

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

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April 1, 2026
Start: 11:22 a.m.
Recess: 1:12 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 BROADWAY - 8TH FLOOR - HEARING
ROOM 1

B E F O R E: Ty Hankerson, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Shekar Krishnan
Linda Lee
Christopher Marte
Frank Morano
Mercedes Narcisse
Yusef Salaam
Pierina Ana Sanchez
Sandra Ung

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Phil Wong

A P P E A R A N C E S

Marit Larson, Acting Deputy Commissioner for
Environment and Planning at New York City Parks

Sarah Aucoin, Chief of Education and Wildlife at
New York City Parks

Mark Drury, Chief of Citywide Legislative Affairs
at New York City Parks

Katie Swabb, City Parks Foundation

Ashley Roelofs, Trust for Public Land

Leslie Garcia, Trail Stewardship Manager for Van
Cortlandt Park Alliance

Gabriel Cummings, Training Manager for the Urban
Path Program at the Natural Areas Conservancy

Kathy Nizzari, founder and Chair of Lights Out
Coalition

Tina Pina (testimony read by Margaret Lee),
Lights Out Coalition

Toni Simon, self

Patricia Tristan, self

Lisa Curtiss, self

Margaret Lee, Lights Out Coalition

Edita Birnkrant, Executive Director of NYCLASS

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Testing one, two, one, two. Today's date is April 1st, 2026. Today's hearing is a Committee on Parks and Recreation being recorded in an HR room by Keith Polite.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Hey, folks, we're going to start shortly. We're just waiting for a couple documents and then we'll begin. My apologies.

Folks, we can all go home. April Fool's, I'm sorry.

All right. We're starting now, so we're going to prepare. Two seconds. All right. In two seconds, we're going to start. Sorry for the delay.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, and welcome to the New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation.

Please do not approach the dais at any time.

Keep your phone on silent mode.

Chair, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Good morning, I am Ty Hankerson, Chair of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. I'd like to welcome everyone who has come to participate in today's hearing.

As many of you know, Earth Day is coming up on April 22nd. To recognize this every year, the Council typically advances various pieces of legislation that seek to deliver a healthier and more sustainable environment for all New Yorkers. Today, the Parks Committee will consider four bills devoted to that end.

Intro. 740, sponsored by myself, would require Parks along with the Department of Environmental Protection, Transportation, and other relevant agencies to conduct a study to identify at least the top 10 community districts that have given the least green space, and to make recommendations to the Mayor and Council on how to increase green space, including parkland in such areas. Parks and green spaces improve mental and physical health by reducing stress and providing visitors with areas for recreation. They are crucial infrastructure, not a luxury. However, it is no surprise to anyone here that park equity remains one of the primary issues facing our city, as it has been clearly documented that in many low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, residents lack access to quality green space. Ensuring that our parks system receives the

resources they need in order to achieve equity and the distribution and quality of green spaces remains one of the major challenges facing city policy makers. I think this bill will be a major step forward in providing the information we need to clearly identify the problem areas of the city, and then to focus our resources on those areas by building sorely needed green space for the New Yorkers in those neighborhoods.

Next up, Intro. 577, sponsored by my Colleague, Council Member James Gennaro, would help to ensure that our underdeveloped urban forests and natural areas are able to be accessed by New Yorkers for recreational activity. This legislation would require parks to formalize and maintain at least 300 miles of trails in a way that those trails are prioritized to connect the maximum amount of natural areas to New Yorkers, and improve access by low- and moderate-income communities to those natural areas. The Parks Department would also have to publish and update the maps of those trails on its website.

Next, we have two bills sponsored by my other Colleague from Queens, Council Member Phil Wong. First is Intro. 805. This bill would build on

legislation we passed last year, Local Law 152, on creating a cool pavement pilot program. During hot days, overheating and hydration can be an issue for people of all ages, with dark-colored asphalt pavements contributing to the urban heat island effect. Light-colored asphalt and other types of cool pavements, on the other hand, can help reduce that effect. This bill would require Parks, along with DEP and DOT, to conduct a study and pilot program on the use of cool pavement materials on locations with various parks and playgrounds. Parks would then be required to post the results of the study and pilot on its website.

And finally, Intro. 806 would create a more formal structure for overseeing wildlife issues that face the city. Despite its reputation as being a concrete jungle, the city is actually a habitat to hundreds of animal species that live in the wild. In recent years, for reasons that likely have to do with our efforts to expand green space and effects resulting from climate change, sightings of various forms of wildlife have been reported. With more wildlife interactions, the possibility of disease spread, property damage, and physical confrontations

can become more common. Many have argued that there needs to be more effort in managing and studying the city's wildlife populations to better promote human-wildlife coexistence. Specifically, this bill would create a Wildlife Management Advisory Board to develop a wildlife management plan. It would also analyze wildlife management issues, and recommend policies to preserve and promote biological diversity and the humane treatment of wildlife.

