Urban Forest Plan. This includes funding for an updated citywide Lidar remote sensing data capture and analysis to monitor the canopy coverage of the urban forest and measure the growth or loss of tree canopy coverage and track progress towards the 30% goal, as required by Local Law 148 of 2023 to be completed every 5 years.

In addition to these budget requests, there are several staffing-related needs that are essential in rebuilding and expanding the City's urban forest workforce, including:

- Salary increases for the advanced and technical civil service roles like Foresters and Climber & Pruners, to help attract and retain the best candidates to manage the nation's largest urban forest.

- Expansion of City-led workforce training programs, including internal programs to train existing employees and create promotional opportunities like the NYC Parks Climber & Pruner program, as well as programs that bring in new workers to expand overall workforce capacity.

- We commend the Mayor for lifting the hiring freeze and 2-1 hiring ratio, but are disappointed that 100 vacant roles will be eliminated from Parks on top of the 600 positions previously cut since 2023 - effectively resulting in 700 positions being permanently lost. We encourage the Mayor and Council to restore and fill all these positions.

Additional background:

- The City of New York is required by Local Law 148 of 2023 to equitably expand tree

canopy cover to reach 30% citywide, and the forthcoming NYC Urban Forest Plan will chart a path to reach that goal.

- To ensure the plan is successful, the City will need to plant additional trees, but it will also need to baseline existing staff and expand the workforce that protects and maintains trees, as well as invest in workforce development programs, tree nurseries, tree health research and monitoring, wood salvage, and more.

- The urban forest helps cool the city - reducing energy bills and decreasing heat-related public health risks. These investments can also help the Mayor meet his goals of improving livability and quality of life in NYC.

- In 2021, Forest for All NYC set the goal of achieving “30x35” in the NYC Urban Forest Agenda – 30% tree canopy cover equitably distributed across NYC by 2035. The NYC urban forest cools the air, offers shady respite from heat, sequesters carbon, increases energy efficiency, and contributes to New Yorkers’ health and wellbeing, and yet it does not serve New Yorkers equitably.

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- NYC Parks manages 53.5% of the total urban forest canopy in the city.

- Despite its laudable efforts, NYC Parks is chronically underfunded, particularly for management of the urban forest. It needs baselined and sufficient investment in the regular maintenance of the urban forest.

- Despite the importance of the urban forest and its perennial needs for stewardship, there is no dedicated, long-term funding for managing NYC’s trees in the years ahead.

Please, please, please vote for the budget required to manage half of the urban forest canopy. It has so many positive effects on our lives, on energy use, and infrastructure. AND it is SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR ALL!

Respectfully Submitted,

Carol A. Colone



Staten Island, NY 10306

Thursday, March 26, 2026

My name is Caroline Corwin and I'm a lover of New York City's parks. I see firsthand how more funding for Parks in general, and the work of Playfair employees in particular, make this city run.

Playfair Parkies compose a large section of the workforce and do everything from opening key facilities, beautifying our green spaces, to leading education tours on places like Hart Island and Fort Totten.

The Parks Dept already does so much with so little. If playfair is not renewed, the effects will be felt acutely by other Parks staff and most importantly by the public.

Keep our parks funded, New Yorkers need these spaces to learn, play, relax, and build community. Our playfair Parkies are essential to making that vision a reality for so many of us.

I write as a concerned New Yorker on behalf of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, founded and led by New Yorkers for Parks, New York League of Conservation Voters and District Council 37 and composed of over 400 organizations calling for transformative investment in New York City's parks system. Free to the public, our parks are central to an affordable and thriving New York City.

We appreciate your commitment to dedicate 1% of the city budget for NYC Parks maintenance and operations and applaud the recently announced investment in modular bathrooms in parks, one of the goals in our Parks 2030 platform and First 100 Days for Parks agenda.

As we approach the start of the FY27 budget cycle, your administration has the opportunity to rebuild an agency crippled by decades of disinvestment and, more recently, four years of disproportionate PEG cuts and a hiring freeze. It is time for New York City to lead the nation and the world in its vision for parks and open spaces.

A recent New York Times poll asked readers to vote on 17 ways your administration can improve New York City. Fully funding our city's parks won handily, with 35,551 New Yorkers identifying this investment as a key priority. Why? New Yorkers love and rely on these spaces, yet have seen the steady depletion of NYC Parks and its workforce. They experience inequitable conditions based on zip code. And they see how forward-thinking cities across the country have invested in their parks systems to improve quality of life, address climate change, strengthen public health and more.

Investing with vision in NYC Parks means investing in thousands of union workers who steward 30,000 acres of public parkland, or 14% of New York City. It means investing in working families in every borough who depend on our parks. Parks are the original universal free childcare, serving as playgrounds our entire city relies upon for physical and social resilience.

Your administration can change this trajectory now. The following are the critical staffing investments New Yorkers need for our parks system:

- Baseline the 274 parks positions currently funded by one-year contracts (Parks Enforcement Patrol, Rangers, Forestry, etc.) to retain staff long-term.
- End the hiring freeze and restore 600 eliminated full-time baselined union parks positions (City Parks Workers, Forestry, Capital Projects, frontline staff).
- Add 460 Parks 2nd-shift cleaners to staff 400 high-use sites and keep parks and restrooms clean.
- Add 227 forestry staff to address a backlog of 20,000+ uninspected tree conditions and 35,000+ open work orders.
- Create borough-specific mowing crews by adding 80 dedicated lawn-care positions to address the agency's documented inability to care for park lawns and playing fields.
- Restore 59 capital team positions and add 60 more so nearly 100 stalled capital projects can resume, unlocking ~\$450M in neighborhood green space and resiliency investments.
- Increase trades staffing by 40% (130 tradespeople) for faster repairs and violation clearing.

- Invest \$21.2M to expand hours and services at all 36 recreation centers so 22 centers can operate 7 days/week.
- Add 250 PEP officers to increase the uniformed presence at 120 high-need parks.
- Increase overtime funding to \$40M so Parks can respond to storms, emergencies, and routine repairs outside regular hours.

The impact of lost staffing lines is clear. Remaining Parks workers are overburdened by millions of users who rely on these spaces. As a result, New Yorkers visit parks that are poorly maintained, with just 65% achieving the agency's own Vital Parks score goals.

As the city confronts rising costs, deepening inequality, and climate threats, your administration has an opportunity to not only reverse staffing cuts to NYC Parks, but to put our city's parks, and all New Yorkers, on the path to a prosperous, safe, clean, and green future.

Thank you.

My name is Cody Frost. I love city parks. To me parks are our most valuable resource in the city because they allow New Yorkers to connect with themselves and their natural environment. Play Fair employees keep our parks accessible and interesting by helping underserved New Yorkers relate to their natural environment. Clean bathrooms, safe parks, and opportunities to learn are all invaluable functions of Play Fair Employees. Without Play Fair our parks would be desolate and sad. Fund Parks!

Greetings Chair Hankerson and members of the Parks Committee.

My name is Cora Cofield, and I am here representing myself as a solitary advocate. I am testifying today as a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, a citywide coalition led by New Yorkers for Parks, New York League of Conservation Voters, and District Council 37 and including more than 450 organizations that steward, advocate for, and rely on NYC's parks and open spaces.

The parks system is one of NYC's most important affordable resources, providing free programming and places for neighbors to exercise, play, and commune with nature.

Mayor Mamdani's FY27 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks is \$33 million less than the FY26 Adopted Budget and does not provide critical restorations after four years of cuts. Mayor Mamdani's FY27 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks is \$33 million less than the FY26 Adopted Budget and does not provide critical restorations after four years of cuts. The Preliminary Budget maintains the status quo of underinvestment rather than putting Parks funding on a path toward 1% of the city budget, a goal the mayor committed to. The Mayor's budget eliminates 100 Parks staffing lines as a condition of the end to the hiring freeze. Following 600 staffing lines cut since 2023 under the Adams Administration, these cumulative losses limit the agency's ability to rebuild its workforce. It also fails to safeguard the 276 Parks workers set to lose their jobs at the end of this fiscal year since they are dependent on annual one-shot City Council funding. These positions must be baselined to ensure stability and consistent service. After years of cuts, Parks staff are stretched thin and basic services are suffering. Only 65% of parks meet the agency's own maintenance standards. The money needs to be put back into Parks!

To ensure a safe, well-maintained parks system and deliver basic services, the City must add round about 500 Second-Shift workers to keep 400 high-use parks and restrooms clean, like Tompkins Square. These workers will most likely come through the Parks Opportunity Program.

POP is veteran program that should be remembered for funding. In my experience the POP job training participant is an essential worker in the day-to-day maintenance and operation of Parks and Recreation. I know this to be true because I was such a worker. I am an immigrant from Panama, and I have been beneficiary of educational and hands on training opportunities through POP ultimately resulting in me becoming an Inspector with a Code Enforcement Official Certification issued by New York State last fall. I was also encouraged by POP to apply for and to take the civil servant Exam for Construction Inspector which I passed. I say this to convey that the POP program works for those who work it. The career coaches go above and beyond to get their clients on the path of permanent employment while the POP worker receives training in the field and hands on experience working alongside CPW's and APSW's keeping the Parks system clean, safe and inviting.

To those much is given much is required and that's why I stand up for the POP Program. I urge the Mayor and City Council to restore staffing, invest in park maintenance, and move toward dedicating 1% or more of the city budget to parks.

Respectfully,

Cora Cofield.

Daniel Tainow

Lower East Side Manhattan

Good afternoon, my name is Daniel Tainow, and I am a park patron, I am on the Parks Committee of Manhattan Community Board 3, I work for Parks, and I am a proud member of DC37. I am also a proud member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, advocating for adoption for the Parks 2030 platform and dedicating at least 1% of the city budget to fund NYC Parks maintenance and operations. Workers make the Parks work:

- Parkies in every park. Permanent full-time maintenance staff in our parks means cleaner bathrooms, mowed lawns, less trash, and safer environments for our children.
- A full and expanded Urban Park Rangers and Parks Enforcement Patrol corps to ensure our parks are welcoming, safe and accessible for New Yorkers.
- Expanded free public programming in parks and recreation centers like after-school care, yoga, sports leagues, and community events — so that parks continue to thrive as active, affordable hubs of daily life.
- A forestry division that can properly care for street trees and trees in our parks.
- Natural Areas staff to care for our [urban forests](#), [trails](#) and [wetlands](#), opening these spaces to millions of New Yorkers.
- Lifeguards so every beach and pool can be fully open to New Yorkers seeking relief from the heat.
- Support for volunteer stewardship of park spaces through a fully funded Partnership for Parks, and Green Thumb staff supporting community gardens.
- Well maintained bathrooms, water fountains, and basic infrastructure.

