

THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

OF THE

THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

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Monday, June 23, 2025

Start: 10:30 a.m.

Recess: 12:31 a.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Hon. Yusef Salaam, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joann Ariola
Diana I. Ayala
Tiffany Cabán
Carmen N. De La Rosa
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THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

A P P E A R A N C E S

Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, Commissioner for the New
York City Parks Department

Asha Harris,
Assistant Commissioner for Urban Park Service

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

Thomas Alps,
Deputy Chief at Patrol Services Bureau for the
New York City Police Department (NYPD)

Matthew Besse,
Managing Attorney at the New York City Police
Department (NYPD)

Adam Ganser,
Executive Director at New Yorkers for Parks

David Saltonstall,
Vice President for Government Relations and
Policy at the Central Park Conservancy

Shatik Mitchell,
Director of Civic Engagement at the Central Park
Conservancy

Ralph Baselice,
Vice President Local 983; Park Ranger Sergeant

Rella Stuart-Hunt Wurmfeld,
Friends of City Hall Park (FCHP)

Melissa "Mel" Julien
Representing The NYC Plover Project and New
Yorkers for Parks Play Fair for Parks Coalition
(NY4P/Play Fair)

THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY
A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Nadira Pittman,
Representing—Self

Cory Hasson,
Government Affairs Manager of New York
Restoration Project (NYRP)

Christopher Leon Johnson,
Representing—Self

SERGEANT KING: This is a microphone check for the Committee on Public Safety. Today's date is June 23, 2025, being recorded by Tavell King in the Chambers.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: We are about to begin. Everyone, please settle down. We are about to begin.

(PAUSE)

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, and welcome to today's New York City Council Hearing for the Committee on Public Safety. At this time, we ask that you silence all electronic devices. And at no time is anyone to approach the dais.

If you would like to sign up for in-person testimony, or have any other questions throughout the hearing, please see one of the Sergeant at Arms.

Chair Salaam, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: [GAVEL] Thank you and good morning.

I'm Council Member Yusef Salaam, Chair of the Committee on Public Safety. I want to welcome everyone here today for today's Oversight Hearing on *Law Enforcement's Role in Keeping City Parks Safe*.

New Yorkers depend on our parks as sanctuaries, places for families to gather, children to play, and communities to bond. But when these spaces are compromised by persistent quality of life issues and criminal activity, their purpose can be undermined, and the public trust is shaken.

Today's hearing will examine the role of the NYPD, the Department of Parks and Recreation, Park Enforcement patrol officers, and other partners in keeping our parks safe and welcoming.

We will hear about efforts to address long-standing concerns from robberies in Central Park, to illegal ATV and dirt bike off-road use in Van Cortlandt Park, to drug use and paraphernalia in playgrounds across Brooklyn.

While the Administration has launched new initiatives to address quality of life issues, we must ask how these efforts are performing and where gaps remain. We are particularly interested in how enforcement decisions are made, how data drives strategy, and what is being done to respond to, not just to crime but to homelessness and substance use in park settings, with the hope of balancing social

service outreach and enforcement actions when appropriate.

New Yorkers have a right to safe parks, and they also have a right to dignified treatment, regardless of their housing status or mental health condition. We welcome the testimony from the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the NYPD, and we thank our advocates and constituents who continue to speak up for safe, inclusive, and accessible public spaces.

I thank everyone here today for participating in this important conversation, and I look forward to a thoughtful and constructive dialogue.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair. I will swear in today's witnesses. From NYPD, we have Deputy Chief Thomas Alps and Matthew Besse, Managing Attorney; and from the New York City Parks Department, we have Commissioner Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, Matthew Drury, Chief of Legislative Affairs, and Asha Harris, Assistant Commissioner for Urban Park Service.

If you could each raise your right hands?

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, before this committee, and to respond honestly to council member questions?

PANEL: [ADMINISTRATION AFFIRMS]

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Noting for the record that all witnesses answered affirmatively. You may begin your testimony.

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: Yes, thank you, thank you so very much.

Good afternoon, Chair Salaam, Members of the Public Safety Committee, and other Council Members. I am Iris Rodriguez-Rosa, Commissioner for the New York City Parks Department, and I'm joined here at the panel by Asha Harris, our Assistant Commissioner for Urban Park Service, Matt Drury, our Chief of Citywide Legislative Affairs, and other key agency leaders. I'm proud to be making my formal debut as Commissioner before a Council committee, and to be joined by our colleagues at NYPD to discuss law enforcement's role in keeping our city parks safe.

New York City Parks takes its responsibility to protect the safety of our patrons, parks, and public facilities very seriously, so I

would like to take this opportunity to briefly outline the ways in which we seek to enforce park rules and make sure our park visitors feel safe and comfortable, which is the primary purview of our agency's Parks Enforcement Patrol, also known as PEP.

The PEP Unit's mission is to preserve and protect our parks and public spaces by enforcing agency rules and regulations, educating the public, and responding to the needs of our patrons. PEP achieves its mission with the support of various teams that also fall under the umbrella of the Urban Park Service (UPS) Division, including Central Communications staff, who are the internal link to first responders throughout the agency, providing support as a 24/7/365 call center utilized to report incidents, request help, dispatch employees, and respond to emergencies. Our Emergency Management team coordinates continuity planning and spearheads agency responses to larger incidents, and these operations are critical to ensuring that PEP officers are supported during their patrols and prepared for any situation, as is the support from division administrative staff, Academy instructors, and others.

Our PEP division was created in 1981 as a companion to the agency's Urban Park Ranger program. PEP officers have NYC Special Patrolman and New York State Peace Officer status and are entrusted to enforce NYC Parks Rules & Regulations, in addition to the New York State Penal Law and NYC Health Code. Their enforcement efforts generally focus on quality-of-life offenses and deterring patrons from violating Parks' rules through education. Still, they are empowered to issue summonses for violations on Parks' property, including those related to street trees, and have the authority to make arrests when necessary. Though they do not carry firearms, officers are equipped with ballistic vests, batons, handcuffs, and pepper spray.

Our officers patrol city parks by bicycle, horseback, car, and on foot. Officers also provide security at many events held in parks, as well as rallies, protests, and concerts throughout the city. They also maintain order, manage pedestrian traffic flow, and conduct security checks at Citywide events, such as the St. Patrick's Day Parade, Puerto Rican Day Parade, and Thanksgiving Day parades.

Our corps of PEP officers is mostly organized into Borough Commands, each led by a Captain and a number of Sergeants. Our deployment approaches are dynamic and vary seasonally, depending on our enforcement needs and staffing levels, but PEP Officers have traditionally provided coverage at our parks during hours when they are busiest, ranging from the early morning through the late evening, either through daily fixed-post patrols or frequent mobile patrols. Additional patrol priorities are developed in conjunction with Borough Commissioners and their Chiefs of Operations, reflecting issues and concerns raised by community members, elected officials, partner agencies, service requests received through 311, and quality of life conditions documented through our Parks Inspection Program, such as canine waste, graffiti, and vandalism.

To help provide a uniformed presence and assist our PEP officers, we also deploy Park Security Service (PSS) staff, largely City Seasonal Aides (CSAs) who are hired to provide extra security at parks, beaches and pools during the busy season and at our recreation centers citywide; as well as participants in our agency's work development

1 initiative, the Parks Opportunity Program (POP), to
2 receive on-the-job training experience that helps
3 prepare them for future employment. These staff
4 members are uniformed and serve an important role on
5 the ground, advising the public about swimming rules
6 and assisting with crowd control at park events.
7 However, they are not empowered to write summonses or
8 make arrests.
9

10 Our agency also fields a corps of Urban
11 Park Rangers, who, like their Parks Enforcement
12 Patrol counterparts, are designated as Special
13 Patrolmen and New York State Peace Officers and
14 trained at the UPS Academy. Rangers definitely serve
15 a valuable enforcement presence, performing patrol
16 and responding to animal conditions, especially in
17 our natural areas, though they are primarily focused
18 on education through a huge variety of environmental
19 and outdoor recreation programs, enjoyed by New
20 Yorkers across the city, as part of our Public
21 Programs' Education & Wildlife unit.

22 In addition to this roster of City-funded
23 PEP Officers, Rangers, and security staff patrolling
24 parks all over the city, we also deploy an additional
25 number of PEP officers and security staff made

possible with private funding to serve a dedicated enforcement presence at busy park locations, including Washington Square Park and the High Line.

The agency's enforcement staff plays a substantial role in the City's response to emergencies. In recent years, PEP officers have been recognized for heroic life-saving efforts ranging from pulling an accident victim from a burning vehicle, stopping someone from jumping into the frigid waters of the East River, and administering naloxone, a medication designed to reverse opioid overdoses. During weather emergencies such as wildfires, PEP Officers, PSS staff, and Rangers are called upon to help direct patrons to places of safety, report downed trees and other damage, in addition to supporting NYPD as needed. They also assist the NYC Department of Homeless Services in engaging with the city's homeless population in parks, especially during Code Red and Code Blue emergencies. As part of the Mayor's Homelessness Task Force, our PEP officers conduct patrols aimed at finding and aiding people experiencing homelessness and assist DHS and NYPD with the relocation of clients and their belongings from parks.

NYC Parks and NYPD have always had a strong partnership. Our local park managers and Borough Commissioners are in constant communication with NYPD local leadership. Still, as the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety, and other Administration leaders have made it a clear priority, our city's enforcement officers are coordinating more closely than ever before to strengthen and streamline enforcement efforts. Alongside NYPD and other agencies, PEP Officers have participated in 82 "Community Link" details addressing quality-of-life concerns in parks since its launch in 2023. During these details, various quality-of-life conditions have been addressed, including unlawful vending, pedicab violations, homelessness, illegal drug activities and abandoned RVs. Since the pilot program launched in October 2024, Parks has also been a proud agency participant in "Every Block Counts," a data-driven multi-agency initiative that focuses on city blocks that have historically experienced high levels of shooting incidents, crime, and quality-of-life issues. Chosen blocks have been provided with intensive support and resources in an effort to reduce crime and restore lasting safety and

livability, with multiple agencies working together to create a safer, cleaner, more livable environment for residents based on each block's immediate needs.

"Stronger Parks/Safer Communities" is our endeavor to enhance the recreational assets and green spaces in communities with the highest rates of gun violence, upgrading and activating parks and community centers with positive use, and uniting people to strengthen and improve community safety.