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

Now I'll turn it over to our Committee Counsel. Actually, I'm going to turn it over to my Colleague, Council Member Phil Wong.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you, Chair.
Good morning, everyone.

Today we are considering two bills of mine which reflect the City's responsibility to improving its environmental and the well-being of its people. The first bill will create a cool pavement pilot program for parks and playgrounds in heat-vulnerable areas. Our children deserve to play

in places that will not subject them to uncomfortable or even dangerous levels of heat, and this bill will begin to make that a reality.

The second bill, Intro. 806, will create a citywide wildlife management program. This long-overdue program will give the City a shared mission for our wildlife benefiting residents, communities, and ecosystems alike.

The passage of these two bills is crucial for this city. I would like to extend my thanks to Chair Hankerson for hearing these bills, to the Council Staff for working so hard to get them moving, and to the Administration for coming to speak to us today. I hope we can have a productive conversation regarding any changes that will maintain the bill's mission of improving the well-being of our animals and people. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Council Member.

I want to acknowledge my other Colleagues that are here, Council Members Morano, Ung, Narcisse, Marte, and obviously Phil Wong, who we just heard from.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

9

2 With that, I will turn it over to
3 Committee Counsel, Kris Sartori, to swear in the
4 members of the Parks Department.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL SARTORI: Thank you,
6 Chair.

7 Would the representatives of the Parks
8 Department please raise your right hand if you're
9 able?

10 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
11 whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your
12 testimony before this Committee and to respond
13 honestly to Council Member questions?

14 DIRECTOR DRURY: I do.

15 ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: I do.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL SARTORI: Thank you, and
17 you may begin when ready.

18 ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Good
19 morning, Chair Hankerson, Members of the Parks
20 Committee, and other Members of the City Council. I
21 am Marit Larson, the Acting Deputy Commissioner for
Environment and Planning at New York City Parks, and
I'm pleased to be joined by our Chief of Education
and Wildlife, Sarah Aucoin, as well as our Chief of
Citywide Legislative Affairs, Matt Drury. Thank you

for having us here today to discuss the legislation being considered, four environmentally friendly, environmentally themed bills related to nature trails, wildlife management, cool pavement, and the availability of green and open space around the city.

As the 56th annual celebration at Earth Day approaches later this month, we appreciate the Council's focus on sustainability, eco-friendly practices, and we're proud to be the agency tasked with managing, planning, and growing our city's green spaces in a responsible and thoughtful manner. For each of the topics that the legislation touched upon, we'd like to provide some background context about the agency's approach and ongoing efforts to deliver for New Yorkers.

Starting with Intro. 577, this legislation would require New York City Parks to improve, formalize, or create 300 miles of trails within three years of the effective date of the bill. One-third of the acreage under our jurisdiction consists of natural areas, totaling over 12,000 acres of parkland. These unique spaces are located all across New York City and are most abundant in the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island. These parks have a

legacy of protection and preservation rather than development and are now home to abundant plant and animal biodiversity, including rare and threatened and endangered species. As part of a social research study, the Natural Areas Conservancy and the U.S. Forest Service interviewed New Yorkers that were visiting natural areas and found that almost 20 percent of these New Yorkers relied exclusively on that local park for access to nature. This is one example of how we know our local natural areas are extremely valuable for passive recreation, environmental education, and mental well-being.

Nature trails are the primary way to access these unique spaces and our trail formalization work is an attempt to make them more inviting and welcoming to all New Yorkers. In recent years, with the help and support of our incredible Park partners and volunteer stewards, New York City Parks staff mapped and assessed over 450 miles of trails running throughout our natural areas, many of which were confusing, circuitous, redundant, and in poor condition. This formalization process includes corridor pruning to maintain trail width, invasive species removal to maintain the healthy forest, and

building of approximately 250 trail structures each year to help prevent erosion and increase the safety and enjoyment of trail users. Within the next year, we anticipate having delivered over 300 miles of formalized high-quality nature trails for the public, transforming the city's trail network from confusing and redundant to clearly marked and legible. And useful maps for all these trails are available to the public on our agency website.