Fund park workers for the essential service they provide!

Preliminary Budget Hearing - Parks and Recreation

Monday, March 23, 2026

[Dyaami D'Orazio, Programs at FSNYC, All Community Gardens and Parks]

Thank you to Chairman Tyrell Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is **Dyaami**, and I was a member of Jardin de las Rosas located in the Bronx for over 2 years. Our garden, Jardin de las Rosas and many others across the city have a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our neighborhood.

This budgetary ask is at least 10 years old because I worked for Parks back then and I saw community members organizing for 1% of the budget then. I was in my 20s when I learned about this campaign and I am very confused about how we still have to advocate for the importance of and critical access to green spaces and the services that the parks department provides for millions of people 10 years later!!!! I am 32. This campaign should be over and we should be proudly funding the NYC Parks Dept at minimum 1%.

The recently released preliminary budget has allocated less than 1% of the total city budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

This leaves GreenThumb facing budget constraints. Restore the previously allocated \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.

Please, please, please, move in this direction:

- **Gardens need to be recognized as an essential public asset, they need to be protected from development.**
- **Introduce legislation to permanently protect all NYC community gardens on city-owned land from rezoning and development.**
- **Allocate \$300,000 through the Parks Equity Initiative for direct funding to gardens**
- **Fund community-based organizations to distribute resources equitably**
- **Invest in A Greener NYC to create green jobs for youth and support environmental education and advocacy in gardens.**
- **Strengthen the Get Stuff Clean Initiative to combat rodent infestations and illegal dumping in and around gardens by:**
 - **Increasing DSNY and DOHMH support for gardens.**
 - **Expanding access to Rat Academy training and sanitation services.**

Thank you,

Dyaami

a NYC kid with a deep love for our parks and gardens

Elsie Soto



Bronx, N.Y. 10468

Hart Island Visitation Proposal

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

My name is Elsie Soto. I am a CUNY public health student, a family member of two people buried on Hart Island, and an advocate for many other families who are navigating similar experience.

For us, visiting Hart Island is not optional. It is how we grieve. It is how we stay connected to the people we love.

Right now, access remains limited in ways that make that the grieving process even more difficult. Visitation is primarily on weekends, which does not work for many families. People have varying work schedules, lack of childcare, and responsibilities that make weekend access unrealistic. I am asking that at least two weekday visitation days be added to the monthly calendar, so families have a fair opportunity to visit.

There is also a growing concern that is deeply painful for families. NYC Parks Dept. public tours on Hart Island are being advertised for about \$39.99 by touring companies and offer around three and a half hours on the island. If those proceeds were being used to expand family visitation, we would understand. However, that is not happening, and families are still given significantly less

time, sometimes under one hour for visits. This is unfair. Access for loved ones should come first.

Transportation is another major barrier. A short shuttle service already exists, but it currently runs between the Hart Island ferry and the BX29 stop at Fordham Street (3 blocks) and only at the end of the visit. Families traveling by train must still find their way to and from the Pelham train station, relying on extremely limited bus service on City Island.

The distance from the Pelham train station to the ferry is less than 3 miles, about a 10 to 15 minute drive, yet for families using public transportation it can take 30 to 40 minutes or more due to transfers, weekend service, and wait times. I am proposing that the existing shuttle service be expanded to pick up visitors directly from the Pelham train station and bring them straight to the Hart Island ferry. This is a simple change that would make a meaningful difference in access and reliability.

Hart Island is the resting place of over one million New Yorkers. The families and loved ones connected to this island deserve dignity, fairness, and equitable footing to mourn our loved ones.

Thank you for your time and for listening.


Hello,

My name is Fiona Whalen and I'm a lover of parks. I see firsthand how more funding for Parks in general, and the work of Playfair employees in particular, make this city run.

Playfair Parkies compose a large section of the workforce and do everything from opening key facilities, beautifying our green spaces, to leading education tours on places like Hart Island.

The Parks Dept already does so much with so little. If playfair is not renewed, the effects will be felt acutely by other Parks staff and most importantly by the public.

Keep our parks funded, New Yorkers need these spaces to learn, play, relax, and build community. Our playfair Parkies are essential to making that vision a reality for so many of us.

 Fiona Whalen

[REDACTED]
Bronx, NY 10451
March 23, 2026

FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing for the Committee on Parks and Recreation.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

My name is Francine Rogers, and I am a member of **Neighborhood Advisory Committee Community Garden** located in the Bronx. I have been an active member for this garden for **over 43 years**. Our garden serves as a vital green space in our community, providing food access and sponsoring community events like Easter Egg Hunts and Pumpkin Decorating Festivals as well as numerous summer bar-b-ques. Our garden serves as a growing space to 10 families who all use the garden as their place to relax as well as to grow tomatoes, peppers, cilantro, and various flowers. We also partner with the Bronx Documentary Center as a resource for their photography classes.

One of the main reasons why our garden has survived so many years besides our dedicated volunteers is the support and encouragement of the presence of **Green Thumb** through their knowledgeable staff and generous resources. Unfortunately, GreenThumb lacks the funding to be able to adequately provide resources to our city gardens because of past city budget cuts. **I wish to advocate not only for the return of these funds but for an increase of them. \$2.6 million plus is a great investment in the well being and health of our neighborhoods.** Community gardens provide stability, fresh air, relaxation, peace safety, and friendship to residents.

I am also a member of the **Green Guerillas Council of Gardeners**, a coalition representing over 550 community gardens across New York City. **We call on the council to restore the previously allocated \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb in this FY27 Fiscal Budget to Parks and Recreation for the Green Thumb program.**

Thanking you in advance for your attention in this matter, I am

Sincerely,

Francine Rogers
[REDACTED]

To the members of the city council,

I write today in my own personal capacity. I do not represent the Parks Department in any official capacity.

I have worked at Parks since 2017 and have been proud to be a part of making our city more sustainable, liveable, and green. I work in the Division of Environment and Planning in the Natural Resources group. We take care of the 12000 acres of forests, wetlands, and grasslands in the city.

I am lucky because I was able to secure a permanent position.

Since we first received annual seasonal funding for forest management, our staff has grown and shrunk multiple times. We get the funding in July, undertake the hiring in the fall, and then by the spring people already begin to leave for more secure positions. Sometimes our funding is continued, sometimes it has been cut. Sometimes we can keep individuals on using grant funds, sometimes we cannot.

Of course it is most painful for my colleagues who are deciding whether or not to stick with a job that may be cut in a few months. Living with that uncertainty is draining and demoralizing.

I do also want to point out how this boom and bust cycle also impacts those of us with the good fortune to have permanent positions. In this most recent wave, I was involved in hiring two positions out of the dozens that this funding supports. This meant hours of reviewing resumes, scheduling interviews, and then conferring with colleagues to make a selection. It will not surprise you that hiring for the city takes time and is a multistep, arduous process. We were able to bring our hires on in October or November, and we have spent the last six months training and orienting them before our busy season in the field which is about to begin. One of the only seasonal hires that had been able to remain on our team through grant funding when the last round of funding was cut has now told us that she is leaving for a position in the private sector for more job security. With her now leaves the institutional knowledge that she has acquired after two and a half years on the job.

We have hired some really fantastic people who have jumped into public service with energy and enthusiasm. Please baseline the Playfair funding so we can give my colleagues the security they deserve and we can reduce the amount of time that permanent employees like myself spend hiring and training staff who do not stay in their positions.

Thank you,
Georgina Cullman, PhD

Good afternoon. My name is Helen Chirigos and I work for the Natural Resource Group at Parks.

I want to offer a perspective, as one of the natural area workers on one-shot-funding, that Playfair is not a sufficient solution to budget shortages.

I am a full-time, indefinitely seasonal employee? That doesn't make any sense. I do not receive the same benefit as those on permanent lines until 18 months of full time unbroken seasonal employment of having paid federally recognized holidays. I can't apply to internally posted annually paid jobs at parks that are open to baselined 'full-time employees'. I haven't bought into the pension because I assume it is more likely than not that funding will lapse, and I will be let go, in one of the upcoming 4 years.

I am new to the workforce, and (with a lot of luck) I actually turned down other job offers to be here. I am proud to be a public servant and contribute to the city I was born and raised in. But our salaries as parkies, pretty much across the board, don't compete with the private sector. I say this to spell out that for these reasons Parks is experiencing high turnover, losing skilled staff, institutional knowledge, and dedicated public servants who care deeply about this work.

It also harms the baselined work force, by putting more strain on remaining staff who are already stretched thin. It means constant rehiring and retraining instead of building long term capacity and expertise. Experiencing the process first hand, it is unbelievably inefficient.

The good thing is, it doesn't have to be this way.

The investment in baselining these so-called seasonal workers should be a first priority. It would provide stability for workers and strengthen the agency's ability to care for New York City's natural areas. It would allow staff to plan their lives, stay in their roles, and continue building the knowledge and relationships that make this work effective. If we are serious about maintaining healthy forests, resilient wetlands, and a strong green workforce, then we must invest in the people who make that possible.

Good afternoon Chair Hankerson and members of the Parks Committee,

My name is Ira Gershenhorn, and I am here representing myself as a member of the Riverside Valley Community Garden who has many connections with New Yorkers for Parks, the New York League of Conservation Voters, the Department of Parks and Recreation, Manhattan Community Boards 7, 9, 12 and the Riverside Park Conservancy.