Above and beyond these interagency efforts, through which we are pleased to work closely with NYPD and our other agency partners, NYC Parks believes that caring for our parks every day and keeping them active and enjoyable spaces makes them more welcoming and safer, whether it's the thousands of programs that take place each year in our parks, recreation centers and nature centers, the day-to-day maintenance performed by our incredible staff, or the longer-term park renovations and reconstruction projects led by our Capital Division.

In closing, without the diligent work of our PEP officers, Rangers, and the incredible support of NYPD and other partners, the park experience would be greatly diminished. Every day, we work to ensure

1 park rules and regulations are being upheld and that
2 a helping hand can be provided to patrons in need. I
3 am extremely proud of the work of our staff and thank
4 them for their continued service to the City of New
5 York.

6
7 Thank you for allowing us to testify
8 before you today and for all of your continued
9 advocacy for our city parks. We will now be happy to
10 answer any questions that you may have.

11 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. I'd like
12 to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council
13 Member Holden, and on Zoom, by Council Member Ariola.

14 I'm going to open up with questions
15 specifically for the Department of Parks and
16 Recreation.

17 Volunteers and parents have cleaned up
18 large amounts of drug paraphernalia, such as syringes
19 and pipes, from parks and neighborhoods like Clinton
20 Hill. We want to know what the DPR's official
21 protocol is for staff responding to drug waste in
22 parks, and why some boroughs have dedicated cleanup
23 programs while others do not?

24 COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: I will say
25 that one of the things that we're proud of is that we

1 provide training to all our park workers who go out
2 there and do maintenance in our parks. So we give
3 them bloodborne pathogen training so they can safely-
4 - they are safe and cleaning up as much of this
5 paraphernalia that is found in our parks.

6 CHIEF DRURY: And I'll go on to mention
7 that I think the programs you're referring to are our
8 special partnerships with existing service providers.
9 So, they're usually nonprofit organizations that have
10 sort of come around and been formulated in areas that
11 have experienced really sharp increases in syringe
12 debris and litter and things. And we are always open
13 to expanding those partnerships. But I'll note that
14 the programs where they exist currently are focused
15 on where we've observed the most severe conditions—
16 largely in the Bronx and a couple of portions of
17 Upper Manhattan. But as new conditions arise, that's
18 an ongoing conversation above and beyond the day-to-
19 day cleaning and maintenance that Commissioner
20 Rodriguez-Rosa just mentioned.

21 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. DPR's Bike
22 and e-scooter pilot is ongoing through December 2025.
23 What safety metrics is DPR using to evaluate whether
24
25

this pilot should be expanded, modified, or terminated?

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: Council Member, thank you for the question. I don't have the specifics at this moment, but I know that we're continuing the pilot program to see how effective how it is at our greenway. So I will be more than happy to obtain some additional information for you, Council Member.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Thank you. I definitely appreciate you getting back to us about that. And some park drives and greenways allow for micro mobility devices, while other paths remain off limits. So what we want to know is, how are these boundaries communicated to the public on the ground and enforced in practice by PEP officers?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: Good morning. Thank you, Council Member, for the question. So when we launched the pilot, we had a series of details that we conducted throughout the parks citywide, where we handed out flyers to individuals and educated them on the rules. Our main approach is to educate first, prior to enforcement. What we also did was, depending on the area and the demographics,

1 we had those pamphlets translated so that we could
2 have different languages that we could hand out. So
3 it's in Spanish, Bengali, and French, just to name a
4 few languages other than English. And essentially, we
5 did a lot of education, partnering with the NYPD. We
6 also partnered with FDNY and did education on the
7 lithium-ion batteries and again, fire risks. So there
8 was a lot of work done to just educate the public not
9 only on our rules, but also on how to operate safely
10 in our parks.
11

12 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for that. I
13 would definitely love to have copies of those
14 handouts. If you can provide that to our office in
15 our districts, there are a lot of folks that probably
16 will be able to give those to as well, so that they
17 can then further disseminate them to, you know, their
18 friends and folks that they know.

19 PEP officers and urban Park Rangers are
20 authorized to issue summonses for curfew violations
21 and, in some cases, initiate misdemeanor charges.
22 Given the potential criminal consequences, how is DPR
23 ensuring the public is clearly informed of park
24 curfews, especially tourists or new residents?
25

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: So we try to make sure that the public is aware. We also have a considerable amount of signage that is throughout all our parks that sort of denote some of the things that patrons should become aware of. We have a very extensive, you know, signage program. And we also encourage people to go on to our website to be able to familiarize themselves with many of the things that are occurring in our parks as well.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: And Park safety data shows a concentration of crime in large, high-traffic parks, while small parks remain relatively safe. How does DPR adjust its PEP Deployment Safety Strategy in response to these crime patterns, and what level of input does NYPD's Park Patrol priorities?

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: As I mentioned in our testimony, we have an amazing, remarkable partnership that we have with NYPD. And we also always look to-- NYPD will also address our-- will communicate with the Parks Department if they feel that there's an uptick, a particular uptick in a particular location, so that way we can strategize that Park enforcement and NYPD can then strategize as to how to address those particular concerns. So, more

to speak on any specifics if Asha or NYPD wishes to be able to speak on that?

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: Good morning, Chair, Council Members.

So, on a regular basis, on a yearly basis, we strategize together as a team, the Parks Department and NYPD. Typically, around the month of May, we ask the boroughs and the local precincts to develop a strategy and a plan based on last year's data, reviewing indexed crimes and quality of life conditions. So we sit down as a team, we discuss what the current issues are, what the crimes that we're seeing are, what the trends are, and what the patterns are. We get on the same page, and we prioritize parks to maximize our deployment.

Just to talk about the overall state of parks and the overall strategy and the initiatives that are ongoing with the with NYPD, park crime has decreased from 386 crimes from 2016 to 2024, it's down 36.3%.

Since 2016, park crimes on average decreased, culminating in a historic low of 855 crimes across the city in New York City parks. The year of 2020—COVID. Post-COVID, in 2021-2022 and

2023, we started to see crimes in parks increase across the city. And 2024 marked the first decrease year in park crime since 2020. We went down 5%.

This year we're down 13.6%, which tracks with the overall crime throughout the city decrease. We're at 356 crimes across the city, in New York City parks, versus 412 last year. That's a decrease of 56 or 13.6%.

When you look across the city, 2025, where we're seeing issues or slight increases as patrol Borough Manhattan North, specifically in Morningside Park in the two-six, Marcus Garvey Park, in the two-five, and Highbridge Park in Manhattan in the three-three. Raw number increases are slight, plus three in Morningside, plus two in Marcus Garvey, plus one in Highbridge.

When I'm talking crimes, I'm talking about major crimes, serious crimes, the seven major index crimes.

So that's the type of information we share continuously. We have a long-standing relationship. I've known the Commissioner for quite some time, from my time up in the Bronx. So these types of relationships are long-standing, and ours is

one example, but it's going on in local precincts with park managers. So we have a great continuity and we're seamless.

So we share this data with Parks, and they see it. We also talk about quality-of-life issues. Let's talk, what are we seeing in specific parks? We had the borough commanders and the precincts provide us with chronic conditions in the parks across the city. We compared those complaints that we received and we're observing with the Parks Department in many aspects they see the same issues. And in addition, they've added some issues. So we're on the same page.

So we look at these parks, we prioritize, our resources are finite, but we're strategic in what we do. And our deployment is fluid, and we're moving accordingly.

But the overall state of parks across the city is very good. It's in good shape. We have some outliers, like I noted. But when it comes to addressing conditions that make New Yorkers feel unsafe, or make it impossible to go about their daily lives, or disrupt one's ability to enjoy a park, we have determined that success comes by way of

collaboration—collaboration with local officials, community members, and other city agencies. We know that enforcement is only part of the solution.

The NYPD Community Link Initiative is a cornerstone of that approach. This initiative helps address complex and chronic conditions by strengthening communication across multiple agencies and leveraging each agency's expertise to effectively solve these conditions for the long term. Since its inception, NYPD Community Link has responded to 1,500 complaints and conducted 1,600 operations. Under the Community Link umbrella, there are three notable initiatives underway in New York City parks and one additional initiative on the perimeter of Central Park. All these initiatives are our community-centered approach and could be tailored to additional parks.

Central Park, or the Central Park Conservatory Partnership, launched a year ago and includes a dozen agencies that were addressing illegal vending, pedicab complaints, dogs off leash, reckless E-bikes, and things of that nature.

Central Park and PEP officers are working jointly and conducting weekly operations. Central

Park Conservatory assists with the Ranger Corps by acting as a visible presence and promoting respectful use of the park through education and assistance.

And NYPD is also doing outreach as well with our auxiliaries and some officers, especially regarding E-bikes. We have enforcement results, but what is of particular note is that crime in Central Park is down year to date by 50%. Specifically, robberies in Central Park are down 90%. It's two versus 21, so that's outstanding.

Then we talk about the 110 Street corridor, which is right outside Central Park on the North End of the park. An initiative launched in April of 2024 to deal with drug use paraphernalia and homeless issues outside the park, but it was affecting the quality of life in the park. This is a long 110th Street between 5th and 8th. Results are that we have engaged over 1,000 clients and made significant arrests to solve those issues that were embedded in chronic issues in that corridor that were complained about by the community.

Next initiative that's significant to note is the Washington Square Park or the Village Interagency Task Force launched in March of 2025 to

combat persistent drug use, homelessness, and quality of life concerns. This is a great example of a community-centered multi-agency approach to address complex issues. The 6th precinct and PEP officers maintain a daily presence in the parks, conducting enforcement. What's particularly notable is that the Manhattan District Attorney's Office is in partnership with us in this endeavor and regularly attends weekly meetings to discuss and guide strategies. So that's significant: index crime in that park is down 13%. We have significant enforcement results, and you can see that it's affecting crime in that park, down 13%.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Just a quick question, because I definitely love the downward trend in most of New York City. But regarding the outliers in Manhattan, you know, especially in my district, are there any suggested methods to get that down as well? I know that a lot of it may deal with, you know, trying to fill positions, attrition, all of that, you know, that the NYPD is definitely dealing with. But I love the fact that the city at large is receiving a good fair share of positivity. But that negativity, not a lot, just a, you know, positive

three, two, and one, I would love to see if there was some more collaboration that we could look at in Manhattan North.