Though this formalization effort has resulted in fewer trails, the trails that remain are now of higher quality and more likely to be enjoyed by the surrounding communities. Given the robust trail network currently available to the public within our parks' natural areas, we believe the legislation proposed to mandate to improve or create 300 miles of additional trails within natural areas is impractical, but we would be happy to work with the Council to explore potential improvements to the information regarding our trail system that is available to the public. We appreciate the intent to offer New Yorkers more options to exploring our natural areas and are happy to partner to explore ways to make sure even more New Yorkers can enjoy

this incredible access to natural areas, though of course the agency's finite resources should primarily focus on maintaining and caring for the trail network that already exists.

Turning to Intro. 740, this bill would require New York City Parks in consultation with other City agencies to conduct a study to identify at least the top 10 community districts that lack the most green space and to make recommendations to the Mayor and Council on how to increase green space, including parkland in such areas. We're proud to be the agency tasked with planning, managing, and growing our city's green and open spaces in a responsible and thoughtful manner and ensuring that New Yorkers have access to open space is a major part of our core mission.

Parks are essential urban infrastructure that provide respite for New Yorkers and protect us from the growing threats of climate change and we do our best to carefully track and inventory public open spaces across the city, including property that is not directly under our jurisdiction. The City's One NYC Strategic Plan released in 2015 established a target of having 85 percent of New York City

residents living within a walking distance of a park by 2030, and we're currently at 84.2 percent, the 0.8 percent difference representing roughly 63,000 people without close access to open space. This underlying data-driven goal helps guide our efforts to create and improve green and open space around the city and allows us to identify underserved areas in terms of their open space ratio, which reflects access to public open space in relation to population within a given neighborhood or community district. This open space ratio is central data metrics informing our recently launched Walk to Park neighborhood ULURP effort. Historically, the agency has only been able to pursue parkland acquisition on a case-by-case basis, learning of specific opportunities with willing sellers through happenstance, which in some cases were in neighborhoods that already had significant access to open space. Through this new proactive strategic effort, we have identified community districts with lower open space ratios and are proactively assessing privately owned sites for acquisition opportunities on a neighborhood wide scale. Two community district based ULURP applications were approved in December 2025 in Queens

Community District 3 and Brooklyn Community District 5, and another is undergoing the City's ULURP approval process in Queens Community District 2. We're working on outreach to private owners within these districts in hopes of identifying willing sellers and are planning to submit additional ULURP applications in other high-need districts in the near future.

Similarly, this data-driven approach allows us to help advise New York City Public Schools in their ongoing effort to identify schoolyards and neighborhoods with less access to open space, which can potentially be open to the public outside of school hours. This Schoolyards to Playgrounds initiative has been a great success, and we very much appreciate New York City Public Schools partnership in this ongoing effort. With all that in mind, New York City Parks is very appreciative of the underlying intent of Intro. 740, and we look forward to working with Council to determine how to best achieve the goals of this bill. As we've discussed today, the analysis of public access to green and open space is very much guiding our operational strategies as an agency, and we'd be happy to discuss

the best way to make that information available to the public in a digestible and useful manner.

We do have some technical concerns with the legislation as it's currently drafted, namely proposed mandate to assess the capital condition of every green space in the city, including properties that are not under Parks' jurisdiction, which would be infeasible for the agency to pursue. Assessment of the capital needs in any given property is a highly complex and technical exercise, often requiring detailed analysis, including subsurface site borings, and a mandate of this sort would be massively time-consuming and resource-intensive undertaking.

Moving to Intro. 805, this would require New York City Parks in consultation with the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Transportation, and the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice to conduct a pilot program concerning the installation of cool pavement materials on parks and playgrounds. New York City Parks implements a variety of methods to mitigate heat vulnerability on our sites. Our capital division incorporates design principles into our park renovation projects, including converting existing

pavement to vegetative areas, building rain gardens, and using permeable pavers, applying color-soaked coat seal on large asphalt areas, using lighter colors for safety service tiles, and of course preserving our existing tree canopy and planting new trees. We use lighter color reflective roofing materials whenever appropriate, and our citywide services team oversees the largest portfolio of green roofs of any City agency, having installed nearly 300,000 square feet of green roof over 42 parks facilities.

We're pleased to report that, pursuant to Local Law 152 passed by City Council last year, DOT is actively planning a two-year pilot to install cool pavement in locations around the city, which include pedestrian open spaces such as plazas and triangles. We look forward to working closely with DOT as they kick off their cool pavement pilot later this year, but we do not believe that a parallel park-specific pilot should be implemented at this time until the results of the DOT pilot can be comprehensively assessed.

Lastly, Intro. 806 would require the creation of a Wildlife Management Advisory Board to

develop a citywide wildlife management plan to analyze wildlife management issues and recommend policies to preserve and promote biological diversity and the humane treatment of wildlife. We very much appreciate the intent of this legislation and are happy to work with the Council and the Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare to discuss the best ways to achieve the goals of the bill.