- Mayor Mamdani's FY27 Preliminary Budget for NYC Parks is \$33 million less than the FY26 Adopted Budget and does not provide critical restorations after four years of cuts.
- The Preliminary Budget maintains the status quo of underinvestment rather than putting Parks funding on a path toward 1% of the city budget, a goal the Mayor committed to.
- The Mayor's budget eliminates 100 Parks staffing lines as a condition of the end to the hiring freeze. Following 600 staffing lines cut since 2023 under the Adams Administration, these cumulative losses limit the agency's ability to rebuild its workforce.
- It also fails to safeguard the 276 Parks workers set to lose their jobs at the end of this fiscal year since they are dependent on annual one-shot City Council funding. These positions must be baselined to ensure stability and consistent service.
- After years of cuts, Parks staff are stretched thin and basic services are suffering. Only 65% of parks meet the agency's own maintenance standards.
- **In order to ensure a safe, well-maintained parks system and deliver basic services, the City must:**
 - Add 460 Second-Shift workers to keep 400 high-use parks and restrooms clean
 - Restore 59 Capital Projects staff and add 60 more so that nearly 100 stalled capital projects can resume, unlocking nearly \$450 million in green space and resiliency investments
 - Add 227 forestry staff to address the backlog of 20,000+ uninspected trees and 35,000+ open work orders
 - Add 130 tradespeople—including plumbers, electricians, carpenters, masons, roofers, and painters—for faster repairs and violation clearing
 - Add 80 dedicated lawn-care positions to keep lawns and playing fields usable
 - Invest \$21.2M to expand hours and services at all 36 recreation centers
- New Yorkers are eager for parks investment. In a recent [New York Times poll](#), a 35,000+ reader majority chose increased funding for parks as their top policy.
- NYC's 30,000 acres of parkland are essential public infrastructure supporting public health, climate resilience, recreation, and quality of life in every neighborhood.
- Our parks system is one of NYC's most important affordable resources, providing free programming and places for neighbors to exercise, play, and commune with nature.
- We urge the Mayor and City Council to restore staffing, invest in park maintenance, and move toward dedicating 1% of the city budget to parks.

I do not understand how the City likes to fund the organizations that pave our streets when there is perfectly good cobblestone underneath and pave our parking lanes. That money at a minimum would be much better served if it went to parks. The City has the money. It just isn't using it very well.

Sincerely,

Ira Gershenhorn
Riverside Drive ###
New York, NY 10025
ira@gershenhorn.com

Good Afternoon, my name is Irena Goldstein. I was raised and currently live in City Council District 39. I come here today as a New Yorker, a union member, and a parks worker.

Right now, the mayor is proposing to cut funding to parks. This means that people who have dedicated their lives to the environmental stewardship in their communities will probably continue receiving paltry wages (\$24/hr!?!). This means that workers will probably continue to have long commutes, because they do not earn enough to live near the parks they maintain. Or, there are not enough parks jobs in their local communities. And, this means that the city will probably not make people, who have seasonal positions funded through Playfair, permanent staff, allowing people to live with job precarity.

From the federal to the local level, when governments need to tighten their budget belts, politicians cut funding to parks. Oftentimes, this is because park labor is invisible to the public. People think working in our public green spaces is cool, niche, and an enjoyable alternative to an office job.

But, these laborers use their bodies to maintain park lands, which are places that boost our mental health, forests to capture carbon, much needed third-places, and wetlands to mitigate the effects of flooding from storms charged by climate-change.

And, who are the gardeners, foresters, and ecologists that labor to sustain these vital green spaces? Think about an oak tree, a maple, a sweetgum. Can you tell the difference between their leaves? Now think about these trees in the winter, when they are bare of foliage. Would you be able to recognize them through their bark and woody structure alone? Could you identify any of our myriad native wild flowers in the early spring to the fall, through their stems, buds, and blooms?

It takes years of working with plants to have this type of specialized knowledge of our native flora. You see, park workers are not just expendable labor chilling in nature, wearing shirts with cool logos on them.

Please do not cut funding to parks, for our communities, for our planet, and for our workers.

My name is Irene Van Slyke and I live in Boerum Hill neighborhood and serve as a member of the board for Brooklyn Queens Land Trust (BQLT), a not for profit organization.

The trust owns 36 community gardens 29 in Brooklyn and 7 in Queens

As you consider the NYC Budget, we urge you to preserve the Greener NYC and Parks Equity Initiatives in the City Budget and the budget of the Green Thumb program in Parks.

BQLT receives funds through these initiatives and they are critical to preserve our community gardens. Gardeners grow various crops that are shared with their families and others in need. We work closely with Green Thumb that provides resources and guidance. Besides growing crops gardens are important open spaces and hubs for education on Climate Change and sustainability in our shared environment. Most gardeners provide composting services to reduce food waste, harvest rain water and build community.

Most of our gardens are located in Brooklyn Community Boards 3, 4, 5, 8, 17 and 18, and

In Queens Community Boards 3, 12 and 13

These are areas with diverse populations with large hispanic, African American, Asian and white residents including immigrant populations with a mix of low and middle income residents.

Thank you

Good morning, My name is Jennifer Seda. I'm proudly reppin' the Bronx—I was born and raised and work in the Bronx. I've been visiting NYC parks my entire life for baby showers, birthday parties, picnics. You name it... I've attended and I love our parks! It's my third space. As mentioned I work in the Bronx, I'm currently serving as the Volunteer Coordinator for the Bronx River Alliance. About The Bronx River Alliance, we work to protect and restore the Bronx River so it can be a healthy, vibrant resource for the communities it flows through. In support of our mission, we help steward eight miles of the Bronx River in partnership with NYC Parks—through cleaning, planting, paddling, and advocacy efforts.

Our communities have long faced disinvestment, and when budgets are cut, we feel it first and worst. We got wind that this year, Parks funding is down by \$33 million. That's a lot of money. We simply cannot afford to lose these jobs or the essential services they provide. Our communities already face so many environmental inequities—we need more safe, clean green spaces, not fewer. We're very proud to engage community volunteers, and we work hard to bring together a strong network of dedicated, passionate, and talented volunteers—people who step up to help fill the gaps left by years and years of budget cuts.

Though Volunteers play a vital role, and we're proud to mobilize them, volunteers cannot replace the trained professionals our parks depend on. Expecting unpaid labor to fill these gaps is not fair, not equitable, and not sustainable.

We are urging the decision makers: Mayor Mamdani and City Council to restore parks staffing, invest in park maintenance, and commit 1% of the city budget to parks. Our communities need it, deserve it and will continue to advocate for nothing less.

Oversight Hearing TESTIMONY

The NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

[hearing about the FY27 City Budget](#)

Monday, March 23rd at 11:30am (public comment starts at 1:30pm).

ALL WRITTEN TESTIMONY DUE By THURSDAY March 26th at 10am.

Register to Testify Here: [Hearing Testimony Registration - New York City Council](#)

Dear NYC Council and Budget Planning Committee

Hello, my name is Joan Reutershan, I've lived in Fort Greene, Brooklyn for 40 years and in NYC for 60. I'm writing to ask that the NY City Council and the Administration work together to deliver on Mayor Mamdani's campaign commitment to double the NYC Parks budget, and ensure full funding for the staff and programs that are critical to the protection, maintenance, and planting efforts that will enable the City to reach its 30% tree canopy goal.

I would like to testify in three capacities, in order of the amount of time I have been working with three organizations devoted to protecting and preserving New York City's Urban Forest, our street trees, backyards and parks.

1. As a member of the Friends of Fort Greene Park

Friends of Fort Greene Park have an urgent suggestion to the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation, the Parks Department and *Forests for All* that will help them/us reach the goal of 30% canopy by 2035: Reconceive the Capital Plan for Fort Greene Park, Northwest corner [Lower Plaza and Sidewalks], which calls for the elimination of 78 trees and greenspace. ***Friends of Fort Greene Park has fought to keep these magnificent mature trees--zelkovas, honey locusts, sycamores, (controlled) maples --and beloved greenspaces for 10 years.*** According to *Forests for All*, in addition to the demonstrated value of capital investment in tree planting, the data make a strong case for the need for maintenance and protection of mature trees. A coarse proximity analysis of tree canopy change suggests that most of the citywide gain in tree canopy from 2017 to 2021 can be **attributed to the growth of existing trees rather than new plantings.** **Friends of Fort Greene Park proposes an alternative plan, which is on our website** [<https://sites.google.com/view/fortgreeneparkrenovation/home>] and [<https://www.friendsoffortgreenepark.org/>]. **It is significantly less expensive and would enable funds to be spent for other environmental justice areas in NYC.**

It makes no sense to spend taxpayer money to raze trees and reduce tree canopy when the City's goal is to expand it. So I and we in Friends of Fort Greene Park call on you to preserve the

continuous grove of mature trees that extends from the NW entrance of Fort Greene Park to the top of the Monument steps: Protect the triangle of interwoven honey locusts shading the bus stop on Myrtle and Saint Edwards; preserve the 11 thriving zelkovas on the steps of the monument in Fort Greene Park, which shade runners, other park users and nurture wildlife; keep the full limb extensions of the London planes, whose branches meet and greet each other like a cathedral but let in enough sun for the greenspace below, do not radically prune them; keep the AE BYE grassy mounds, beloved playground for the community and do NOT replace grass with a hardscape plaza. This grove as it is, is an urban forest, and it is the backyard of the residents of adjacent Walt Whitman and Ingersoll NYCHA houses, as well as my favorite area of the Park, to which I come for an experience of nature in the City. It needs maintenance, but not a redesign. The section of the Capital Plan for Fort Greene Park, which calls for this destruction, originated in a Parks without borders Plan from 2015, which is antiquated and was conceived before the 10 hottest years on record. How can we justify creating unnecessary LOSS of canopy and greenspace?

We have a new administration, a new Parks Commissioner and it is time to rethink this section of the Capital Plan for Fort Greene Park. Given the escalation of climate change, and the challenges it brings to the health and wellbeing of citizens and urban wildlife alike, it is urgent that we keep the resources that we already have, the grove of trees and greenspace and this soul gratifying beauty in the NW area of Fort Greene Park.

2. As a member of the Earth Care Action Group at First Presbyterian Church, 12 West 12th St. NYC

The Earth Care Action Group at The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York is a member of *Forest for All* NYC, a coalition of over 200 organizations committed to helping the city reach 30% tree canopy cover citywide by 2035 in an equitable manner. Our Action Group at First Church has cared for, watered, and mulched new and established street trees and cleaned the 14 tree beds around the Church perimeter for the past 8 years. We purchased three new trees with our own funds, one of them failed after two years despite our consistent care and watering. At considerable expense we purchased another new tree. Others of the older established trees are in troubled condition and we fear they will need more attention than the city can give them at present budget allocations. So we need the full allocations proposed by Mayor Mamdani.

The parks and urban forest matters to First Presbyterian Church because trees are an environmental bedrock for a healthy planet. They provide shade, save energy, absorb water to help prevent flooding, pull carbon dioxide out of the air to help with air pollution, add unlimited beauty to our lives, etc. AND LACK of trees in a neighborhood is a social injustice. The urban forest is essential to the quality of life of all New Yorkers, and NYC Parks plays an invaluable role in caring for a significant portion of our city's trees and green spaces.