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: In other parks like Marcus Garvey, perhaps. So we noticed the issues up there. I highlighted the fact that there is a slight increase in index crimes in Marcus Garvey Park, the commands that I had mentioned, and their yearly strategy must be laid out. It must include what officers are going to be deployed, how often, when, what unit is being deployed into these parks, and what conditions they're going to correct. They must state their precinct and borough plans, and Marcus Garvey is named in these plans. They must state the last time they had a strategy meeting with Parks. How are they going to address it jointly? And then the use of Community Link is invaluable, meaning Community Link has those established interagency contacts and relationships that they can address it jointly, whether it's outreach, enforcement, or it's services being provided.

So I highlight Washington Square Park, I highlight Central Park, and I highlight 110. But in fact, Community Link is using similar methods

throughout the city and parks like Marcus Garvey Park. Battery Park is another instance where we have an ongoing initiative as well.

In addition, to promote public safety in city parks, we have standing details at four beaches, three parks, and every New York City pool. So that means dedicated officers in these four beaches, three parks, and every New York City pool, Orchard Beach, Coney Island Beach, Rockaway Beach, Midland Beach, Flushing Meadow Park, Prospect Park, and Brooklyn Beach Park. Plus, we supplement oversight in the New York City pools with PEP officers.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Let me ask you this, recently I was, I don't want to say canvassing my district, but we were definitely enjoying the day the other day, and what I noticed, and I said, wow, this is really, really positive, was that in King Towers, and I'm just using them as an example, there was a patrol car stationed inside of King Towers. What I remember growing up in that area was that the visibility provided was really the best safety measure. As soon as we saw officers in the community, whether they were walking around or, in this particular instance, actually sitting on the ground,

1 that really provided great stability. People were
2 walking around knowing that they were safe. And I'm
3 wondering, because Manhattan North, on the Northern
4 side of Central Park and Lenox Avenue, Marcus Garvey
5 Avenue-- Malcolm X Boulevard, I remember there was a
6 patrol car there as well. So that level of
7 cleanliness, when people saw that there's somebody
8 there, there's, you know, the NYPD making sure that
9 we're safe, in addition to all of the other efforts
10 that were going on right there, cleaning up that
11 whole corridor, I'm wondering if, in terms of these
12 outliers, there may be an opportunity to do the same
13 kind of thing? Because, especially in my district,
14 you know, the oversaturation of drug use, a lot of
15 times people, even though there's like that one place
16 where people know, "Okay, I can use drugs safely, I
17 can make sure that I'm not going to die trying to get
18 high," but we want people who may not necessarily be
19 trying to use drugs to feel safe as well. And I know
20 that in those examples, a patrol car sitting right
21 there smack dab in the middle of everything let
22 people know. "Okay, either go somewhere else, or this
23 is a safe place for us to bring our children and have
24 a good time."

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: Well, I thank you for noting that. As the Executive Officer of Patrol Services Bureau, I understand that deployment at King Towers is part of our Summer Violence Strategy, and it does work. Flooding the zones in areas where we're seeing violence has suppressed shooting citywide and violence citywide in specific zones or areas. So the mere presence connects with the community and also suppresses crime, violence, and quality of life issues.

And then, we have the strategy on 110th Street between 5th and 8th that we're talking about, but that needs a more complex approach. The 110 Street corridor, because we're dealing with individuals who have mental health issues, drug addiction. So, beyond the scope of NYPD, that's why the multi-agency approach is best suited for a long-term solution. But I think that's really the theme today that many agencies are working seamlessly together, communicating, have long-standing relationships, and we're addressing these issues, not just from an enforcement perspective, but from every angle. And that is the best and most successful approach.

And in addition, NYPD leverages technology. So we have cameras, Argus cameras, we have drones that we use at some of the beaches like Rockaways, Coney Island, Orchard Beach, South Beach. These technological measures help ensure public safety. And I mentioned the planning that we do yearly. It's just a recap of what we saw last year and what we're seeing currently, and we strategize, and then the communication.

And then lastly, I'll add, I think the intelligence sharing is stronger than ever. We're providing that crime data to Parks, so they can see what we're seeing. We can strategize together. And we're sharing information, perhaps that could keep park employees safe, perhaps trends, patterns, people that are wanted for violent crimes, and they could possibly assist us in identification or perhaps apprehension. So they can help us as well. And we're sharing that intelligence with them. We're not operating in a silo.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I definitely appreciate that.

I have one question before I open it up to my fellow council members. And I want to note for

the record that Deputy Speaker Ayala has also joined us.

DPR partners with DHS and DOHMH to conduct outreach to individuals experiencing homelessness in parks. I want to know what role PEP officers and park managers play during these outreach efforts, and how decisions are made about when to escalate from outreach to enforcement.

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: Thank you, Council Member, for that question.

I'm going to turn it over to Assistant Commissioner Asha Harris. But before that, we always try to lead everything with compassion and education. I mean, it is with the sister agencies, DOHMH and Homeless Services, that we continuously communicate with them and we strategize with them most humanely and compassionately to be able to try to address the issues with the individuals and also to try to seek services for them as well. So we're very compassionate with that.

I'm going to turn it over to Assistant Commissioner Harris to speak a little bit more in detail.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: Thank you, Commissioner, and thank you, Council Member, for the question.

So our team works very closely with the NYPD Encampment Task Force Unit and also the Department of Homeless Services, as well as other city agencies, to conduct homeless outreach throughout our parks.

There are instances where we have to coordinate cleanups, and essentially, before that space is cleaned, a notice is provided. We want to make sure that individuals are aware, again, of the rules that are provided before services, and essentially, you're given the option to accept or ask follow up questions.

We conduct multiple details. Last year, we conducted 665 details throughout our Park system. Our PEP officers approach every single individual experiencing homelessness with compassion and care. Part of it is that there's a trust building component. You want people to be able to speak freely, let you know what they want, and essentially get them the services that they need.

We have had a couple of successes in crisis cases where we were able to get individuals who've been homeless for quite a long time to accept services, which we're very proud of. So there's a lot of work that is, again, done by our team along with the Maintenance and Operations staff. Sometimes it's, you know, a Recreation staff member conducting a program that observes this or our officers while on patrol. So there's just a lot of communication. Again, we work very closely with NYPD and DOHMH for services and DHS as well.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I want to note that we have been joined by Council Member Cabán.

I have a question regarding the notice. You mentioned that, prior to cleanup, notice is provided. What's the time frame in that particular regard that people say, for instance, who might be, I don't want to use this word, but "camping" out in the park. How long ahead of time would they be notified?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: So it comes in a variety of forms. Again, as I mentioned previously, it is education first. So as we engage the individuals, we let them know what the park rules and regulations are. Again, being homeless is not a

1 crime. There has to be some type of violation. So it
2 really depends on what we're seeing: if we're
3 addressing a park rule violation or if we're just
4 engaging with someone to let them know that there are
5 services available, so that they're aware of the
6 services that can be provided, whether it's that they
7 need somewhere to eat, to shower, et cetera, right?
8 So, there is that type of engagement. So that's one
9 thing, right? Letting people know if there is a
10 violation, and if there isn't, what services are
11 available.
12

13 If there is an established encampment,
14 and it is determined by the Encampment Task Force
15 that we would be proceeding with a cleanup, then that
16 individual would get seven days' notice unless there
17 is an emergency that poses a serious public health
18 risk to that individual or to others. So it really
19 would depend on what we encounter at the time we
20 engage that individual.

21 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for that.
22 I'd like to now open it up for questions from Council
23 Member Holden.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair,
25 and thank you, Commissioner. It's nice seeing you

again, and we go way back, and it's nice to be at your first hearing as Commissioner, and we welcome you and look forward to a good partnership.

So now some of my questions would be centered around PEP. There aren't enough of them. We need to double or triple--to protect our investment, that's what we need to do, is to double or triple the amount of PEP officers. And they're great. We just don't have enough of them, and we need them around the clock. We don't really have that.

What's the biggest obstacle to hiring more PEP officers? Is it the starting salary? And what is the starting salary?

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: So, Council Member, as we know, we always utilize the resources that we have on hand to be able to distribute them equitably throughout the city adequately. And we also make use of them properly.

The starting salary specifically for-- it's \$50,000, it's \$50,000, give or take, \$50,000 as a starting salary for the PEP officers. And we always look forward to being able to recruit PEP officers continuously. So any help that we can get from anywhere will be appreciated absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Right. I've never seen-- I've been associated with Parks in my community for over 40 years now. As a civic leader, as a coach for Little League, and you name it, I've done it within the Parks, as you know. I've never seen it this bad, probably since the late 70s, early 80s. I'd never seen it this bad. Meaning illegal vendors have the run of the place now. We can't get them out of the park. I never had motorcycles-- in the park now, not even on the paths. Now they're-- yesterday they were on the asphalt softball field in Juniper Valley Park. I was going to vote, early voting, and saw this guy racing on a motorcycle. Not a little scooter or an E-bike, it was a motorcycle. And just having his fun. I called 911, obviously. Over one hour later, I got a call from NYPD asking if the guy was still there. And I said, "Are you kidding?" You know, it doesn't work when we can't get either PEP or NYPD—and then people know that they have a really good amount of time to do whatever they want.

Illegal vendors are routine at my concerts. I'm running concerts in the park every week, and there are at least two or three. We finally

1 got NYPD to show up and stand there. So we pointed
2 out the illegal vendor. You know what the cops told
3 them? "Well, go outside the park and you can sell
4 outside the park," which is inaccurate. They can't,
5 they can't be at the curb, they can't even be in the
6 park perimeter. They're constantly there, and they're
7 selling without a license. And nothing happens.
8 Nothing happens.
9

10 The E-bike program, by the way, that
11 allows E-bikes or these motor vehicles inside the
12 park, the pilot program, was a disaster. It actually
13 promotes-- This is why I'm blaming that pilot program
14 for why I have motorcycles in the park now. Because
15 once you create that, you are actually giving them
16 carte blanche.

17 I'll tell you what works, though, and,
18 and Commissioner, I'd like you to-- and also with the
19 police, that we actually get this done. The best
20 thing that we've done as a community is to do a text
21 chain on Forest Park. I don't have Forest Park in my
22 district anymore, but we are still part of the chain.
23 We have concerts in the park that we sponsor. But
24 then we also have concerts that we don't sponsor. And
25 you know, Commissioner, we've been complaining about

1 this, these illegal car meetups, they put these big
2 speakers on, and they were doing that at the Forest
3 Park bandshell parking lot. They do it at Highland
4 Park. They do it in West Maspeth; they do it adjacent
5 to a lot of parks. A text chain works the best, which
6 means communities—the stakeholders are NYPD, PEP,
7 and the Leadership of Parks in Queens, meaning Phil
8 Sparacio was our guy on the chain. And he always
9 responds. That's great. The CO of the precinct or
10 Community Affairs always responds. And it actually
11 works. And the communities can tell us, the people
12 that live there, say there are guys with big speakers
13 that are blasting noise all over the neighborhood.
14 That works.