As some visitors may be surprised to learn, but most New Yorkers know very well, our city's urban wildlife is actually quite abundant and diverse. Some species thrive in close proximity to New Yorkers, creating both management challenges and opportunities for education and research. At the same time, other species are negatively impacted by urbanization, including endangered species and protected migratory birds that require targeted conservation efforts. New York City Parks Wildlife Unit was established in 2016 to address these dynamics, promote coexistence between people and urban wildlife, and serve as an informed resource for the public and as an ambassador for the city's wildlife.

We'd like to briefly outline a few examples of how this work is currently being done. The Wildlife Unit works to educate New Yorkers and support safe coexistence between people and wildlife across the city. For example, coyotes naturally inhabit urban green spaces. This can occasionally lead to negative encounters. Game cameras are used to monitor their distribution and behavior, allowing targeted outreach to communities and staff to ensure the safety of both people and animals. The long-term survival of species like coyotes in our city depends on public understanding and perception. In 2025, the Wildlife Unit reached over 1,000 people through educational programs promoting coexistence.

The City's non-lethal deer impact management plan was launched in 2016 to combat negative impacts of the overabundant deer population on Staten Island. Under the direction of City Hall, the plan is a coordinated multi-agency effort involving New York City Parks and numerous partners. Working closely with the Mayor's Office of Animal Welfare, our Wildlife Unit manages a contract allowing the humane sterilization of deer and oversees data collection and analysis for the

program, tracking deer vehicle collisions, tick-borne disease, and forest impacts, and sharing program results with the public each year through the interactive story map report. As of Project Year nine, we're pleased to note the deer/vehicle collision reports have decreased by 83 percent since the program's inception, and Lyme disease cases on Staten Island have declined.

The Wildlife Unit is also leading a wildlife conservation project to monitor active nest sites of rodent-consuming raptors such as red-tailed hawks. In 2025, a total of 68 raptor nests were monitored citywide, helping inform New York City Parks' pest management practices with the goal of reducing secondary rodenticide poisoning in wildlife. Working in close coordination with New York City Health Department, New York City Parks supports public safety through ongoing education, disease surveillance, and interagency collaboration, including efforts to prevent rabies in wildlife populations and track emerging diseases such as avian influenza. Those interested in learning more can visit the City's Wildlife NYC website, a valuable resource for New Yorkers to learn more about wildlife

that live across the five boroughs. Visitors can also find events that celebrate wildlife and even report their sightings of healthy wildlife. New Yorkers have submitted over 4,000 sightings documenting everything from hawks to raccoons to coyotes. These reports provide New York City Parks with important insight into wildlife activity and help identify where issues may emerge in the future.

Lastly, we're always looking for opportunities to partner with the City Council and engage with your constituents, so please reach out and let us know if our Wildlife Unit can help lead an information session on a specific issue of interest.

I hope our testimony today, as demonstrated, New York City Parks is proud to be New York's greenest agency. Thank you for allowing us to testify before you today and for your continued advocacy and support of our city parks. We're happy now to answer any questions that you may have.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much.

I'll start off with some questions, and I'll just hand it over to my Colleagues to ask additional questions.

In regards to Intro. 740, aside from Mayor Mamdani's recent announcement regarding the expansion of the Community Parks Initiative, CPI, how many projects have been completed since its inception in 2014?

ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Thank you for the question.

The Community Parks Initiative is Parks' first equity-driven investment program to bring enhanced green spaces into underserved neighborhoods, and through this initiative we're using both data-driven methodology and working closely with communities to create thriving public spaces. In total, we have 127 CPI sites. We've completed 70 CPI sites with another 57 active projects underway.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

Is the Administration open to securing more funding to expand CPI even further?

ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Thank you for the question. We have, since the fall of 2021, 425 million dollars in baseline mayoral capital funding for continuing the program beginning then. We've then, therefore, got 50 million dollars annually to complete renovations in 10 sites per year

2 for the next 10 years, and very much look forward to
3 continuing that work.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I just want to go
5 back to something you mentioned in your testimony,
6 and pardon me if I misheard. Did you say that 0.8
7 percent out of the 85 percent goal, represents 63
8 people without close access to parks? Is that what
9 you said?

10 ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON:
11 63,000.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: 63,000. Okay. I'm
13 like, okay, 63, that's not bad. Thank you.

14 And, is that in a particular
15 neighborhood, or is that just across the city?

16 ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: That's
17 across the city.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

19 Is the idea of funding Parks through
20 property tax revenue, a tax increment finance
21 district, or special park district, as is done in
other cities such as Chicago, a viable one for New
York City? Is that solution viable for New York City?