3. As a New York City Parks Department "Super Steward."

I have been a NYCDPR Super Steward for 6 years. I participated in their training to help with tree work at the Church and in my neighborhood and at other sites, so I have a stake in the funding and strength of the DPR. NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC, but the Parks staff and programs that support the urban forest have continued to be cut. **The FY27 Preliminary Budget allocation for the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) was slightly decreased from the adopted FY26 budget.** While the overall City budget increased by approximately \$12B, the NYC Parks budget decreased by \$33M from FY26 to FY27, primarily due to a loss of Mayoral one-shot funding that was not carried over from last year. While there are reasons to be hopeful about this year's budget – despite a very tight fiscal environment,

NYC Parks has not yet been hit with drastic cuts – **the Preliminary Budget does not restore NYC Parks to the level of staffing required to care for the NYC urban forest.**

NYC’s first ever Urban Forest Plan, required by Local Law 148 of 2023, released this spring, will chart a path for NYC to equitably expand tree canopy cover to 30% citywide by 2035. Implementing this Plan will require resources! To ensure the plan is successful, the City will need to plant additional trees, but it will also need to baseline existing staff and expand the workforce that protects and maintains trees, as well as invest in workforce development programs, tree nurseries, tree health research and monitoring, wood salvage, and more. NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC.

We call on Council and the Mayor to allocate \$150M to fund the initial implementation of the 10-year Urban Forest Plan, including baselining and expanding NYC Parks forestry staff positions and funding to support other City agencies that will expand tree canopy under their jurisdiction.

We ask that the Budget include approximately \$150 million for:

- Restoration, expansion, and baselining of NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) staff and programs to support ongoing operations and to grow the urban forest:

- Expand NYC Park’s capacity for tree risk management and inspections, including increasing and baselining the number of staff (climbers and pruners, foresters, and related management) and contract funding that are critical for caring for and managing the existing tree canopy across NYC.

- Baseline NYC Parks positions currently funded by one-year contracts (approximately 276 positions including Parks Enforcement Patrol, Urban Forest Rangers, Forestry staff, etc.) to limit turnover and sustain the operational efficiency that come from retaining a stable workforce.

- Provide \$16M in baselined annual funding to fully implement the Forest Management Framework for forested natural areas, including \$2.4M in annual capital funding for large scale restoration and contract work, \$11.2M in baselined expense funding for in-house staff to conduct maintenance and for materials and operating costs, and \$2.4M in baselined expense funding to provide one trails crew per borough supporting the formalization and maintenance of NYC’s nature trail network.

- Increase the number of tree planting staff (via Capital funded Interfund Agreement) to increase the number of street trees planted from just under 18,000 in FY25 to at least 25,000 per year, with the aim of shortening the 9-year Neighborhood Tree Planting Program.

- Increase funding for the trees and sidewalks program, to increase the City’s capacity to respond to damage to sidewalks caused by tree roots.

- \$1M for the Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to support non-NYC Parks agencies tasked with heightened management and expansion of trees in their jurisdictions (such as NYC Housing Authority, Department of Education, the School Construction Authority, Department of Sanitation, Department of Transportation, etc.) in implementing initial actions of the forthcoming NYC Urban Forest Plan. This includes

funding for an updated citywide Lidar remote sensing data capture and analysis to monitor the canopy coverage of the urban forest and measure the growth or loss of tree canopy coverage and track progress towards the 30% goal, as required by Local Law 148 of 2023 to be completed every 5 years.

In addition to these budget requests, there are several staffing-related needs that are essential in rebuilding and expanding the City's urban forest workforce, including:

- Salary increases for the advanced and technical civil service roles like Foresters and Climber & Pruners, to help attract and retain the best candidates to manage the nation's largest urban forest.
- Expansion of City-led workforce training programs, including internal programs to train existing employees and create promotional opportunities like the NYC Parks Climber & Pruner program, as well as programs that bring in new workers to expand overall workforce capacity.
- We commend the Mayor for lifting the hiring freeze and 2-1 hiring ratio, but are disappointed that 100 vacant roles will be eliminated from Parks on top of the 600 positions previously cut since 2023 - effectively resulting in 700 positions being permanently lost. We encourage the Mayor and Council to restore and fill all these positions.

Despite its laudable efforts, NYC Parks is chronically underfunded, particularly for management of the urban forest. It needs baselined and sufficient investment in the regular maintenance of the city's trees. Despite the importance of the urban forest and its perennial needs for stewardship, there is no dedicated, long-term funding for managing NYC's trees in the years ahead. Please vote for the budget required to manage half of the urban forest canopy. It has so many positive effects on our lives, on energy use, and infrastructure. AND it increases SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR ALL!

Respectfully Submitted,

Joan Reutershan

[REDACTED]

Brooklyn NY 11217

To the Committee on Parks and Recreation,

I am an NYC Parks street tree planting forester. I and many of my colleagues are testifying for the Parks preliminary budget meeting, in support of budget increases for the department. This kind of rank-and-file advocacy doesn't happen in the private sector. My colleagues and I all do this because we truly believe in the value this department brings to the people of this city, and we want to keep being able to provide our neighbors with clean and safe parks, well-maintained trees, and beautiful gardens.

We cannot satisfy these needs or feel proud of our jobs without 1% For Parks. This concept has been teased over our heads for years and used as a weapon in every mayoral campaign. But the true budget continues to languish at an uncertain, approximate 0.6%.

I have friends whose jobs are on the budget chopping block every year while we wait for Play Fair funding to be renewed. The question of whether they will still have a job every July causes no end of pain and stress, while they continue to maintain the park trails that City residents walk and hike every single day. 1% For Parks would go towards making their roles permanent, so that we can retain the institutional knowledge that makes them so good at their jobs.

Our parks are in an abysmal state. The bathrooms are constantly closed or too dirty to use, even though they make up the bulk of the public restrooms available in the city. Equipment is often broken, invasive species decimate the greenery, and trashcans overflow. Meanwhile, capital funding goes to building even more parks that we cannot keep up with maintaining. 1% For Parks would fund more maintenance crews to keep our parks functional for the communities they serve.

In addition, we have a backlog of forestry service requests and work orders, without the necessary staff to handle them. The city pays thousands of dollars in settlements towards property damage caused by trees or branches falling that could have been avoided with a timely removal or pruning. 1% For Parks would fund new lines for foresters and climber-pruners so that the City can address problematic trees before they cost the City money.

Thank you for your time!

Jules Au-Hart

Preliminary Budget Hearing - Parks and Recreation

Monday, March 23, 2026

Justin Czarka, Teacher

Thank you to Chairman Tyrell Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Justin Czarka , and I am a member of the South Bronx Schoolyard Garden and Outdoor Classroom

(<https://sites.google.com/view/sci-wiki-tific/gardening/garden-news>) located in the Hunts Point section of The Bronx.

This is an NYCDOE school garden in existence for over 15 years that I helped found to provide outdoor access to students at our public school, PS 48. Our garden, South Bronx Schoolyard Garden and Outdoor Classroom (<https://sites.google.com/view/sci-wiki-tific/gardening/garden-news>), has a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our neighborhood.

- The recently released preliminary budget has allocated less than 1% of the total city budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation. Our school garden relies on the programming, materials, and technical support provided by community garden groups, crucially GreenThumb.
- This leaves GreenThumb facing budget constraints. Restore the previously allocated \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.
- Gardens need to be recognized as an essential public asset, they need to be protected from development.
- Introduce legislation to permanently protect all NYC community gardens on city-owned land from rezoning and development.
- Allocate **\$300,000 through the Parks Equity Initiative** for direct funding to gardens
- Fund community-based organizations to distribute resources equitably
- Invest in **A Greener NYC** to create green jobs for youth and support environmental education and advocacy in gardens.
- Strengthen the Get Stuff Clean Initiative to combat rodent infestations and illegal dumping in and around gardens by:
 - Increasing DSNY and DOHMH support for gardens.
 - Expanding access to Rat Academy training and sanitation services.

Thank you,

Justin Czarka

South Bronx Schoolyard Garden and Outdoor Classroom, PS 48x

<https://sites.google.com/view/sci-wiki-tific/gardening/garden-news>

My name is Kasha Pazdar. I am a parks worker, a DC37 member, and a resident of City Council District 35. Thank you for receiving my testimony today. I ask this council to baseline the Playfair Urban Park Rangers and all other parks playfair workers.

I worked as an Urban Park Ranger in the Bronx for 4 years. For the first two years, I was in a Playfair funded line. I did the same job as a civil service ranger, but I did not have the same benefits or rights. I was not paid for holidays for 18 months, could not sign up for the pension, and faced delays in signing up for health insurance.

In my 4 years with the Rangers, I noticed that each April, workplace morale and productivity would suffer as Playfair staff began to apply for other jobs. Massive amounts of institutional knowledge are being lost each year this way. Many of the best, brightest, and hardworking rangers would leave city service because they could not count on a job to be there in July. It is stressful to experience that for one fiscal cycle, and it is demoralizing to experience it for many years.

It is not just an injustice to these workers. The public suffers when program managers can't plan for a season because they don't know what their staffing will look like. The instability of Playfair funding had a direct impact on the Urban Park Rangers' ability to plan and book educational and recreational programming, resulting in fewer canoeing, history, hiking, fishing, bird watching, and camping programs for the public.

I know that what I share here is echoed by many of my colleagues working in stewardship, in trail maintenance, in forestry, and in other areas of Parks. If the Parks department is going to deliver on its promises, then the mayor and city council need to deliver on their promise for a well-funded Parks department. I ask all of this committee to baseline all Playfair positions to help achieve these goals. Thank you very much for your time.

Testimony Submitted to FY27 Preliminary Budget – Parks

My name is Katherine Fritts. I moved to New York City in 1987 to work for the New York City Parks Department. After two years, I left the Parks Department to go to law school in NYC and have spent the better part of my career and adult life in NYC. My husband and I have owned our home in Washington Heights for more than 20 years. I walk in Highbridge Park every day. I am on the Board of the Natural Areas Conservancy (NAC), which champions and protects NYC's 20K acres of forests and wetlands, serving as the Treasurer, and am on the Executive Committee, the Audit and Finance Committee and the Program Committee.

I love living in NYC because of the daily intellectual and cultural stimulation that this diverse City provides. I am also a lover of nature and the out of doors. I am quite sure I would not have remained in NYC all these years if the parks, including the natural areas, were not available. I believe most New Yorkers feel the same way.

Given our parks cover more than 40 percent of NYC, provide physical and mental health benefits to all New Yorkers, and are an important part of NYC's resilience in the face of climate change, I find it a disgrace that the current Parks budget is approximately .5% of NYC's \$127B FY 27 budget.