16 (TIMER) No other precinct, though, the
17 102 set it up with us, right? I don't have the 102
18 anymore. I can't get the 104 to do it. I can't get
19 the 110 to do it, and I can't get the 112 to do it.

20 So what we need is Parks to be a partner
21 with NYPD and actually set up a chain with residents,
22 stakeholders, and so forth, because it does work.

23 Not getting a response, or getting a
24 response an hour later to a 911 call where somebody's
25 riding very, very fast—and I have the video. If

anybody wants to see it, I'll send it to you. I sent it to Phil Sparaccio. It is unacceptable that we endanger our residents and park users.

And that's why people don't want to go there now, because this is lawlessness. We had the running track issue, you know, at Juniper, which took over a year. It extended over a year because of design problems. The track is getting destroyed now by daily bike riders, and people are just riding E-bikes in the park. And so that needs to be addressed. The NYPD is short-staffed. PEP is woefully short-staffed. So the answer is, it's not getting addressed unless we come up with some creative solutions. Thank you. Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, NYPD.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Thank you, Chair Holden. Our chair will be back in a few minutes. So in the interim, I have a couple of questions regarding curfew at our local parks.

Hi Commissioner, it's the first time I've seen you since you were appointed commissioner. I'm so happy for you and for us.

But regarding the curfew in the parks, one of the things that I run into periodically is that folks will get a permit to have maybe a BBQ, a

1 party, or some sort of celebration. It's great
2 because it starts at noon or one in the afternoon.
3 Everybody's having a really nice time, and then it
4 turns into an adult party after seven or eight
5 o'clock at night, and people refuse just to leave the
6 park. How does the Parks Department handle that?

8 COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: So in
9 several parks, we do have certain parks that we're
10 able to close that we're able to shut down. I know
11 that we do it in Manhattan and we do it up in the
12 Bronx, where we're able to shut down some parks.
13 Sometimes it's difficult, because if the park is open
14 and open to the public--but I'm going to have a
15 Assistant Commissioner Harris speak specifically to
16 the curfew hours on that.

17 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Okay.

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: Thank you,
19 Commissioner.

20 So our parks usually have signage, like
21 the Commissioner mentioned, that has the hours of
22 operation. If there's a location where you're seeing
23 this frequently, we can definitely coordinate with
24 your office and with the NYPD to address those
25 concerns.

If we have Intel that something's happening, right, let's say it's something that happens annually, we will coordinate resources to ensure that we have someone at that location to help deter that activity.

Another great resource is the community utilizing 311. Calling 311 will get dispatched to our central communications, and then it can be flagged for our team as well. So there are different approaches on how we could address those instances.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: I see it mostly at the parks where you're allowed to barbecue. You know, folks, if it's a nice day, they'll stay until 9:00 or 10:00 at night. And usually, you know, by that point they're drinking. And, you know, not every party, obviously.

But I'm trying to figure out how to create a better process for ensuring, especially when you're a permit holder, that you have to get some sort of a deposit to show that not only did you leave on time, but that you adhered to the rules, and that you cleaned up after yourself right after your event.

Is there a way that folks can maybe submit maybe photo evidence or bring back a permit

to, I don't know, to whoever, that acknowledges that they have left the premises and that they've left it the way they found it?

CHIEF DRURY: I'll just note that, you know, and we encourage, all folks who are having a sizeable event over 20 people or so are getting a permit for a gathering like a BBQ. We want folks to enjoy our parks, but do it responsibly and safely.

So it's usually made clear. So, for example a, if a picnic, you know, begins at 12:00 p.m., like almost certainly it'll, you know, there's also an end time there. And so that's usually discussed and expected... (CROSS-TALK)

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: What is the end time?

CHIEF DRURY: Well, it depends on the application. People can work that out with the various permit offices. So there's no limit per se, except to say-- well, unless the park has operating hours, obviously, it would fit within those confines. And I think we usually seek to end our permits, you know, an hour or so earlier than the closing time of that park at a minimum.

But more to the point, once they're in a relationship with us, once they have that permit, you know, I think there's dialogue with the permit office.

I think you're raising some interesting ideas about additional steps that might be, whether it's on an education front or otherwise. I think that we can kind of look at it a little more closely and consider. Because, right now, I believe for an event like a BBQ, which is reasonably small in the grand scheme of things, I don't believe that there's necessarily a security deposit. That's usually for larger events that are over 250-300 people, that's where that starts to come into play.

So, like a concert, something like that, will almost always have a security deposit or a bond that's held for small-- you know, we obviously want our parks to be accessible. We don't want to introduce unnecessary burdens on the cost side. But you're raising a fair point that there have been instances where if damage is done to the property or if there are problems with an event, we have the capacity to follow up with that permit holder and, you know, either seek redress of that or, you know,

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2 theoretically, you know, reject permits in the
3 future, that sort of thing. So there are some
4 mechanisms.

5 Commissioner Harris, if you have anything
6 to add, please do.

7 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: And I just
8 also wanted to add that while the officers are on
9 patrol, if we do see a large group of people and
10 there is alcohol or there is something that amplifies
11 sound or something that's going on, we will still
12 engage, right? So essentially, they have to comply
13 with their permit. So we would engage and address
14 those violations that we observe.

15 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah, I really do
16 think that-- I mean, I got it, we don't want to
17 impose a financial burden on families that may not be
18 able to afford it. But it is reimbursable.

19 I know when I have to pay a deposit, I'm
20 going to make sure that everybody in my team is
21 behaving and that we're leaving it as is, because I
22 want all of my money back. So I think it's worth
23 considering.

24 Also, I would love to hear from the NYPD
25 about the policy. Are we removing folks on time from

the park? Does the PEP Department monitor the timeline, or is that an NYPD thing? At what point do you guys come in?

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: So we understand that Parks and NYPD have a finite number of officers, and there are issues surrounding closing parks.

So the NYPD, in certain circumstances, has taken on the responsibility to enter parks, have people voluntarily move out of the parks, and close gates in some instances. So we're closing parks on behalf of the Parks Department.

So we have that agreement in our yearly strategy sessions, for instance, Devoe Park, Saint James Park, up in the five-two in the Bronx. So there are several parks that we are assisting the Parks Department with. For the most part, it's voluntary compliance, asking people to leave. In some cases, it is a common summonsable offense, and people do get summonses.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Okay. I know I have, uh, Mill Pond, you know, has had some trouble with folks drinking and hanging out until later on in the evenings. I've had it at Thomas Jefferson as well.

But at Thomas Jefferson, I've also had shootings. And actually, at Mill Pond, we recently had a couple of shootings a few weeks ago. And that, you know, usually is related to the activities in the park, right? Because people start off having a really nice time, and then those events transition into something else.

And they're not that many of them. So I want to be very clear that, for the most part, folks are going into the parks to celebrate whatever is happening in their lives at the moment. And we want to make sure that they're safe as well. But we want to make sure that we're not only keeping the space safe, but that we're also protecting the land and the grass and all of the things that cost a lot of money to replace and a lot of effort.

I think we've gotten better in terms of the garbage collection that happens, you know, because now I think we're doing nights and mornings after those events. But, I think that there has to be some sort of level setting in terms of, like, you know, "By 6:00 - 7:00 p.m., there should be no barbecuing, there should be none of that. You know, if you want to stay in the park, you're welcome to

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: Part of our Summer Violence Strategy, parks are sensitive locations for us. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday are prioritized. We understand that significant crime and violence could occur in parks. So we have 311 supervisors who are monitoring the 311 system for those types of complaints that can indicate what we consider precursors to violence. So we prioritize those 311 calls. And we get into the parks, and we show a presence. We clear the park if we have to, and we address any quality-of-life conditions.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah. It's sad to even have that conversation, but oftentimes, you know, we'll see that folks who were not the intended, you know, victim end up getting hurt because they just stayed a little too long and something else transpired, you know, between someone else who is visiting the park. So, that, for me, is a prime focus of this.

Regarding illegal drug use, you know, Commissioner, you've been with me, I walked through, I don't even have to go into the deep discussion about this. But, how are we handling that with the shortage of PEP officers who are available to engage with folks in the park settings and ask them to leave?

Because I know that the NYPD does some of that, but I don't know if they have to be called. These are usually smaller parks, playgrounds in some instances. But that's been a consistent pattern. I'm at a loss. I don't even remember the last time I wasn't addressing an issue of drug use on the playgrounds.

But usually the problem is that we don't have enough PEP officers. So I've been caught in a situation where I've had to recommend the closure of certain spaces, which obviously the advocates hate, right? Because we want to keep-- and I agree. I want to keep all these spaces open, but if they're only open to serve as spaces for active drug use, then we're creating a situation where children can potentially enter the space and come in contact with

syringes that are littered throughout these spaces.
That scares the bejesus out of me.

So, how do you decide which park gets
more enforcement? Is that even possible with the
workforce?

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: Council
Member, thank you so very much for your statement and
for understanding. And you've been intimately
involved in understanding and visiting, and as you
know, I was with you and on a walk-through that we
visited, and something was happening right in front
of our very own eyes that we witnessed. But you have
always been sharing with us the concerns that you
have in the particular parks that we've tried to
address. And if we've needed to close something
because the usage of that park was not what it was
intended to be, we've done it as well to try to
minimize the population coming into a playground
where children are supposed to be.

We are about providing seeding for these
parks for positive activity to be able to weed out
any kind of negative element in that sense. And we
try to strategize and focus on certain locations that
are brought to our attention with the PEP officers.

And at that note, I'm going to let Commissioner Harris add to that.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Council Member.

I, too, was at the walkthrough, and essentially, after that walkthrough, we put together a plan with dedicated patrols. As you're aware, there are some parks where we were consistently throughout the day, where possible. But the goal, once we receive the complaint, and we know that there is a concern, is not only to conduct patrols, but also to ensure that DOHMH teams and the NYPD are aware of that activity, right? We know that where there's usually drug use, there might be drug sales, right? So again, coordinating with our partners to ensure that we're addressing the condition holistically and then having officers there that could address the conditions on the ground or serve as a deterrent.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah. I mean, if we could pay attention a little bit to McNair Park this summer-- I know last summer we had to shut it down for a little bit. It's open, and I want it to remain open, but I was driving by yesterday, and there were primarily grown men in the park. And they're in the

1 playground space. So that's the part of it that's
2 upsetting. Like, parents don't want to take their
3 children to the playground, because it's populated by
4 grown men who are either asleep or using drugs.