DIRECTOR DRURY: Thanks for the question,
Chair.

You know, I think Parks Department is always open to... there's been a lot of interest and excitement about, you know, the needs of parks in the city, and, you know, we're delighted to take part in those conversations. Speaking to the specific funding models of that sort, you know, it's a conversation we're happy to take part in. I don't think we're prepared at this time to kind of opine, and obviously we want to do that in consultation with, you know, OMB and a lot of other, you know, Mayor's Office stakeholders, but we're very intrigued and interested in a lot of the creative approaches that have been taking place across the country, and I think we think there's a lot to learn.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Has Parks actually considered it, or it hasn't really been top of mind?

DIRECTOR DRURY: I'm not aware that that funding model could be implemented by the agency, like, at its own discretion. I believe that would require, you know, I think there are other regulatory and policy steps that would need to be put into place, so I wouldn't say we have contemplated it, because I don't, you know, if it were to happen, it would have to require a series of more complicated

discussions and policy decisions, so I can't say that we've, you know, planned, but we're aware of the interest in both that funding model and others, and it's something we're watching very closely.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay. That's good to know.

Are any other conservancies being planned for the near future that would run and maintain any of DPR's parks?

DIRECTOR DRURY: Yeah. Thanks for the question.

We're very proud of our partnership with organizations, some of which range in size, you know, from small, sort of informal, what we call friends of parks groups, civic associations all over the city, to larger, you know, conservancies, formal conservancies that have license agreements with the City, and today I'm not aware of any sort of new conservancies that are coming online, so to speak, but we definitely are in a series of conversations with groups that are growing in capacity, that are very interested in playing a formalized role, and there's a lot of different ways to go about those structures, and we want to make sure that it will

1 serve the park best, and obviously, you know, in
2 terms of the, each group is different, has different
3 capacity, different interests, each park is
4 different, that's, you know, that may be assisted by
5 such a group, so those conversations, there are, you
6 know, dozens, if not more, of groups that are, you
7 know, out there growing and providing great value,
8 and, you know, and we're in discussions about
9 formalizing, you know, several of those agreements in
10 a variety of fashions, but nothing to announce today
that we would say is kind of coming online.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay. I guess as a
12 follow-up to that, does Parks encourage such
organizing?

13 DIRECTOR DRURY: We certainly encourage
14 New Yorkers to get involved in their parks, and that
15 can happen in a variety of ways, from informal, you
16 know, volunteer groups to, you know, frankly, just
17 park visitors, you know, cleaning up after
18 themselves, right? There's a lot of different ways
19 that people can support their local park. There are
20 great organizations that have grown over time and are
21 doing incredible work in our parks, and, you know, we
very much value those partnerships, for sure.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: But particularly
3 friends groups and conservancies, does Parks
4 encourage the formation of those type of
5 organizations?

6 DIRECTOR DRURY: We do. We don't see it as
7 a necessity, but it is an incredible engagement tool
8 to make sure that, you know, New Yorkers are
9 interested in their parks, and we found it's very
10 helpful. It's nice to have an entity to kind of point
11 them to, right? Something that has some structure
12 around it. We do find that we don't think it's a
13 necessity by any means. There are incredible parks in
14 our system, that don't have a formalized group
15 attached to it, and that's fine as well.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Is it helpful in
17 terms of maintenance?

18 DIRECTOR DRURY: It can be. It certainly
19 can be, but, you know, we're obviously dedicated to
20 keeping our parks clean in the best condition
21 possible, regardless of whether there's a group or
not.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

What efforts has DPR engaged in to determine which areas of the city are in the most need of green space?

ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Thank you for that question, Chair.

As we mentioned in our testimony, we're proud to be the agency tasked with planning and managing and growing our green space, and we do that by carefully assessing where there is need across the city. As I mentioned, in 2015, the City began with, under the One NYC, a strategy to identify how we could reduce the number of New Yorkers that were not within a walking distance to parks. Again, that goal of achieving 85 percent of New Yorkers that are within a walking distance to parks by 2030 was really the driver to be able to assess whether we're, what state we're in now, and how we achieve that goal. We look citywide at the data on open space. We look at the open space across not just our property, but other entities as well, and with that, we're able to assess where the gaps are, and it's really that approach that's allowed us to identify where there are needs. So, in addition to this Walk to Park initiative, we have also zeroed in on a strategy to

try to ensure that we are poised to be able to then implement additional open space to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. So, that's our community-based ULURP initiative, our neighborhood ULURP program, and through that program, we identified 19 community districts across the city that had both large populations above a certain threshold, open space needs, ratios below a certain threshold, and/or a percent poverty that indicated need for investment. And with that program, that's one of the main ways in which we are assessing where there's need for green space, and how we can actually get to closing those gaps.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: And have you published the data from your findings?

ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: We currently have succeeded in going through ULURP for two of the community districts, and so that was a public process through which we go through ULURP, and I think we've shared all of that information with each of the districts as we go through that process. And we're now steadily working towards the rest of the community districts, and are currently focusing on Queens Community District too.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I just want to
3 take a moment to acknowledge the presence of Council
4 Member Salaam, P. Sanchez, and Council Member
5 Krishnan.

6 What areas of the city does DPR see as
7 being in the most need of open and green space?

8 ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Thank
9 you for the question, Chair.

10 We have priority community districts that
11 meet this criteria of really being in most need of
12 closing these Walk to Park gaps. In the Bronx,
13 Community Districts 9, 11, and 12. In Brooklyn, 5, 7,
14 11, 12, 14, 15, and 17.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'm sorry, can you
16 just, just a little slow.

17 ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Very
18 happy to share this information with you, obviously,
19 after the hearing.

20 Brooklyn is 5, 7, 11, 12, 14, 15, and 17.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: By chance, do you
know what those neighborhoods are?

ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: They
span quite a bit. I know Marine Park is, I believe,

2 one of them in that district, but we can certainly
3 get you a map and show you those neighborhoods.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'd appreciate
5 that. Thank you.

6 ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Queens
7 has Districts 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 12, and Staten
8 Island is District 1.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay. We have some
10 work to do.

11 Aside from developing or renovating parks
12 and playgrounds, or planting trees, what are some of
13 the other efforts DPR has engaged in over the years
14 to help bring green space to neighborhoods that are
15 in need?

16 ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Thank
17 you for that question.

18 Yes. In addition to the Walk to Park
19 program and the neighborhood ULURP program, we look
20 for opportunities to partner with other organizations
21 and agencies to provide access to parks and open
spaces whenever we can. One of our most successful
programs has been the Schoolyard to Playground
collaboration with both non-agency partners and with,
of course, the public schools. We've also worked in

rezonings with our partners at the Department of City Planning to make sure that we're able to take opportunities to identify any new needs that come and be able to plan for the access needed for future New Yorkers, and work with privately operated public space owners when that's appropriate as well.

We're also always in the process of making sure that the open spaces that we do have are well programmed, making them even more accessible and inviting, and in natural areas in particular, for example, we've really focused on stewardship and providing at hundreds of events every year to get people out to their open spaces, and with that we've been able to engage, you know, thousands of volunteers per year.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

Final question, final two questions from me, and then I'll turn it over to my Colleagues.

The Council passed a slightly related bill in 2022, Local Law 10 of 2023, which required DPR with other appropriate agencies to review City-owned sites on streets with dead-end and land that abuts highway entrances, underpasses, and exits that the land that is suitable for the planting of

2 trees or other vegetation or creating green spaces.
3 The report required from that bill was due in 2024
4 but has still not been submitted. Can you share an
5 update on when that will be completed?

6 DIRECTOR DRURY: Yeah. We want to thank
7 you, Council Member, for bringing this to our..

8 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Council Member
9 Krishnan's bill.

10 DIRECTOR DRURY: Yes. Very much so.

11 Thanks for bringing this to our
12 attention. Yeah. The Local Law did require that an
13 agency or office designated by the Mayor would
14 consult with all the, you know, the various entities
15 that you mentioned, DEP, DOT, DCAS, including Parks,
16 to undertake this site review. We're actually not
17 able to speak to the status. I'm not aware that an
18 entity was indeed designated by the previous
19 Administration so we're going to need to sort of, but
20 our colleagues are aware of the status of this, so,
21 you know, we appreciate this having been brought to
our attention and we'll try to get you an update as
soon as we can.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'd appreciate
that. Thank you.

2 With that, I'm going to turn it over to
3 Council Member Wong.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. Thank you,
5 Chair.

6 I'm reading the statement here from the
7 Parks Department, and it says that we look forward to
8 work closely with DOT as they kick off their Cool
9 Pavement pilot later this year, but we do not believe
10 that a parallel park-specific pilot should be
11 implemented at this time until the results of the DOT
12 pilot can be comprehensively assessed.

13 Now, I understand that DOT is also doing
14 this, but Parks covers different spaces. Why are we
15 waiting for DOT's program when Parks can start
16 identifying parks and playgrounds that are heat
17 islands, very specifically playgrounds, you know, and
18 work to reduce that? It gives away responsibility or
19 it kicks the can down the road for another
20 Commissioner to deal with. Can you respond to that?