My asks include:

- Provide **\$16M in baselined annual funding to fully implement the Forest Management Framework** for forested natural areas, including \$2.4M in annual capital funding for large scale restoration and contract work, \$11.2M in baselined expense funding for in-house staff to conduct maintenance and for materials and operating costs, and \$2.4M in baselined expense funding to provide one trails crew per borough supporting the formalization and maintenance of NYC's nature trail network.
- Save and make permanent 50 Urban Park Ranger positions set to expire in June. We cannot expect to have a world-class NYC workforce if positions are funded year to year. Most people desire and require a job that has more consistency.
- Fund the implementation of the forthcoming Urban Forest Plan to help increase the canopy cover of NYC from 23.4% to 30% citywide.

As a resident of Washington Heights, it is imperative that we increase the number of our Parks employees. Our Parks employees are working very hard, but our Upper Manhattan parks are still not maintained at the level of parks in other NYC neighborhoods. Our Upper Manhattan parks need additional Parks Department employees.

I want to thank all elected New York City officials and all NYC employees for the tremendous work they do every day to make this City great. My comments here reflect my passion for NYC and making it even better for all! Thank you.

Katherine H. Fritts

[REDACTED]

New York, NY 10032

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Oversight Hearing TESTIMONY

The NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

[hearing about the FY27 City Budget](#)

Monday, March 23rd at 11:30am (public comment starts at 1:30pm).

ALL WRITTEN TESTIMONY DUE By THURSDAY March 26th at 10am.

Register to Testify Here: [Hearing Testimony Registration - New York City Council](#)

Dear NYC Council and Budget Planning Committee

Hi, my name is Kathie Young and my organization, The Earth Care Action Group at The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York is a member of Forest for All NYC, a coalition of over 200 organizations committed to helping the city reach 30% tree canopy cover citywide by 2035 in an equitable manner.

The parks and urban forest matters to my organization/community because trees are the environmental bedrock for a healthy planet. They provide shade, save energy, absorb water to help prevent flooding, pull carbon dioxide out of the air to help with air pollution, add unlimited beauty to our lives, etc. AND LACK of trees in a neighborhood is a social injustice.

The urban forest is essential to the quality of life of all New Yorkers, and NYC Parks plays an invaluable role in caring for a significant portion of our city's trees and green spaces.

NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC, but the Parks staff and programs that support the urban forest have continued to be cut.

The FY27 Preliminary Budget allocation for the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) was slightly decreased from the adopted FY26 budget. While the overall City budget increased by approximately \$12B, the NYC Parks budget decreased by \$33M from FY26 to FY27, primarily due to a loss of Mayoral one-shot funding that was not carried over from last year. While there are reasons to be hopeful about this year's budget – despite a very tight fiscal environment, NYC Parks has not yet been hit with drastic cuts – **the Preliminary Budget does not restore NYC Parks to the level of staffing required to care for the NYC urban forest.**

The benefits of parks and trees are endless, you get so much bang for your buck when you manage and take care of trees and park property properly, and for that we need a larger budget. But just think about all of the other expenses, like energy that will go down.

We ask that Council and the Administration work together to deliver on Mayor

Mamdani's campaign commitment to double the NYC Parks budget, and ensure full funding for the staff and programs that are critical to the protection, maintenance, and planting efforts that will enable the City to reach its 30% tree canopy goal.

- My organization- The Earth Care Action Group of The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York is a member of the Forest for All NYC coalition which seeks to justly and equitably protect, maintain, expand and promote the NYC urban forest.
- The urban forest matters to my organization/community because the urban forest is essential to the quality of life of all New Yorkers. The shade, beauty, and water retention are just a few positive facts of trees and the life of Parks.
- NYC's first ever Urban Forest Plan, required by Local Law 148 of 2023, will be released this spring and chart a path for NYC to equitably expand tree canopy cover to 30% citywide. Implementing this Plan will require resources! To ensure the plan is successful, the City will need to plant additional trees, but it will also need to baseline existing staff and expand the workforce that protects and maintains trees, as well as invest in workforce development programs, tree nurseries, tree health research and monitoring, wood salvage, and more.
- **NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC, but the Parks staff and programs that support the urban forest have continued to be cut.**
- We call on Council and the Mayor to allocate \$150M to fund the initial implementation of the 10-year Urban Forest Plan, including baselining and expanding NYC Parks forestry staff positions and funding to support other City agencies that will expand tree canopy under their jurisdiction.

We ask that the Budget include approximately \$150 million for:

- Restoration, expansion, and baselining of NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) staff and programs to support ongoing operations and to grow the urban forest:
 - Expand NYC Park's capacity for tree risk management and inspections, including increasing and baselining the number of staff (climbers and pruners, foresters, and related management) and contract funding that are critical for caring for and managing the existing tree canopy across NYC.
 - Baseline NYC Parks positions currently funded by one-year contracts (approximately 276 positions including Parks Enforcement Patrol, Urban Forest Rangers, Forestry staff, etc.) to limit turnover and sustain the operational efficiency that come from retaining a stable workforce.
 - Provide \$16M in baselined annual funding to fully implement the Forest

Management Framework for forested natural areas, including \$2.4M in annual capital funding for large scale restoration and contract work, \$11.2M in baselined expense funding for in-house staff to conduct maintenance and for materials and operating costs, and \$2.4M in baselined expense funding to provide one trails crew per borough supporting the formalization and maintenance of NYC's nature trail network.

- o Increase the number of tree planting staff (via Capital funded Interfund Agreement) to increase the number of street trees planted from just under 18,000 in FY25 to at least 25,000 per year, with the aim of shortening the 9-year Neighborhood Tree Planting Program.

- o Increase funding for the trees and sidewalks program, to increase the City's capacity to respond to damage to sidewalks caused by tree roots.

- \$1M for the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to support non-NYC Parks agencies tasked with heightened management and expansion of trees in their jurisdictions (such as NYC Housing Authority, Department of Education, the School Construction Authority, Department of Sanitation, Department of Transportation, etc.) in implementing initial actions of the forthcoming NYC Urban Forest Plan. This includes funding for an updated citywide Lidar remote sensing data capture and analysis to monitor the canopy coverage of the urban forest and measure the growth or loss of tree canopy coverage and track progress towards the 30% goal, as required by Local Law 148 of 2023 to be completed every 5 years.

In addition to these budget requests, there are several staffing-related needs that are essential in rebuilding and expanding the City's urban forest workforce, including:

- Salary increases for the advanced and technical civil service roles like Foresters and Climber & Pruners, to help attract and retain the best candidates to manage the nation's largest urban forest.

- Expansion of City-led workforce training programs, including internal programs to train existing employees and create promotional opportunities like the NYC Parks Climber & Pruner program, as well as programs that bring in new workers to expand overall workforce capacity.

- We commend the Mayor for lifting the hiring freeze and 2-1 hiring ratio, but are disappointed that 100 vacant roles will be eliminated from Parks on top of the 600 positions previously cut since 2023 - effectively resulting in 700 positions being permanently lost. We encourage the Mayor and Council to restore and fill all these positions.

Additional background:

- The City of New York is required by Local Law 148 of 2023 to equitably expand tree

canopy cover to reach 30% citywide, and the forthcoming NYC Urban Forest Plan will chart a path to reach that goal.

- To ensure the plan is successful, the City will need to plant additional trees, but it will also need to baseline existing staff and expand the workforce that protects and maintains trees, as well as invest in workforce development programs, tree nurseries, tree health research and monitoring, wood salvage, and more.

- The urban forest helps cool the city - reducing energy bills and decreasing heat-related public health risks. These investments can also help the Mayor meet his goals of improving livability and quality of life in NYC.

- In 2021, Forest for All NYC set the goal of achieving “30x35” in the NYC Urban Forest Agenda – 30% tree canopy cover equitably distributed across NYC by 2035. The NYC urban forest cools the air, offers shady respite from heat, sequesters carbon, increases energy efficiency, and contributes to New Yorkers’ health and wellbeing, and yet it does not serve New Yorkers equitably.

- Forest for All NYC has over 200 member organizations from the non-profit, government, and business sectors.

- The NYC urban forest is composed of all 7 million trees in the city, and the physical and social infrastructure that support them. It spans public and private property and every neighborhood in NYC - from street trees to private backyards to city parks.

- NYC Parks manages 53.5% of the total urban forest canopy in the city.

- Despite its laudable efforts, NYC Parks is chronically underfunded, particularly for management of the urban forest. It needs baselined and sufficient investment in the regular maintenance of the urban forest.

- Despite the importance of the urban forest and its perennial needs for stewardship, there is no dedicated, long-term funding for managing NYC’s trees in the years ahead.

Please, please, please vote for the budget required to manage half of the urban forest canopy. It has so many positive effects on our lives, on energy use, and n infrastructure. AND it is SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR ALL!

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathie Young

[REDACTED]

NYC, NY 10011

Preliminary Budget Hearing - Parks and Recreation

Monday, March 23, 2026 - Written Testimony

Kim Belk, President Brooklyn's Finest Garden

Thank you to Chairman Tyrell Hankerson and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Kim Belk, and I am a member of Brooklyn's Finest Garden located in Clinton Hill and have been for several years. Last year I was elected president of the garden and couldn't be more excited to continue stewarding this garden that has been in existence on one form or another for several decades. Our garden has a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our neighborhood.

I joined the garden because I wanted to feel more connected to where I live—and what I found was so much more than a green space.

Before getting involved, I didn't really know my neighbors outside of my building. The garden changed that. It gave me a way to build relationships, work alongside people on my block, and feel like part of a real community. That kind of connection is hard to create, and once you have it, you realize how essential it is.

Our garden doesn't just exist within its fence—it extends into the neighborhood. We work closely with our local block association, which covers a 6-block area, helping with things like cleaning up tree beds, planting bulbs, and maintaining shared spaces. The result is not just a beautiful garden, but a more cared-for and connected neighborhood overall.

That's why I'm asking you to invest in and protect community gardens.

Right now, less than 1% of the city's budget is allocated to the Department of Parks and Recreation. That lack of funding directly impacts programs like GreenThumb, which so many gardens rely on. I urge the Council to restore the previously allocated \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb so gardens can continue to thrive.

Community gardens should also be recognized as essential public assets. They are not empty lots waiting for development—they are active, cared-for spaces that bring people together. I support legislation to permanently protect all community gardens on city-owned land from rezoning and development.

In addition, I support allocating \$300,000 through the Parks Equity Initiative to provide direct funding to gardens, and ensuring those resources are distributed equitably through community-based organizations.