5
6 A good question would also be, is the
7 Parks Department working with the DOHMH and with some
8 of the harm reduction groups in those communities,
9 so that we're offering services and trying to get
10 people into treatment, but at the same time
11 addressing the public health crisis that is the
12 syringes all over our playgrounds?

13 COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: I know that
14 we've been working closely with Tricia Shimamura, the
15 [Manhattan] Borough Commissioner, as well, and there
16 is a constant communication with the DOHMH and the
17 Department of Homeless Services. And there's constant
18 communication with them. So we work closely in harm
19 reduction with the community groups that also do
20 interventions as well.

21 DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah, Tricia is
22 really good, by the way.

23 COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: Yes.

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: Yes,
25 everything the Commissioner said is accurate. We

definitely do work with service providers, let them know where we're seeing these individuals in need, so that they can go out and conduct outreach with them. And that's with DOHMH. And in instances where those individuals were using, or unfortunately experiencing homelessness, then we would bring in DHS as well.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Are you also working with the Parks Department on the syringe redemption program that's happening at the parks? Because I think that there was an issue with maybe Saint Mary's, not-- I believe that the DOHMH stated that they couldn't necessarily park near Saint Mary's park because there were some concerns?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: So, we have been working closely to make sure that the location of where the exchange is going on is not directly impacting the access for the children to be able to go to the playground and to the park. So we do coordinate very well with them to be able to do that, too.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Okay, that'll be helpful. And if you could keep me posted on what you're seeing, if there is a reduction, it is a pilot program, and we're, you know, we're hoping that it'll

kind of-- are you familiar with the redemption program?

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: Yeah, absolutely. You know, I think the perfect example is Washington Square Park and the initiative that's going on there.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah.

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: And what's unique about that is the Manhattan District Attorney's Office is involved in it, too.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah.

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: Either diversion or prosecution is being considered, and guiding our strategies and our approach. We are doing significant enforcement, drug sales, and drug usage in that park, and then bringing it into the prosecution element.

So it's working. We're seeing crime reduction in that park specifically, down 13%, but at the same time, there are resources being offered to individuals in the park.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah, we have to offer resources...

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: Right. So it's a holistic approach, multi-agency approach, and it seems to be working.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah, absolutely. I agree. We kind of arrest our way out of this, unfortunately, but I would love to see an increase in the detectives-- what is that department called? Oh my goodness, my brain-- the detectives that oversee the drug activities in the city? The drug sales and they go out, they're undercover?

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: Right.

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah. So...

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: (UNINTELLIGIBLE)

DEPUTY SPEAKER AYALA: Yeah, we don't have that many of them. I know in my district, we had 14 that were assigned to Northern Manhattan, and they were assigned to five of the worst, you know, crime areas. So we never see them. And then they were using them, the NYPD moved them around to focus primarily on gun sales. But it allowed, you know, the drug dealing industry to continue to grow.

And I know in my community, most people focus on the drug users. I don't because I, you know, they're individuals that unfortunately have, you know, an illness. But I would love to see more consistent policing around the drug dealing. And that they did not take so long.

Thank you. Thank you so much, Chair. You can have your committee back.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

I want to ask about-- I'm not sure if this has been asked yet, but about unleashed dogs. I know we had some discussion about this before. One of the recurring quality of life complaints in parks is dogs being off their leashes in areas, or during hours when it's not permitted. Can the DPR speak to how often unleashed dogs are sighted across the five boroughs and whether PEP officers are adequately resourced to address these complaints?

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: Thank you for the question, Council Member.

And yes, that's one of the highest OATH summonses that New York City Parks issues. Absolutely. So we try first of all to get compliance. We first try to educate them to get, you know, immediate compliance, and then if we need to provide a summons, we do that. But that's one of our highest numbers of interactions that we have.

Commissioner Harris?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Council Member, for the question.

As the Commissioner mentioned, we do issue a lot of and receive a lot of unleashed dog complaints. When we look at our request for services, unleashed dogs are the top complaint that we're receiving. In addition to that, just looking back at this calendar year, from January to May 31st, the top summons issued were for unleashed dogs in the park, and we issued-- 22.2% of our summonses were for an unleashed animal in the park.

Looking at last year, it was in our top three summonses, with 14.6% of the summonses issued related to unleashed dogs. And then, even going back just one more year, we were at 21.9%.

So a good amount of our summonses are related to unleashed dogs. And those are just summonses, right? That does not count all the interactions where there's education of our park rules as it relates to canine concerns and complaints.

COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: Council Member, I just wanted to add a little bit. One of the

things (UNINTELLIGIBLE) we educate them, because we have a lot of dog parks, you know, dog parks throughout the city. So along with educating them, we also direct them to wherever the nearest the nearest dog park would be as well.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Got you.

Moving on to the call boxes and emergency communications in parks, many NYC parks have aging infrastructure, including emergency call boxes that are non-functional or outdated. In parks with fewer patrols, particularly after dark, residents often raise concerns about the lack of real-time ways to report emergencies or threats. What we want to know is how many functional emergency call boxes currently exist in major parks? How frequently are they being used?

CHIEF DRURY: I'm not sure we have that data available. I think anecdotally, we can describe that to the degree there are existing call boxes, they're often in areas that are by their very nature secluded—our marinas or other areas where there might be, you know, an incident. So, like our marinas are, they are a decent example where I believe there are existing call boxes.

And then there have been various efforts over the years to implement different approaches. I recall a pilot, sort of the blue light stations. That was in the Bronx; that was something that, in partnership with NYPD, we pursued a few years ago. And we'd have to circle back on the immediate results of that pilot.

My recollection is that we did not see a massive-- I mean, thankfully, we didn't see a massive influx of usage of those boxes. And not to be cavalier about it, but in a day and age where most folks have a cell phone in their pockets, I think we've seen-- and, and pretty good cellular coverage throughout the city, I think we've seen that folks are able to reach 911 or other emergency resources, in a variety of different ways.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: But specifically with the boxes themselves, is the blue light an indication that the box is actually working, or functioning correctly? Because sometimes in instances where folks may have their phone with them or somebody stole their phone, you know? Or they're just not able to get to the phone. It's one thing to be able to kind of, you know, press something as they're running, but

1 to try to unlock a phone, or you know, part of the
2 security of the phones themselves is not just the
3 first layer of security, but trying to do different
4 layers of authentication just to get into a phone.
5

6 CHIEF DRURY: Yeah, my understanding is
7 the way they're designed is they are supposed to be
8 used in a hurry, right? Because in a condition where-
9 - you know, that's my understanding.

10 I think the different units have
11 different setups. So I can't speak to whether the
12 activation of a blue-- say, there is a little blue
13 light, if that's operational, there could be
14 instances in which there's still a problem with that
15 unit.

16 Again, I don't think we have that data
17 with us today in terms of the number of units and how
18 many are fully operational today, but we're happy to
19 look further into that.

20 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I think that would
21 definitely be helpful, especially for safety
22 measures, especially in areas where we may want to
23 deploy that as well. Having that up, I know on
24 college campuses, it's definitely something that they
25 see, and they get the opportunity to say, "Well, at

1 least I know we're safe." But if we can, you know,
2 utilize that same service, I don't want to call it
3 low-tech, but you know, it may be easier to deploy
4 than an actual officer in those spaces, it could
5 definitely go a long way.

6 Moving to the PEP headcount and
7 deployment, DPR's PEP has been consistently flagged
8 as understaffed, particularly in larger parks and
9 during overnight or weekend hours.

10 The new Central Park Conservancy Rangers
11 do not have enforcement powers, which may further
12 stretch PEP's role. What is the current headcount of
13 full-time PEP officers citywide, and how many PEP
14 officers are assigned per borough? How is this
15 deployment determined across Park properties of
16 different sizes and usage levels?

17 COMMISSIONER RODRIGUEZ-ROSA: We have 250
18 officers throughout the city, and we try to make sure
19 that we have about-- and that includes 80 PEP
20 officers. That does not-- I'm sorry, does not include
21 80 PEP offices dedicated to the specific park
22 locations such as Washington Square Park and the High
23 Line. So we tried to distribute them equitably
24 throughout the city. We try to average about 50 per
25

borough, except Staten Island, where we do about 30 or about 31.

But we also, with these 50 officers that we have throughout the boroughs, strategically try to place them to be able to have them patrol areas of concentration that have been noted between NYPD and the complaints of elected officials that have been shared with us. So we try to use whatever resources that we have available, and we try to maximize them as best as possible throughout the city.

CHIEF DRURY: And I'll just add, as the Commissioner noted in her testimony, that in addition to the officers who are peace officers that can make arrests and issue summons, we also have our Park Security Service staff, which is around 50 or so year-round, and that balloons up to about 300-350 during our busiest season. And they serve as really helpful informants. They're uniformed, though they don't make arrests or issue summons. But they're a really helpful part of the enforcement presence. And also, we have our Urban Park Rangers, of whom we have about 80 or so, who also provide a really valuable enforcement presence. They can issue summons, although their focus is largely on our educational

programs in our natural areas, but they are an additional set of eyes and ears out there for enforcement purposes.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Perfect.

Moving to the NYPD, homelessness in parks specifically, constituents have raised concerns about the visible presence of homeless individuals sleeping in parks and the potential over-reliance on enforcement instead of outreach. Parks are also used as shelter alternatives by individuals unable or unwilling to access DHS services.

So my question is, what is the NYPD's enforcement policy when encountering homeless individuals sleeping in public parks, particularly during open hours? And how is that policy coordinated with the Department of Homeless Services and outreach providers?

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: Thank you for that question, Chair.

So year to date, there's been 206 encampment operations conducted in the New York City Park citywide, where we offer assistance, outreach, and services.

Our primary objective, when these operations occur, after a notice is served, is just site security. We're not there for enforcement. We're not criminalizing homelessness.

So it's about connecting the other city agencies to the client and offering services in providing a shelter, if accepted.

So if a New York City police officer happens to notice an individual or an encampment that's experiencing homelessness, they'll log it in, and it will be referred to Community Link, and then that will be addressed by an interagency approach. That's the standard practice citywide, not enforcement.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

Youth-involved group robberies in Central Park, uh, the NYPD reported a rise in juvenile-led swarm robberies in Central Park, mostly occurring between 7:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m., including groups of youth as young as 11 years old.