21 DIRECTOR DRURY: Yeah, absolutely. Thank
you, Council Member.

And again, to be very clear, Parks is
doing a lot of work to reduce heat island effect in a
variety of different ways that we also mentioned in

our testimony, including greening spaces that were within our, you know, and including using lighter colored tiles for our safety surface. We're very mindful of that.

This specific technical exercise, the cool pavement piece, you know, DOT, we're working very closely with them. They are looking at spaces, incorporating spaces that we believe are actually commensurate or quite comparable to what we would consider park-type spaces, plazas, pedestrian areas, what have you, and we think there's going to be a lot to learn from those efforts. So, we're very dedicated to reducing heat island effect in all of our, you know, through greening, through planting. Those efforts will continue and on a parallel path as the City undergoes this pilot as required by last year's law, you know, we think there's going to be a lot of, you know, great lessons to learn. We're already working closely with DOT. They're aware of the interest in making sure that there are, you know, comparable lessons that can be sort of gleaned from their exercise. We'll be involved and we're looking very closely at that exercise.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Yeah. What I'm
3 saying is that this bill 805 targets playgrounds and
4 land under the jurisdiction of the DPR.

5 DIRECTOR DRURY: Yes.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: That's not DOT's
7 jurisdiction.

8 DIRECTOR DRURY: Correct. However, we
9 would suggest that undertaking two separate pilots to
10 achieve a similar goal is not the sort of
11 coordination and thoughtful use of resources that,
12 you know, that the City deserves. So, we believe that
13 there's a lot to be learned from the pilot that's
14 already required by law. There will be space... our
15 understanding is DOT is still going through their
16 site selections, but we believe there will be sites
17 that are chosen that will be... that will provide
18 helpful intelligence for us to learn from and to
19 adopt and to pursue on our own merits, and we look
20 forward to kind of learning from that.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: How much time do I
have? I still have time. Okay. Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: No, I just want to
be clear. Does the Parks Department have the goal of
reducing dangerous heat that children may be

subjected to while spending time in parks and playgrounds?

DIRECTOR DRURY: Yes. Very much, and as we described in our testimony, there's a variety of efforts that the agency undertakes to address that very concern.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Then is the Parks Department supportive of projects that reduce dangerous heat children may be subject to while spending time in parks and playgrounds?

DIRECTOR DRURY: We are, and we implement them constantly.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: But then what is the issue with the bill here that you seem that...

DIRECTOR DRURY: The issue is that the City is going to be undergoing a cool pavement pilot in coordination, led by DOT, but in coordination with multiple agencies. We believe that parallel pilots as a general like management strategy isn't advisable.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: All right. Then did the Parks Department recommend changes? Why did the Parks Department recommend changes that almost completely erase the bill that reduces the heat in parks and playgrounds?

DIRECTOR DRURY: In coordination, first of all, this is a dialogue that's happening with our partners at DOT, with the Law Department, with the Mayor's Office, and we believe, and we're happy to discuss this with you and your team, we believe that you know for the bill to advance, we'd be interested in seeing incorporating more language to work with the law that's been enacted as opposed to creating a wholly separate and parallel process.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: All right. I looked at the edits. The changes that the Administration recommended gives me the impression that you do not want to improve the well-being of the children.

DIRECTOR DRURY: Well, I can assure you, sir, that's incorrect. We very much care about the well-being and safety of all New Yorkers, including our children.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: All right. Well, recommendations to help this City implement a program that makes it a safer and more comfortable place are welcome. Shirking responsibility is not welcome, and then I feel that after reading your edits.

DIRECTOR DRURY: Well, we're sorry you feel that way. We'd like to continue in the

2 conversation, as I think our testimony made clear.
3 This agency is not shirking any responsibility, but
4 we do want to move forward in exploring new avenues
5 in a thoughtful and efficient manner.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. Thank you.
7 Thank you, Chair.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Council
9 Member.

10 I'm going to turn it over to Council
11 Member Narcisse.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Thank you,
13 Chair, and thank you for being here.

14 I love Parks, so I wish we can bring the
15 money up, but my question is going to be around the
16 dogs around our park. Does the Department track dog
17 waste complaints separately from general park
18 cleanliness complaints, and if so, what does that
19 data show over the last three to five years, and how
20 many 3-1-1 calls or complaints have been submitted
21 specifically related to dog waste in the parks, and
is the number trending up or down? How many fines
have been issued to dog owners for failure to clean
up waste in the parks annually? You know I love
parks, so that's the reason I'm asking this.

DIRECTOR DRURY: No. It's a great question, and we appreciate it, Council Member.