Gardens are also powerful spaces for youth engagement and workforce development. Continued investment in A Greener NYC can create meaningful opportunities for young people while strengthening environmental education and stewardship.

Finally, we need stronger support around sanitation and public health. Expanding the Get Stuff Clean initiative—including increased support from DSNY and DOHMH, and better access to Rat Academy training—will help gardens address challenges like illegal dumping and rodent control, which affect not just the gardens but the surrounding community. I know last year the support we received decimated the rats that we were fighting in our garden, which has minimized their presence on the block as well!

For me, this is personal. The garden helped me get to know my neighbors, feel invested in my block, and be part of something bigger. These spaces build community in a way that few other things can.

I hope you will support and invest in them accordingly.

Kim Belk

Brooklyn's Finest Garden

My name is Lorraine Forte and I am a member of two gardens in the lower Manhattan area. One is food waste recycling center that has kept this notion alive in the community for over 15 years. The city has gone on and off with it and keep it as a “habit” is important for a program to catch on and become policy. Our waste is turned into microbial rich soil that is free and used by other gardens and nearby Tomkins Square Park.

The sanity factor of a green space along with the many other more stressful happenings of a crowded and commercial environment should not be overlooked. This became more poignantly apparent during COVID. As well as the importance of our gardens to a person’s individual experience they serve as places of collective positive action for communities. All Green Thumb gardens are required to produce activities for the communities they are in.

The population of New York continues to grow and the fabric of neighborhoods continues to decline. Green spaces are the last bastion of hope for maintaining a New York that is defined by neighborhoods instead of development.

My neighborhood has become a dormitory for students so much of it has become transient. The gardens are places for these young people to become familiar with the idea of “neighborhood” and encounter people and practices that inform them about nature, the environment, and the importance of participating.

- Please introduce legislation to permanently protect all NYC community gardens on city-owned land from rezoning and development.
- Please dedicate 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

-Lorraine Forte



New York, NY 10009

Libraries are the backbone of our communities. Safe spaces for people outside of their homes are dwindling, and libraries are one of our last hopes to maintain accessible, public third spaces. Sustained funding is essential for stable infrastructure and library services. In addition to the essential reading materials and public programming they offer, the NYC library systems are critical civic infrastructure. As extreme weather intensifies and free and open spaces become vanishingly rare, they offer valuable public space that is needed now more than ever. While the expansion of seven-day service will absolutely help communities who don't yet have it, we take seriously the concerns of library union locals that represent library staff, who warn that already underpaid workers are stretched beyond their job descriptions just to meet regular six-day service demands.

I strongly support the union's call for higher wages and the hiring of more workers to correct this before seven-day service is expanded. I demand increased funding, and will continue to act and organize for the future of our library systems. Our libraries deserve more than stagnation – they deserve our enthusiastic and material support.

NYC PLAN continues to demand that at least one-half of 1% (0.50%) of the total New York City expense budget be committed to our library systems, both now and in the future, and I support their demands. The current Fiscal Year '26 funding is only .45% of the total expense budget, so an increase to .50% would mean an additional \$56.4 million for our libraries. This is a realistic but significant number which will allow libraries to better serve NYC.

March 19, 2026
FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing | New York City Council Parks Committee

Submitted by Marta Teegen, Brooklyn Resident

Good afternoon Chair Hankerson and Members of the Parks Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

For the past five years, I have served as a volunteer gardener in Fort Greene Park in Brooklyn. Over that time, I have seen firsthand how essential our parks are to the daily life of our neighborhoods—and how increasingly difficult it has become for Parks staff to maintain them with the resources currently available.

New York City's 30,000 acres of parkland are critical public infrastructure. They support public health, climate resilience, recreation, and quality of life in every neighborhood. Parks are also one of the city's most accessible and affordable resources, offering free spaces where New Yorkers can exercise, gather, and connect with nature.

Despite their importance, the FY27 Preliminary Budget continues a pattern of underinvestment.

The Mayor's proposed budget for NYC Parks is \$33 million less than the FY26 Adopted Budget and does not restore funding after four consecutive years of cuts. It maintains the status quo rather than putting Parks on a path toward receiving 1% of the city budget—a commitment that has already been made.

At the same time, the budget eliminates 100 Parks staffing lines as a condition of ending the hiring freeze. This comes on top of approximately 600 staffing lines cut since 2023, further limiting the agency's ability to rebuild its workforce. It also fails to secure the 276 Parks workers currently funded through one-year City Council allocations, leaving their positions—and the services they provide—at risk.

The impact of these cuts is already visible. Parks staff are stretched thin, and basic services are suffering. Currently, only 65% of parks meet the agency's own maintenance standards.

To ensure a safe, functional, and well-maintained parks system, the City must make targeted investments in staffing and operations, including:

- Adding 460 second-shift workers to maintain cleanliness in 400 high-use parks and restrooms
- Restoring 59 capital projects staff and adding 60 more to restart nearly 100 stalled projects, unlocking approximately \$450 million in green space and resiliency investments
- Adding 227 forestry staff to address a backlog of more than 20,000 uninspected trees and 35,000 open work orders
- Hiring 130 skilled tradespeople—including plumbers, electricians, carpenters, masons, roofers, and painters—to accelerate repairs and address violations
- Adding 80 dedicated lawn-care staff to maintain playing fields and green spaces
- Investing \$21.2 million to expand hours and services across all 36 recreation centers

Our parks cannot function without the people who care for them.

I urge the Mayor and the City Council to restore staffing, invest meaningfully in park maintenance and operations, and move toward dedicating 1% of the city budget to NYC Parks. Without these investments, we risk further erosion of a system that millions of New Yorkers rely on every day.

Thank you for your consideration.

Oversight Hearing TESTIMONY

The NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation

[hearing about the FY27 City Budget](#)

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ALL WRITTEN TESTIMONY DUE By THURSDAY March 26th at 10am.

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Dear NYC Council and Budget Planning Committee

Hi, my name is [Meg Harper](#) and my organization, The Earth Care Action Group at The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York is a member of Forest for All NYC, a coalition of over 200 organizations committed to helping the city reach 30% tree canopy cover citywide by 2035 in an equitable manner.

The parks and urban forest matters to my organization/community because trees are the environmental bedrock for a healthy planet. They provide shade, save energy, absorb water to help prevent flooding, pull carbon dioxide out of the air to help with air pollution, add unlimited beauty to our lives, etc. AND LACK of trees in a neighborhood is a social injustice.

The urban forest is essential to the quality of life of all New Yorkers, and NYC Parks plays an invaluable role in caring for a significant portion of our city's trees and green spaces.

NYC Parks is responsible for the care of more than half of all tree canopy in NYC, but the Parks staff and programs that support the urban forest have continued to be cut.

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The benefits of parks and trees are endless, you get so much bang for your buck when you manage and take care of trees and park property properly, and for that we need a larger budget. But just think about all of the other expenses, like energy that will go down.

We ask that Council and the Administration work together to deliver on Mayor Mamdani's campaign commitment to double the NYC Parks budget, and ensure full funding for the staff and programs that are critical to the protection, maintenance, and planting efforts that will enable the City to reach its 30% tree canopy goal.

- My organization- The Earth Care Action Group of The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York is a member of the Forest for All NYC coalition which seeks to justly and equitably protect, maintain, expand and promote the NYC urban forest.

- The urban forest matters to my organization/community because the urban forest is essential to the quality of life of all New Yorkers. The shade, beauty, and water retention are just a few positive facts of trees and the life of Parks.

- NYC's first ever Urban Forest Plan, required by Local Law 148 of 2023, will be released this spring and chart a path for NYC to equitably expand tree canopy cover to 30% citywide. Implementing this Plan will require resources! To ensure the plan is successful, the City will need to plant additional trees, but it will also need to baseline existing staff and expand the workforce that protects and maintains trees, as well as invest in workforce development programs, tree nurseries, tree health research and monitoring, wood salvage, and more.

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- We call on Council and the Mayor to allocate \$150M to fund the initial implementation of the 10-year Urban Forest Plan, including baselining and expanding NYC Parks forestry staff positions and funding to support other City agencies that will expand tree canopy under their jurisdiction.

We ask that the Budget include approximately \$150 million for:

- Restoration, expansion, and baselining of NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (NYC Parks) staff and programs to support ongoing operations and to grow the urban forest:

- Expand NYC Park's capacity for tree risk management and inspections, including increasing and baselining the number of staff (climbers and pruners, foresters, and related management) and contract funding that are critical for caring for and managing the existing tree canopy across NYC.

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In addition to these budget requests, there are several staffing-related needs that are essential in rebuilding and expanding the City's urban forest workforce, including:

- Salary increases for the advanced and technical civil service roles like Foresters and Climber & Pruners, to help attract and retain the best candidates to manage the nation's largest urban forest.

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- We commend the Mayor for lifting the hiring freeze and 2-1 hiring ratio, but are disappointed that 100 vacant roles will be eliminated from Parks on top of the 600 positions previously cut since 2023 - effectively resulting in 700 positions being permanently lost. We encourage the Mayor and Council to restore and fill all these positions.

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- Despite its laudable efforts, NYC Parks is chronically underfunded, particularly for management of the urban forest. It needs baselined and sufficient investment in the regular maintenance of the urban forest.

- Despite the importance of the urban forest and its perennial needs for stewardship, there is no dedicated, long-term funding for managing NYC’s trees in the years ahead.

Please, please, please vote for the budget required to manage half of the urban forest canopy. It has so many positive effects on our lives, on energy use, and infrastructure. AND it is SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR ALL!

Respectfully Submitted,

Meg Harper



Brooklyn, NY 11217

I've lived in New York City all my life and had the benefit of enjoying our public parks for recreation and for mental health. For the past 6 years I have been an active volunteer at Prospect Park and I see firsthand how underfunded it is. Even with active volunteers like myself, the Prospect Park Alliance is struggling to keep up with the daily usage as well as restoring damage after the numerous storms and fires. Cutting the already stretched parks budget is unacceptable and a theft of New Yorkers' wellbeing and only access to natural beauty and free open communal meeting places.

The parks budget should be expanded, not cut. Mamdani's preliminary budget is a cut of \$33 million dollars from \$687 million last year under former Mayor Eric Adams to just \$654 million. He promised 1% to parks, and so have many politicians in the past, it's time to deliver. With a budget of roughly \$127 billion, that means we need \$1.2 billion for the parks department, and they should get every penny. We deserve more from our tax dollars, and every single New Yorker benefits from parks, so fund them adequately at 1% of the budget this year and every year.