What we want to know is what specific strategies the NYPD is using to address the rise in juvenile-involved group robberies in Central Park, and how the department is coordinating with Youth

Services or diversion programs in response to these incidents?

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: That was an issue that rose significantly in 2024. This year, in 2025, we've had two robberies in Central Park versus 21 last year, resulting in a decrease of 90%.

So it was a strategy of deployment, recognizing trends and patterns, and identifying individuals, and proper deployment resulted in arrests and referrals to the Manhattan District Attorney's Office and prosecution or diversion.

So that was the strategy. It worked—presence, intelligent deployment, and prosecution where appropriate. And as you can see, with two verses 21, we've been successful.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Moving to the NYPD drone use in parks, NYPD recently announced plans to deploy autonomous drones to monitor Central Park due to a spike in crime at the park's large and hard-to-cover geography.

What is the NYPD's policy for using drones in parks like Central Park, including protocols for data collection, storage, and public

notice? And will footage be used in real-time to enforce or for investigative purposes only?

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: So, with regards to drones, and drones as a first responder, generally speaking, they deploy only to 911 calls. So we do have drones located in Central Park that would be deployed to assist responding officers in 911 calls.

I spoke earlier about drones being used in several parks or, sorry, beaches across the city as a safety measure—sharks, and they can deploy flotation devices if someone is struggling out in the water. So that creates another layer of public safety at the beaches. So, generally speaking, drones are deployed when a 911 call is transmitted.

As far as your other question was about the recording of drone footage and how long it lasts, I don't have any information on that. The Drone Unit would be able to speak to that.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Gotcha.

Response to illegal dirt bikes and ATVs in parks, Van Cortlandt Park continues to be used by illegal dirt bikes and ATV riders, despite signage and NYPD seizures. Enforcement remains limited by safety concerns and access issues.

1 THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY 66
2 So what we want to know is, given the
3 dangers posed by illegal ATVs and dirt bikes in
4 parks, particularly Van Cortlandt Park, how is the
5 NYPD coordinating with DPR to better restrict access
6 and ensure a stronger deterrent? And are there
7 current limitations on how officers are allowed to
8 engage with riders?

9 DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: Right. Engaging in the
10 enforcement of dirt bikes and mopeds in city parks is
11 definitely challenging and concerning, because
12 individuals could flee across the city park and
13 strike park goers. So that's a concern of ours.

14 Our strategy is kind of tailored as a
15 result. We do a lot of enforcement in the roadways,
16 out in the city streets, in and around parks,
17 specifically Van Cortlandt Park. And Prospect Park
18 was another park we were talking about, where we had
19 a prior operations.

20 So organically, we feel that if we're
21 seizing these bikes, mopeds, and motorcycles in high
22 volume—at bridges and tunnels and roadways—in a
23 safe, legal manner, it will naturally benefit the
24 parks.
25

1 So I don't have the numbers in front of
2
3 me as far as seizures citywide, but consistently,
4 NYPD ups the bar, and our seizures keep increasing.
5 We have dedicated units to address this issue, as
6 well as the car meetups that we mentioned, especially
7 in city parks. There are text message chains, as the
8 Council Member had mentioned, being implemented. We
9 have them. We have intelligence being shared where
10 we're seeing to address car meetup groups and
11 motorcycle ride-offs.

12 So at the highest levels, we take this
13 very seriously, and we have units directed to address
14 these issues, and we are successful. We're not just
15 ignoring the issue or pushing it down the road; we're
16 addressing it, but we need to do it safely for both
17 the officers and the rider of that moped or
18 motorcycle.

19 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I'd like to note for
20 the record that we've been joined by Council Member
21 Stevens.

22 Moving the Community Link initiative,
23 Mayor Adams announced a multi-agency Community Link
24 operation to address quality of life and public
25 safety in Central Park. The Central Park

1
2 Conservancy's new Ranger Corps has been deployed to
3 address quality-of-life issues without enforcement
4 power. My question is, how does the DPR coordinate
5 with the Rangers in real time, and what protocols are
6 in place to escalate an issue from observation to
7 enforcement?

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: Thank you,
9 Council Member, for that question.

10 We actually have a text thread that NYPD
11 Central Park Precinct is on, along with the Ranger
12 Corps. In addition to that, we also meet our team,
13 the NYPD, and the Central Park Conservancy regularly.
14 There are times when we meet multiple times weekly,
15 at least once a week, to talk about the conditions
16 that we're seeing throughout the park, and then
17 again, how we're going to address those conditions.

18 We also get a weekly report of what the
19 Rangers have been seeing in the park, and again,
20 compare it to what the NYPD and the PEP teams are
21 seeing on the ground. So that way, we can adequately
22 address those conditions and then issue summonses
23 where necessary.

24

25

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. I'd like to pass it to Council Member Stevens for her questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Well, thank you. Thank you, Council Member Salaam, and thank you for having this hearing. Good afternoon, well, we have a couple of minutes, so good morning. We still have five more minutes.

For me, my big question, especially around the PEP offices in the Bronx, is: Can you tell me how many are deployed throughout the Bronx? And if you have the numbers broken down by district, that would be helpful, especially for the summer. I know that it's typically seasonal.

And I am trying to get a better understanding of how you determine the amount and where they're going. Especially because I know this is typically stretched thin, and you don't have as many.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: Thank you, Council Member, for the question.

As mentioned, we do have a finite number of PEP officers. Our team is very dedicated throughout the borough. Ultimately, the baseline for

the borough is 52, and the officers are deployed throughout the borough.

We also have a park (INAUDIBLE)...
(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: So, do you have a breakdown of where those 52 officers are placed throughout the borough?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: So they're deployed throughout the borough. So our PEPs have various commands...

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Mm-hmm.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: But we deploy throughout. So let's say in the Bronx, we have a command at Mill Pond, we have a command at Pelham Bay, and there's a Katonah command. But those officers are interchangeable, and they're deployed based on the complaints that we're getting in conditions throughout the borough.

And in addition, we do have our Park Security Service team, as mentioned, we do onboard over 250 of those individuals who come on and (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: How many do you think you would need to actually have deployment at

all the parks? Because I think that's--like what would get you to a number where they would not have to be moving in the way that they do to help secure?

Because, especially in the summertime, like you said, you have Mill Pond Park and Pelham, and those parks are-- the Bronx is pretty big, so it's spread out pretty deeply. So, how many do you think you would need so that people could be permanently stationed in these places to be at full capacity?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: So, Council Member, thank you so very much for the question and the concern. Of course, you know we make do with the offices that we have (INAUDIBLE)...
(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: I'm not asking about making do, I'm trying to figure out how we get you a whole?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: So we will take any kind of additional resources that can be provided; we will definitely be able to utilize them... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Would it make sense for you guys to be at 100? I'm trying to get to

a number because I think that this is part of the problem. The Bronx has the most parks and has the most parkland, and 52 officers does not seem like enough.

I, myself, specifically, I have Joyce Kilmer, I have Fred Siegel, I have Katonah, I have Macomb's Dam. I have all these parks. And especially in the summertime, we have a high number of people having barbecues there, and they leave a lot of trash. So, if we have more officers there to enforce some of the rules, that would alleviate some of the other things.

So that's why I'm asking what number would it take for you to get whole, so that we can push for that and all be on the same page in order to ease up some of the other things?

CHIEF DRURY: We appreciate that, Council Member. I think the challenge is that there isn't really a magic number, per se. Obviously, as you've heard, you know, the baseline is 50 for the Bronx. Just to be clear, that's the highest it's been historically, since, just so everyone's aware, this is actually the highest level of our (INAUDIBLE)...
(CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: I'm not giving them praise for getting to 50. (LAUGHS)

CHIEF DRURY: Anyhow, uh, one factor that I think is worth noting is that to have-- what I think you're addressing is what we would call a fixed-post presence.

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Mm-hmm.

CHIEF DRURY: Some sort of staff stationed there... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yes.

CHIEF DRURY: throughout the day. And just to be clear, in order to do that, the park needs to fit certain criteria. Namely, you need to make sure that there is a park house, you know, a restroom, and a place to work out of. And not every park property will have that. Certain properties, just by their nature, could only be covered by mobile patrol.

But having said that, we hear you that there's interest in identifying more of these, let's call it fixed-post potential sites, and identifying that universally... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: So, how many fixed posts do you have? Because, obviously, you have

some there, but what are the ones that could be a fixed-post where you don't have PEP officers at?

CHIEF DRURY: Right, that's an excellent question. I don't believe we have that number available today. That would require some analysis and some (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Okay, well, I would love for us to start working on that analysis and to start working there. I know there is a big push for us to get 1% of the budget for Parks. Which I am in full support of. But I also want us to make sure that we have the information to continue to push that fight. And information like that is helpful for us when we are calling for more money for Parks, and these are the services that we are specifically asking for. Because I do want-- like I said, we have a lot of parks in the Bronx, and it is beholden to us to make sure that we have all of the amenities that we need to keep them as beautiful as they are. So, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: (TIMER) Central Park PEP officers and NYPD issued a combined 583 summonses related to illegal vending and pedicab violations this year. What education efforts, if any, has DPR

led to proactively informing vendors and pedicab operations about the rule changes before issuing these fines?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: I'm sorry, Council Member, can you repeat the question?

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Sure. So, just taking it from the top, Central Park PEP officers and NYPD issued a combined 583 summonses related to illegal vending and pedicab violations this year alone. What we want to know is what education efforts, if any, DPR has led to proactively inform vendors and pedicab operators about rule changes before issuing fines?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: Thank you, Council Member, for the question.

When our teams go out, as mentioned, we do take an education-first approach. We do have areas throughout the park where there's signage. We also engage that individual at the time that we observe them, let them know what the violations are, and give them an opportunity to comply. If that individual chooses not to comply and we cannot generate voluntary compliance, then we would move to enforcement. In our parks, we deal with a lot of unauthorized vending and again, as you mentioned,

pedicab violations that we work to address through education and then again through enforcement.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Do you all have a number of how many summonses were issued last year as compared to this year?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: When you are saying "number", you are talking about Central Park specifically, correct?

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Yes.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER HARRIS: We would have to get that Central Park-specific number to you.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thanks, we will definitely be looking forward to that.