Michael Cheung



City Council Hearing 2026-03-23

Hearing Testimony: Monday March 23, 2026 @ 11:30am, Committee on Parks and Recreation
Michelle Catania



Funding Parks for this Year and Beyond

Parks are New York City's backyard. In a city where it is a hustle to survive with limited real estate, parks truly allow the people to live, but that can only happen with the staff and funds to maintain these vital greenspaces. That is why I implore the City Council to not only fund the PlayFair lines, but to also work toward baselining these positions. Millions of children flood the playgrounds after school each day. New Yorkers take refuge in the green trails in the middle of the concrete jungle. Schools get an opportunity to learn about the ecosystems and histories that surround them. And as spring and summer approach, everyone will flock to these safe and clean parks to spend time with their family, friends and neighbors. Behind all of that are the Gardeners, Maintenance and Operation workers, Parks Enforcement Patrol officers, and Rangers that make this all possible.

Yet every June, these Parks workers and the city they serve wait with bated breath as to whether or not the workers will continue to work. It is honestly heartbreaking to witness firsthand. Parks workers are thrown into a lurch and desperately seek other more stable jobs, despite wanting to stay and serve this city. It is wholly unfair. Not to mention the members of the public that will surely suffer as their Parks fall into disarray. I ask that the City Council do what is fair for their constituents and vote to continue the PlayFair funding. And beyond that, I fully hope that the City Council sees the true value of Parks workers and work toward dedicating 1% of the city budget toward NYC Parks and baselining every position that is currently PlayFair. Thank you for your time, and I am ever hopeful and optimistic that the City Council will fund NYC Parks.

I've lived in New York City for over 10 years, and I've been lucky enough to live all of them as a neighbor to Prospect Park. My neighborhood park is my only outdoor space in the city, I don't have a backyard or even a fire escape, but I have Prospect Park, and all year round it is a space I can use to walk, meet up with friends, view the cherry blossoms, and for the last three years, care for with my own hands as an ecozone volunteer.

It is not an exaggeration to say Prospect Park is important to my mental and emotional health and my quality of life in the city. It is a necessary public good that I want everyone to enjoy and benefit from, but it's best enjoyed when the trash is collected regularly, when the fences are repaired so dogs don't get stranded in the lullwater, when the paths are plowed after snowstorms, and when trees are maintained so they don't hurt anyone after storms.

Parks require workers, maintenance, supplies, and care and all require money that is sadly lacking. Cutting the already stretched parks budget is unacceptable and a theft of new yorkers' wellbeing and only access to natural beauty and free open communal meeting places.

The parks budget should be expanded, not cut. Mamdani's preliminary budget is a cut of \$33 million dollars from \$687 million last year under former Mayor Eric Adams to just \$654 million. He promised 1% to parks, and so have many politicians in the past, it's time to deliver. With a budget of roughly \$127 billion, that means we need \$1.2 billion for the parks department, and they should get every penny. We deserve more from our tax dollars, and every single New Yorker benefits from parks, so fund them adequately at 1% of the budget this year and every year.

Natalie McGarry



City Council Hearing 2026-03-23

Testimony of PATRICIA CARO for Additional Funding for NYC Parks

My name is Patricia Caro. I live in AD 28.

I am speaking in support of additional funding for NYC Parks and for the Natural Areas they contain.

I am a recently retired Professor of Geography. And for the past two years I have been a volunteer steward in Forest Park, where my fellow stewards and I spend hours every week mostly removing invasive species, planting native ones, and maintaining trails.

I would like to speak about the economic benefit of trees. As you know, the trees of NYC are its primary lungs. Keeping them and the understory plants healthy slows down the effects of climate change. They also create a space where summer temperatures are regularly 5-10 degrees F cooler than elsewhere nearby. And during periods of heavy rainfall, they allow the ground to absorb water and keep it from flooding nearby built-up areas, which is critical since the sewers of NYC are often *incapable* of moving *both wastewater and floodwater* to safe locations.

According to the Arbor Day Foundation, **every dollar** invested in street and park trees in NY returns **\$5.60**. About *half* of the benefit comes from reduced need for **energy** (electricity and/or gas), almost *one-fifth each* from **air quality improvement** and **increased property values**, and *one-sixth* from **stormwater management**.

The *annual* benefit of a *single* tree in NYC ranges from roughly \$100 to \$400. As a tree grows larger, its value increases. A medium-size red oak yields an overall annual benefit of about \$233.

As a volunteer steward, I know that keeping *invasive species from preventing or stunting the growth of trees* requires *constant* effort, and volunteers contribute only a tiny fraction of what is needed.

Given the Trump Administration's revocation of *federal* measures to combat environmental and climate change, efforts to keep areas *sustainable, safe, and affordable* falls *even more heavily than before* at the **local** level. Please raise the funding for NYC Parks. The payoff will be significant. And that's without adding in the priceless benefit of creating beautiful spaces in our city where people of all stripes really do relax and smile at one another.

Thank you for your time.

My name is Rafael Cruz and I'm a lover of parks. I see firsthand how more funding for Parks in general, and the work of Playfair employees in particular, make this city run.

Playfair Parkies compose a large section of the workforce and do everything from opening key facilities, beautifying our green spaces, to leading education tours on places like Hart Island.

The Parks Dept already does so much with so little. If playfair is not renewed, the effects will be felt acutely by other Parks staff and most importantly by the public.

Keep our parks funded, New Yorkers need these spaces to learn, play, relax, and build community. Our playfair Parkies are essential to making that vision a reality for so many of us.

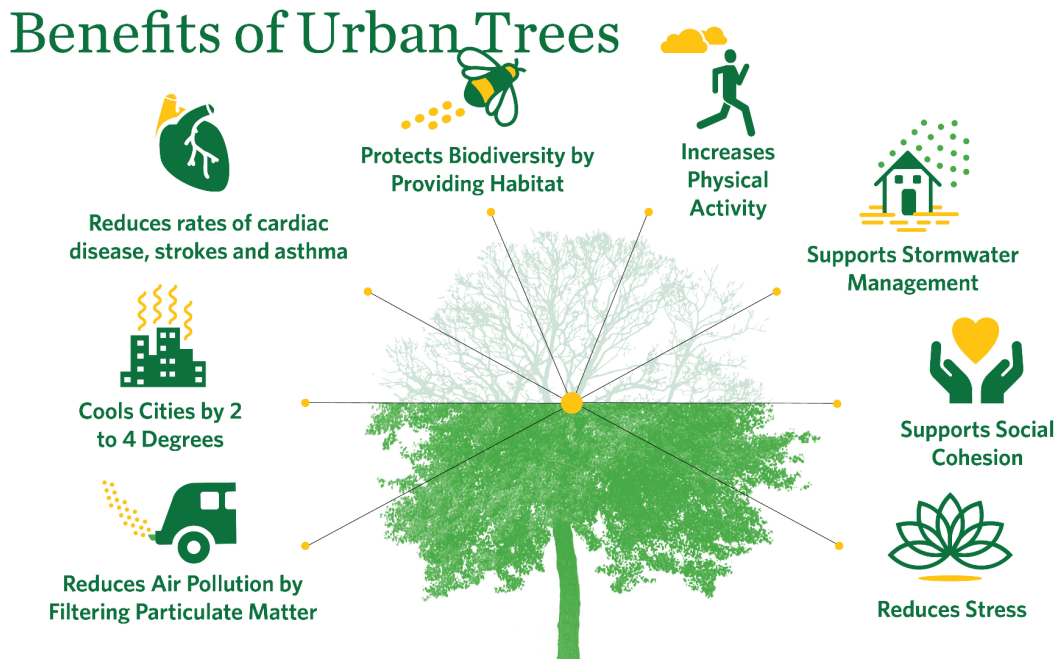
My name is Sarah Baybeck and I am writing in support of NYC Parks receiving the full Play Fair funding for the FY27 city budget and the allocation of 1% of the city budget to Parks. I find peace in the park on my daily bikes and walks and depend on parks as a free space to gather and build community, like my queer birding group that meets weekly in Prospect Park and visit parks all round Brooklyn.

Parks are a vital part of building an affordable and sustainable New York and for too long have been forced to provide too many benefits to New Yorkers with too small of a budget. Playfair Parkies compose a large section of the Parks workforce and keep our green spaces open, clean, and welcoming, and without Playfair funding renewed, Parkies and the public will feel the burden.

Keep our Parks funded. New Yorkers need these spaces to learn, play, relax, and build community. Our Playfair Parkies are essential to making that vision a reality for so many of us.

Hello All:

I am writing in support of robust funding for NYC's parks. The preservation and stewardship of the city's 7000 acres of forest is critical to the health and well being of citizens and all the birds and other animals who reside in these forests. The Nature Conservancy aptly explains how:



Trees provide shade and relief from the heat island effect brought on by climate change. Parks are a source of habitat for native plants, birds and wildlife and give joy to all who use them.

Urban forests, though resilient, are not invincible. I recently learned that invasive species are on a rise in our parks. They steal nutrients from the soil and threaten the life span of trees. More funding for our parks would enable them to plant more trees, and protect and restore forests.

I urge you to vote for generous funding for all our parks to help our planet and to ensure that they exist for future generations.

Thank you,
Sharon Waskow

Oral Testimony

March 23rd 2026

Thank you Chairman Tyrell Hankerson, my district council member for myself and my garden, as well as the members of the committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Sonia Ferraro, I've been a community gardener for over 40 years and I am a GreenThumb gardener for 12 years. I am the founder and Leader of Paradise Community Garden NY located in Jamaica, Queens. Paradise has a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our community.

As a member of the Green Guerillas Council Of Gardeners, I want to express my support for the policy initiatives that have been uplifted today.

In addition, I would like to amplify the needs of community gardens. In particular the much needed infrastructure upgrades and repairs are vital to ensure that gardens are also safe for the seniors who steward them.

Many community gardens across New York City remain inaccessible to people with disabilities, limiting who can fully participate in and benefit from these vital green spaces. To ensure equity and inclusion, gardens should be equipped with ADA-compliant infrastructure, including accessible driveways/street cuts, as well as safe, navigable pathways throughout the garden. Gardeners like myself need designated handicap parking on the street of the garden.

Therefore, additional funding to agencies like Greenthumb and organizations like Green Guerillas is very important. Community gardeners have felt firsthand the effects of the reduced funding.

I urge each council member to visit community gardens in their districts to hear our needs and walk alongside each gardener to better understand the needs of community gardeners.

Thank you, once again, for the opportunity to share with you 40 years of experience.

Sonia Ferraro
Paradise Community Garden NY
[REDACTED] Inwood St
Jamaica NY 11435
[REDACTED]

My name is Theodore Cohen and I'm a lover of parks. I see firsthand how more funding for Parks in general, and the work of Playfair employees in particular, make this city run.

Playfair Parkies compose a large section of the workforce and do everything from opening key facilities, beautifying our green spaces, to leading education tours on places like Hart Island.

The Parks Dept already does so much with so little. If playfair is not renewed, the effects will be felt acutely by other Parks staff and most importantly by the public.

Keep our parks funded, New Yorkers need these spaces to learn, play, relax, and build community. Our playfair Parkies are essential to making that vision a reality for so many of us.

Greetings,

My name is Victoria Mezik and I am an Urban Park Ranger in the Bronx, an environmental educator and interpreter, a civil servant, and a New Yorker. I am writing to state my shared visions and beliefs for the best of New York City's human infrastructure.

For generations, New Yorkers have needed parks for generations—as a place to gather for celebration, solemnity, solidarity, and sacredness. Humanity has hope when we value knowledge, access to resources, and the collective community.

Historically, many now-public parks were used for cemeteries, and intimate burial of loved ones; evolving as the city's population boomed, becoming allocated green spaces for recreation, relaxation, peace, demonstration of rights, sportsmanship, and creating family memories.

The upkeep of these vital places cannot be maintained without resources—bathrooms, fitness centers, benches, trash cans—and these structures must have a steady and continuous workforce.

Playfair employees are a significant part of our workforce, yet, they do not have the same rights, securities, and access to career growth as a provisional or civil service employee like myself.

Keep Playfair funded, and make them baseline city employees. Keep the parks accessible, clean, safe—for today and for your children's children. We owe it to ourselves as New Yorkers.

Thank you,

Victoria A. Mezik
Crotona Park Ranger

New York City Council
Legislative Oversight Hearing: Intro. 0577 - Trails Formalization
Committee on Parks and Recreation
April 1, 2026

Good afternoon, my name is Virginia Cutler, and I am a volunteer Pathkeeper Super Steward in Inwood Hill Park, located in Inwood, Manhattan. I am also a resident of Council District 10. Thank you to Chair Hankerson and the Committee for the chance to submit public comment for today's hearing.

I started walking the trails at Inwood Hill Park every day, sometimes with my dog, sometimes with my partner, often both. Over time those walks turned into something I didn't expect. I started learning the trees, the vines, the native species. I started showing up to events and programs put on by NYC Parks, the Natural Areas Conservancy, and Friends of Inwood Hill Park, and I found a real community there. That community is what brought me to volunteer as a Pathkeeper. In less than a year I've been part of corridor pruning to keep paths clear, closing desire lines to protect fragile areas, helping maintain trail structures, and supporting public programming that welcomes more people into these spaces. These trails matter to the environment of this city and to the people who live here, and I want to help take care of them.

Regarding Intro. 0577, I support the Natural Areas Conservancy in asking the Council to consider the following changes to the proposed legislation that would strengthen its intent and impact:

- The legislation should be reworded to describe "trails" as "nature trails", which would help distinguish these special and unique spaces from other public paths such as greenways, which involve hardscape infrastructure and have very different maintenance and management needs than our nature trails.
- I encourage the Council to consider adding language around improved signage at trailheads to improve wayfinding and convey critical information about trail length, difficulty, and accessibility for park goers.
- The Council should also consider adding language to the bill that would require NYC Parks to provide details for the agency's management planning for trail improvements and formalization.
- In order to help increase access to our natural areas, the Council should consider adding language to the bill that would require NYC Parks to provide a plan on public programming and activation plans for our nature trails.

While the proposed legislation does not come with funding attached, we also support the NAC's call to restore \$2.4 million in baselined funding that was allocated by Mayor Adams in Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24), which would have supported the creation of a permanent citywide Trails team of 26 full-time staff at NYC Parks. These positions were unfortunately eliminated in the FY24 November Plan, leaving NYC Parks with just three full-time staff to manage our 300 miles of nature trails citywide. Restoring this funding would mean improved trails in every borough, improving public safety, accessibility to our natural areas, and would help protect our city's forests and wetlands.

Thank you,
Virginia Cutler

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deputy Commissioner Erik Boorystn

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deputy Commissioner Margaret Nelson

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ^{acting} Dept. Commissioner Marit Larson

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Assistant Commissioner Ben Osborne

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chief of CLA Matt Drury

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Acting First Dept Commissioner Focht

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Commissioner Tricia Shimamura

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joy WANG, Deputy Commissioner

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: A.C. David Cerron

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Executive Budget officer David Stark

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Spice Appel

Address: _____

I represent: Bushwick City Farm

Address: 23 Lewis Ave

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Modhaga Tours

Address: _____

I represent: the Public

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ms. Austin

Address: 1425 AMSTERDAM AVE

I represent: GREEN Guerrillas Council of Garden

Address: + Grant Shade Garden

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 3-23-26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Iyeshima (Eye-she-mah) Harris

Address: [REDACTED] BK, NY 11238

I represent: Green Guerrillas - Community Gardens

Address: Same as above

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ralph Barclay

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: Vice President, Local 983, DC37

Address: (PEP)

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dejon Williams

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: President, Local 299, DC37

Address: (Recreation Specialists)

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SOPHIE STELBOUM

Address: _____

I represent: TRUST FOR PUBLIC

Address: LAND

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ASENHAT GOMEZ

Address: _____

I represent: EL PUENTE

Address: _____



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



**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elsie Soto

Address: _____ Bronx, N.Y.

I represent: Friends of Hart Island & Families

Address: Same as above

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christina Taylor

Address: _____ Brny 12463

I represent: Van Cortlandt Park Alliance

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Adam Ganser

Address: _____

I represent: New Yorkers for Parks

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Oded Holzinger

Address: 24-19 23rd St Astoria NY

I represent: The Natural Areas Conservancy

Address: 1234 5th Ave NY NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. DPK budget Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: TAMI Lin Magos

Address: _____

I represent: THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

Address: 322 8TH AVE., 14TH FL, NYC 10001

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 3/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kaitlin Krause

Address: Dean Street

I represent: Rising Tide Effect

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alia Soomro

Address: _____

I represent: NY League of Conservation Voters

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Savona Bailey-McCain

Address: 131 Edgecombe Ave

I represent: WRSP Harlem Art Fund

Address: 131 Edgecombe Ave

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Caroline Harris

Address: _____

I represent: Self + other seniors

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PATRICIA CARO

Address: [REDACTED] KEN GARDENS 11415

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 03/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Bianna Varga

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn 11218

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Pam Gentlino

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: The Classical Theatre of Harlem

Address: 1850 Amsterdam Ave.

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 3-26-2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ELIZABETH O'CONNOR

Address: WOODSIDE NY 11377

I represent: MOORE JACKSON COMMUNITY GARDEN

Address: 31-57 51st ST. WOODSIDE, NY 11377

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Merritt Birnbaum

Address: _____

I represent: RIVERSIDE PARK CONSERVANCY

Address: 475 RIVERSIDE DR, NYC 10115

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ROSAMOND FERRELL

Address: 85 S. OXFORD ST, BROOKLYN NY 11217

I represent: FORT GREENE PARK CONSERVANCY

Address: " "

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: HEATHER CUBOV

Address: _____

I represent: CITY PARKS FOUNDATION

Address: THE ARSENAL, CENTRAL PARK

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 7.22.2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Helen Cheng

Address: [REDACTED] NY, NY, 10003

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Leslie Gomez Rivera

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn NY 11237

I represent: Green Guerrillas

Address: 725 Bergen St Brooklyn NY 11238

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3-23-26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MAXIMUS BARTON

Address: [REDACTED] LAURELTON NY

I represent: LABORERS LOCAL 1010

Address: 17-20 WHITSTONE EXPRESSWAY, WHITSTONE NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Yeshima Harris-Ouedraogo

Address: _____

I represent: Green Guerrillas

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn NY 11238

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Irada De Jesus

Address: 1480 Washington Ave

I represent: Park Department

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jade Bonham

Address: [redacted] 69th Street

I represent: Play Fair for Parks

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 03/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marissa Lachica

Address: [redacted] Brooklyn NY 11226

I represent: Green Guerrillas

Address: 925 Bergen St Brooklyn NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 03/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Irena Goldstein

Address: [redacted] Brooklyn, NY 11215

I represent: DC-37

Address: 25 Barclay St.

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 03/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Reynold Wang

Address: [Redacted] Astoria, NY 11008

I represent: DC 37

Address: 25 Barclay St

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 03/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marshall Lee Weimer

Address: [Redacted] BK M

I represent: DC37 Local 375 11220

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chauncy Young

Address: _____

I represent: Harlem River Working

Address: group

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 03/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ROSA CHANG

Address: _____ -10005

I represent: GOTHAM PARK

Address: 139 FULTON ST, #515.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SONIA FERRARO

Address: _____ S. Ozone PK NY ¹¹⁴²

I represent: Paradise Community Garden NY

Address: 107-29 109 ST INWOOD ST JAMAICA NY
11435

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 03/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alma Guadalupe Reyes Ortiz

Address: _____ Rego Park

I represent: Queens Community House

Address: 108-25 62 Drive Forest Hills.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Francesca BNCE

Address: [REDACTED] BK 11206

I represent: Grand St. BID

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 03/03/06

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOHN SUPICO

Address: _____

I represent: CENTER FOR URBAN FUTURE

Address: 805 14 AVE NEW YORK, NY, 10013

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MARILYN VOGT-DOWNEY

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: Save the Park

Address: across the street

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/2020

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Morgan Monaco

Address: _____

I represent: Prospect Park Alliance

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Diana McKenzie

Address: _____

I represent: Prospect Heights Community

Address: Eastern PKWAY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ASENHAT GOMEZ

Address: _____

I represent: EL PUENTE

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SOPHIE STEUBAUM

Address: _____

I represent: TRUST FOR PUBLIC

Address: LAND

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alia SOOMM

Address: _____

I represent: NY League of Conservation

Address: VIFERS

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Benjamin Christman

Address: _____

I represent: Green Grenillas

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Savona Puleo

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Caroline Harris

Address: _____

I represent: Self

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 03/23/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Biana Varga

Address: _____ Brooklyn NY

11218

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PATRICIA CARO

Address: _____ KEW GARDENS

11415

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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