Moving to auxiliary police in parks, NYPD has an auxiliary police program that supplements patrol visibility throughout the city; however, it's unclear to what extent auxiliary officers are deployed in or around parks. Our question is, does the NYPD currently assign auxiliary officers to park-specific patrols, and if so, which parks or precincts have the highest coverage?

DEPUTY CHIEF ALPS: Each individual precinct utilizes and leverages its auxiliary officers in different ways. The Central Park precinct

has been using them as an educational approach with regard to e-bikes, as well as just a presence, NYPD presence in the park.

But I can't speak to every command throughout the city and how they use auxiliaries. It would be a good practice to use them in parks. They might be using them in other manners for other reasons, but in Central Park, it's appropriate, obviously, and it's being utilized.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you. Those are all the questions I have for this panel. I appreciate you.

PANEL: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: We will be moving into public testimony, so I now open the hearing for public testimony. I remind members of the public that this is a formal government proceeding and that decorum shall be observed at all times. As such, members of the public shall remain silent at all times.

The witness table is reserved for people who wish to testify. No video recording or photography is allowed from the witness table.

Further, members of the public may not present audio or video recordings as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will have two minutes, *two minutes*, to speak on today's hearing topic: *Oversight - Law Enforcement's Role in Keeping City Parks Safe*.

If you have a written statement or additional testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at Arms.

You may also email written testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov, that is testimony@council.nyc.gov, within 72 hours after the close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings will not be accepted.

I will now call the first panel: Adam Ganser, David Saltonstall, Shatik Mitchell, Donald Chapman, and Ralph Baselice.

Thank you, you may begin in order you wish. Just make sure you press the button and make sure the microphone is on with the red light.

ADAM GANSER: Thank you, Chair Salaam, for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Adam Ganser. I am the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Parks. We represent over 450 organizations across the city, all pulling for more funding for our city's park system.

Public safety continues to be the most compelling issue in New York City today, and the condition of our city's parks reflects the broader concerns of New Yorkers. Budget cuts and the hiring freezes over the last three years have resulted in 800 fewer park staffing lines across the agency, PEP included. Despite the testimony you just heard, the agency is down 60 PEP officers over the last three years.

Instead of a safe refuge, many of our city's parks are places that families are avoiding. The best path towards a safe park system is to restore staffing across the agency fully. Staff at all levels in our city's parks ensure that our parks are not just well-maintained but have an active,

1 vigilant presence of park workers: a presence that
2 deters problematic activity and, at times, unlawful
3 activity.
4

5 At the top of the list of parks workers
6 to restore are certainly PEP officers. PEP officers,
7 as you heard, provide public-facing information to
8 park visitors, making sure folks are following the
9 rules, issuing summons, etc.

10 Some quick data: As you heard, there are
11 currently 250 PEP officers. Those 250 PEP officers
12 are visiting 2,200 parks a day, *2,200 parks a day*.

13 How do they do it? Well, they can't. They
14 just can't do it. From Park's own data, 91% of the
15 City's parks receive less than 30 minutes of PEP
16 coverage daily, if they get it at all.

17 Contrast that with the privately funded
18 PEP officers that are visiting roughly eight parks,
19 eight to 10 parks. Those parks have 80 PEP officers—
20 more or less eight to 10 per park. (TIMER)

21 At New Yorkers for Parks, we talk with
22 communities across the city, and their top concern is
23 safety, and they are all demanding more PEP officers.
24 If the Mayor and the City Council are serious about
25 quality of life and safety issues, they must come

together to restore the nearly 800 positions that have been cut and build the Parks Enforcement Patrol team, so their very good work can be felt in every single New York City park. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you as well.

DAVID SALTONSTALL: Good afternoon, Chairperson Salaam and Members of the Council. My name is David Saltonstall, and I'm Vice President for Government Relations and Policy at the Central Park Conservancy, and I'm joined here by Shatik Mitchell, our Director of Civic Engagement.

About a year ago, after a spate of concerning incidents in the park, the Conservancy joined with the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety's Office to try to develop some strategies for addressing crime and quality of life issues.

We began with one simple premise, reinforced often by then Deputy Mayor Chauncey Parker, which is that no single entity can create safety in Central Park. Or any park. Success depends on collaboration. So we developed a partnership, which I think you heard the Commissioner talk about earlier, that includes more than a dozen city agencies working hand in hand to

address not just crime and long-standing quality of life concerns, but also services for those in need, whether it's a bed in a safe haven shelter or urgent psychiatric care.

The approach is not complicated. Once or twice a week, representatives from each agency and the Conservancy hop on a Zoom call and review a punch list of items, which can range anywhere from a broken street light that needs fixing to an individual in crisis, to a tree branch that is blocking an NYPD camera and needs pruning, as happened last week.

Strategies are developed in real time, tasks are assigned to specific agency leads, and timelines are established, and progress toward each task is revisited the following week. It's working.

As a Commissioner and others noted, year to date, crime in Central Park Precinct is down by 50%, including a 90% drop in robberies.

At the same time, through regular surveys by the Department of Homeless Services along the 110th Street corridor, we have connected some 48 people to shelter.

Of course, every park is different. The challenges in Central Park are different than the ones in Marcus Garvey Park or in Flushing Meadows, (TIMER) just like the topography is different. But we believe the beauty of the approach taken in Central Park is that it is scalable and could be tailored to other parks.

What is required is a willingness to work together, a commitment to develop strategies that are sustained, and crucially, a convener, like the Deputy Mayor's Office, that has the authority and the capacity to drive agency cooperation.

It is also vital that the next City budget restore some \$79 million in cuts to the Parks Department to help strengthen agency staffing, including some 60 Parks Enforcement Patrol Officers who play an absolutely vital role in Central Park.

There's always more work to be done, but we believe that this multi-agency approach, combined with the restoration of the Parks Department cuts, could offer a new path forward for improving safety in parks, and we would be happy to

answer any questions that members may have. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you as well.

RALPH BASELICE: Good afternoon, City Council. My name is Ralph Baselice, Vice President of Local 983, and I'm also a park ranger sergeant for the last 20 years. We represent 19 titles in just about every city agency you could think of. I am here today on behalf of PEP.

One thing I heard everyone agree upon is visibility. When I was hired, the flyer was a "highly visible uniform presence to detect and deter crime". Our numbers are down citywide, not just because I'm their union rep; citywide park enforcement has gone to one tour. I believe it's 9:30 to 6:00, with the opening of the beaches and pools. As you know, they're at Rockaway, they're all over New York City. They're responsible for the water. The lifeguards work 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Park Enforcement Officers keep folks out of the water prior to that and after that, which should be interesting over the course of the next three days, with the heat wave.

Focusing on visibility, the average quality of life, no one's going to commit basic quality of life crimes if they see me. I'm not trying to downplay the job. I'm almost like a scarecrow in the garden.

I'd like to speak to Council Member Holden. I don't know if you remember when they were allegedly stealing the bleachers in Juniper Valley Park on the ball fields? PEP was there, so we had an overtime detail, and we were, like, "Stealing bleachers? You've got to be kidding me." So we were there for about a week, and lo and behold, what they would do is the hardware would get taken off first, so you wouldn't see anything. So we got there one night, the hardware was gone, all the bolts and nuts, and then they would just collapse it. They didn't steal it the time we were there, and I believe it stopped after that because they knew we were going to be there. Now, you can't prevent every crime that's going to happen, but we need more Park Enforcement Officers citywide to preserve the park.

A lot of Council Members spoke about graduation parties, communion parties, and birthday

parties— (TIMER) this happens in the park. It's one of the few things that are free in New York City. This is free recreational space that I mean, they have us paying for garbage cans, congestion pricing. Let's focus on parks. Let's make them safe. Let's get more park rangers, more PET, not just cuts.

I represent them. The results are there. It shows that when they're around, crime is reduced. Thank you very much for taking the time to listen.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you as well. I don't have any more questions for this panel. You are excused. And thank you for your testimony.

I now call up Rella Stuart-Hunt Wurmfeld, Melissa Julien, Michele Siegel, Nadira Pittman, and Christopher Leon Johnson.

You may begin in any order. Just make sure that the button is pressed and the microphone is on as indicated by the red light.

RELLA STUART-HUNT WURMFELD: Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to be able to present before you, and thank you for listening to me.

I have lived in this area for over 50 years, and City Hall Park is my park. I volunteer there frequently because there are not enough staff in the park to keep it going and to keep it looking beautiful.

But I have never, ever seen a PEP officer in the park. And there's been a proliferation of bicycles, many of them electrified bicycles, and other kinds of electric vehicles, including motorcycles. Somebody, I think Robert Holden, you mentioned a motorcycle. They come in frequently. They don't only go one way; they go both ways towards the Brooklyn Bridge, which has actually made provision for the separation of pedestrians and wheeled vehicles. Something that hasn't been done in our park.

So on a fairly narrow pathway, which is a pedestrian throughway to the Brooklyn Bridge subway stop, there are endless numbers of bicycles, including now tour groups who gather at Warren Street and Broadway to put, you know, Citi Bike, people, who are just probably 20 of them. They're directed to go through this little narrow path towards the Brooklyn Bridge, and not only is it one

way, of course, there is a small sign that says, "one way", but people pay no attention to that. There are arrows that have been wiped away from the street. There are a lot of broken stones now because of the proliferation of traffic through there.

But frankly, I take my life in my hands when I go to the park. (TIMER) It's unconscionable. And really, I wish there were more PEP officers there to ensure that people who use the park, who are residents of the area, can feel safe. And not just me, but the whole community. So thank you for listening.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you for your testimony.

MELISSA JULIEN Hi, good morning, or I should say good afternoon. Council, my name is Mel Julien, and I am representing the NYC Plover Project, and I am also here representing the New Yorkers for Parks Play Fair for Parks Coalition. Thank you all for being here today and for having us here today.

As the New York City Clover Project, we're a Rockaway-based nonprofit. We help protect

the endangered piping plover, which is a shorebird that is native to the area. So we spend a lot of our time on the beaches out in the Rockaways. Which, as we all know, is an extremely high traffic area, especially this time of year.

I want to just talk about a very special location within the Rockaways for wildlife. It's called the Rockaway Beach Endangered Species Nesting Area. It's located in the Arverne and Edgemere community along the shoreline. It's home to at least five protected species of wildlife, including the piping plover. And the connection is that PEP is very instrumental in protecting and helping to manage this. So PEP officers are needed to kind of station at either end of this area and just make sure that both people, so beachgoers and the wildlife, are protected.

And again, they are very key and instrumental to this area, but unfortunately, they are not able to be there at all times. This area is not a recreational beach, so it is not open for swimming or surfing. It is strictly a wildlife area, and PEP is very instrumental in making sure

that people do not enter this area and attempt to engage in these types of recreational activities.

So we just want to make sure that we are very vocal and very supportive of allocating budget for PEP. And we want to suggest that at least \$79.7 million can be allocated in the FY26 Budget for PEP. And as we've all heard today, PEP is extremely instrumental in ensuring public safety, and we are very supportive of that. So thank you all. (TIMER)

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you.

NADIRA PITTMAN: Hello, my name is Nadira Pittman. Today I'm not going to speak to you guys regarding anything regarding Parks, but my primary concern is public safety and the quality of life dealing with the NYPD.

I have made over 20 police reports regarding harassment, death threats, etc. I'm just like any other individual. I started working at a young age. I went to college. I have pursued my life, you know, with a positive effect, but these individuals are hindering my quality of life.

I'm not understanding why the NYPD is not taking my concerns seriously with the harassment, the cyber attacks, and the wiretapping.

These are all illegal acts. No one is taking my concerns seriously.

You know, being a single woman does not mean that she is up for grabs pertaining to anything. What I see here is that the primary issue is these fraternities and sororities that are hidden within these organizations, which are definitely a detriment to our public. I understand that a lot of people are benefiting from these fraternities. Still, it's definitely not safe for individuals who are not a part of it. I have witnessed a lot of women and children, even young men, getting victimized due to these fraternities. Because if someone is in a fraternity, it does not mean that they can victimize another individual based on a dislike of a color or sexual orientation (TIMER) at all.

So my primary concern is to come to you guys to inform you of, you know, what is occurring. Why the NYPD-- I have 20 police reports, I went to a detective, and he closed out my case right away. Why aren't they helping me? You know, why am I getting harassed by these various individuals, and why is no one investigating it? Why is it, you

1 know, I'm just like anyone else, self-defense is
2 not a crime. When you have to defend yourself, you
3 have been attacked by a woman in the streets— I
4 could not defend myself because the police would
5 not assist me.
6

7 You know, that's not a crime to defend
8 yourself. And to be titled as "aggressive" to
9 defend yourself as a woman, a single woman, it's
10 definitely unconstitutional and against ethics in
11 general.

12 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: So I have a
13 question...

14 NADIRA PITTMAN: So I would definitely
15 want you guys to put it into play, a possible bill
16 or some type of law, to which, if anyone is in a
17 fraternity, let us know that you are part of an
18 organization that you practice in. It's unfair for
19 the public to be victimized or to have a gain over
20 someone, or possibly have a code in conversation in
21 which we are all engaging, and it's unfair.

22 I think it's definitely disrespectful to
23 have a code, and you know, speaking in those codes
24 while the public is coming here, and all together
25 we are all here to communicate with one of them...

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: So I do have a question...

NADIRA PITTMAN: So it's definitely something that maybe you need to...

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: I do have a question for you.

NADIRA PITTMAN: Yes, sir, mm-hmm?

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: My question is, in the district that you live in, have you been engaging with your council member regarding the bill that you... (CROSS-TALK)

NADIRA PITTMAN: Oh, I have gone...

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: just discussed?

NADIRA PITTMAN: Yes, I'm sorry. Yes, I had gone to the Department of Justice, FBI...

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: No, I am talking about specifically your council member... (CROSS-TALK)

NADIRA PITTMAN: Council member? Yes, sir. I have called them. I have emailed them. I have thousands of emails that show that there is something going on hidden underneath that is preventing me from obtaining justice and protection. I was born in this country. Not saying

1 that anyone who was not born in this country does
2 not deserve protection, but I was born here. I have
3 worked my entire life. I look very young, but I am
4 40 years old. I have worked since I was a teenager.
5 I have contributed to this country. I have put in
6 my hard-earned tax money. But now they are coming
7 at me with the money that I distributed to the
8 country.
9

10 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: What district are
11 you specifically in?

12 NADIRA PITTMAN: I'm sorry, sir?

13 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: What district do you
14 live in?

15 NADIRA PITTMAN: Uh, 31.

16 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Okay, so what we
17 would recommend is we follow back up with your
18 district, with your council member...

19 NADIRA PITTMAN: Mm-hmm?

20 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: to follow through
21 with some of the legislation that you are trying to
22 get pushed forward.

23 NADIRA PITTMAN: Yeah, it is definitely
24 an issue. Because it is not making sense. Why am I
25 getting victimized? Why are these people making up

lies on me? Following me around, harassing me.

Okay, I'm single. Okay, that's fine. But why do I have to be put under these types of conditions? I have worked hard my entire life...

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: So, what we will do, because we are at time, we will definitely make sure that you follow up with your council member to get your issues pushed forward, specifically. All right? (CROSS-TALK)

NADIRA PITTMAN: Okay, and also, will you consider what I also stated as far as the fraternities? This is definitely an issue, and it's a danger to the public. People are getting victimized because of these fraternities. They're getting...

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Well, it's definitely... (CROSS-TALK)

NADIRA PITTMAN: They're not getting the protection. The women and children are not getting the protection they need because of these fraternities. Will there be some sort of bill that will definitely let us know that you're in a fraternity? Let us know what you're doing. Let us know what your belief is. That's okay.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: The...

NADIRA PITTMAN: But...

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: The proposition that
you are proposing...

NADIRA PITTMAN: Yes, sir...

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: will have to be in
conversation with your council member. So we hear
you... (CROSS-TALK)

NADIRA PITTMAN: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: It's definitely on--
your testimony has been recorded.

NADIRA PITTMAN: Well, Council...

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: And we are at
time... (CROSS-TALK)

NADIRA PITTMAN: Mm-hmm, okay.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: So your testimony
definitely has been... (CROSS-TALK)

NADIRA PITTMAN: I appreciate...

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: recorded... (CROSS-
TALK)

NADIRA PITTMAN: I appreciate you hearing
me today. I definitely understand that your primary
goal is public safety within the parks. But, you
know, public safety in general is definitely a

1 concern for me. And I am here to-- you know, this
2 is out of my norm. You know, I deal with
3 healthcare. I went to school for healthcare. I want
4 to pursue nursing. This is not something that I
5 would normally come here for, but I am witnessing
6 too many victims, including myself, who has (sic)
7 went to an officer, looked him in the eye, and
8 begged him for help, and he turned me away. He did
9 not help me at all. And I am still enduring this
10 situation. So, I'm definitely coming here so that I
11 can obtain you guys information (sic). And then we
12 can move forward to there. And I am also going to
13 follow your advice as well.

14
15 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Well, thank you for
16 your testimony.

17 NADIRA PITTMAN: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: We are going to call
19 the online participants now.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will start with
21 Cory Hasson.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

23 CORY HASSON: Hello, good afternoon. Thank
24 you, Chair Salaam, and Members of the Committee on
25 Public Safety, for convening this hearing.

My name is Cory Hasson, and I am the Government Affairs Manager of New York Restoration Project (NYRP). NYRP is a member of Parks and Open Space Partners and the Play Fair Coalition. I am testifying today to advocate for the Mayor and City Council to allocate \$79.7 million in the FY 26 budget to restore and strengthen NYC Parks' workforce and programs, including funding 60 Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP) Officers.

Beyond responding to the concerns of park users, PEP officers can provide lifesaving first aid and support at-risk individuals in need of social services. More PEP officers will help keep our parks clean and safe, bringing in more park users, making these spaces a more reliable resource for New Yorkers. These spaces at full capacity are an invaluable resource that foster physical and mental health, providing spaces for social interaction.

PEP Officers are unionized, career civil servants. Expanding this workforce means more stable, middle-class jobs for New Yorkers, a stronger, more accountable city workforce, and a safer parks system.

1 All New Yorkers, regardless of where
2 they live, deserve to feel safe in their open
3 spaces. As the city invests in new and expanded
4 parks and Parks programs, it must also invest in
5 the personnel who keep these spaces safe, usable,
6 and thriving. Thank you for your time.

7
8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We will
9 now move to Christopher Leon Johnson.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah, hello.
12 Hello, Chair Salaam, my name is-- and Chair Holden.

13 My name is Christopher Leon Johnson, and
14 I am speaking and to show my support to Vickie
15 Paladino's Intro 60-- 060, which will ban E-bikes
16 inside the parks.

17 I understand that this is about law
18 enforcement accountability when it comes to the
19 parks. But at the same time, we need to start
20 talking about the E-bike situation in these parks,
21 because I believe what's going on is that the City
22 Council is scared of Transportation Alternatives
23 and New York for Parks, because I just saw in the
24 hearing, Kathy Park Price who is now the Director
25 of Policy of NY (INAUDIBLE) in New York parks. And

what is going on is that both of those nonprofits, Transportation Alternatives and New York Parks, are in the way of real accountability when it comes to the parks, when it comes to E-bikes being taken out of the bike-- taken out the parks.

I'm calling on the City Council to really show their support for this bill. I understand that the Commissioner has shown her support by limiting the bikes from 15 mph and start giving out C... Class C summons to anybody riding E-bikes that goes over-- that goes... blew... blows red lights.

But at the same time, we need to make sure that, for right now, we need to ban E-bikes from the parks because a lot of people are getting hurt and killed in these parks, and there's no accountability.

So I'm saying-- I'm calling the City Council to publicly disassociate yourself from New York for Parks, because they have a complete lobbyist, Kathy Park Price, who is now the Director of Policy, really influencing not only now the Parks Committee and the City Council (sic). She's

going to completely creep up and influence the Public Safety Committee.

And like I said, I'm calling the City Council to really denounce New York for Parks, that nonprofit, because they're another nonprofit now that is going to be in the way of real accountability when it comes to E-bike regulation and bike bans and E-bike bans and moped bans from the parks. Not only Transportation Alternatives is now (INAUDIBLE) New York for Parks (INAUDIBLE) on Twitter called "N Y 4 P", because of the lady that was there standing behind Mrs. Pittman, (TIMER) the Asian lady named Kathy Park...

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired, thank you.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: So, thank you so much, and enjoy your day. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Thank you as well.

(PAUSE)

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: If anybody is present who does wish to submit testimony today, you can see the Sergeant at Arms in the back. I just want to make sure that we've covered everybody.

2 Seeing none, I will pass it back to you,
3 Chair Salaam.

4 CHAIRPERSON SALAAM: Perfect, thank you.
5 That concludes today's business. This hearing is
6 adjourned. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date August 27, 2025