You know, I think there's been a lot of dialogue about the challenges. You know, there's a lot of press coverage and a lot of community dialogue about dog waste problems all over the city, including, you know, sidewalks and our partners at Sanitation. You know, we want to really strongly encourage all New Yorkers, you know, we all love our pets, our dogs, but we do need to be cleaning up after them properly, so we encourage all New Yorkers, obviously, to do that.

You mentioned, so I'll clarify that dog waste is very much a data point that is included in our comprehensive parks inspection program. So, to be clear, this is a rigorous, comprehensive, deep dive, if you will, inspection of parks that's taken randomly, and it is conducted separately from our maintenance and operations team. So, it's similar to what you might, if you ever worked in retail, they have secret shopper sort of campaigns, so it's similar in that. They're independent visits, and they're very, very detailed, and dog waste is very much a data point that can lead to, you know, the

passing or failure of a given inspection. So, we can... I don't have those data points on hand at the moment, but we can certainly provide historical data about dog waste as a data point in parks in your District or wherever. Similarly, we can get you information about the summons that are issued by our Parks Enforcement Patrol officers. That's something, you know, whether it's dogs off leash or dog waste concerns, that's something we can definitely, you know, we should be able to get you data on that, and I think if I'm...

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: So, you don't have the data for me? Okay.

DIRECTOR DRURY: On dog waste? No, I don't.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Because in a greenery, very beautiful park, you take your kids to run in the park and lay down, you don't want this to be a problem.

DIRECTOR DRURY: We agree 100 percent. You know, it's something we take very, very seriously. It can be obviously very detrimental to the experience of anyone who's ever closely encountered it on your shoes or what-have-you. It's very unpleasant,

obviously. It's something we take seriously, and we're happy to get you the more detailed data and metrics on that following this hearing.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: All right.

I have a few others, but I think we... The thing that I'm looking at the parks where we have 63,000, I believe, people not really having good access, and when I look at them, and especially in this Community Board 17 and District 58, we only have one little park, and it's concrete so I'm talking about the whole area. In Community Board 18, the same thing. I'm shocked to see that, you know, in South Side of Brooklyn, closer to the belt, all along we have parks, but in the middle, we don't have nothing going on. And what's the plan to improve in those areas in terms of green spaces? Do you have any plan for those areas? It's almost zero green space.

ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Thank you very much for the question, Council Member. We are continuing through primarily this program right now, our Neighborhood ULURP, to go systematically through the city, based on the data we have on open space, residents, and other indicators of percent poverty, to look at where there are gaps that are

priorities to fill. We certainly are very willing to look at other places and opportunities. You know, we've always been open to trying to opportunistically look for opportunities. Our Neighborhood ULURP program, however, will set us up in a community district to be able to take action when there are willing sellers, and when there are opportunities. So, between that and also looking at when there are rezonings, and when there are partnerships with our public schools, those are some of our primary tools to make sure that, in dense neighborhoods, we ensure that there's as much access to open space as possible.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Yeah. And now, probably a little off topic, we don't have no community centers. Coming to a park, we don't have no greenery. (TIMER CHIME) What's the plan to have community centers throughout our communities, and that's kind of like, you can build it with the greenery on top. So, Chair, I know you look at that. That's one of the problems, and that problem, I call it penny-wise, dollar-foolish, because when those kids don't have nothing to do, idle hands and idle mind, you know what the, is it devil's name, I don't

really use it, but we need to be using preventive approach, not letting those kids to be trapped in the system that they should not be. So, if we have places like centers, are you promoting community centers like Shirley Chisholm? We only have one for so many decades, and y'all pride, some folks are proud to say, oh, we haven't had for so many years, but I think we're failing our youth, because that's where they supposed to be in the first place. Any plan in your life, because I know I'm talking about one, to be in where we have a lot of gun violence that happen. So, I feel like we should be focusing on those kind of inner green, like, how could I put it, you can use the rooftop for greenery, you can use the surrounding area, and I think that we should be focused on that. Any plan on that, when it comes to community centers?

DIRECTOR DRURY: Yeah. Thanks for the question, Council Member.

And, you know, we love our recreation centers. They are a cornerstone of the facilities that offer incredible engagement and recreation and health opportunities, not just for our children, but, you know, adults, senior citizens. The membership

rates are free for anyone age 24 and younger. They're extremely affordable for senior citizens, persons with disabilities, military veterans, and even the base level is hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of dollars cheaper than your typical, you know, chain fitness club. So, we're very, very proud of our facilities. We're very excited to open to Shirley Chisholm. It's been a huge hit. The local community has been, you know, and we're happy we'll be opening up an additional three or four over the next couple years. Mary Cali Dalton in Staten Island, Soundview in the Bronx, and I'll note that, that effort, which, you know, which began several years ago, because it is a time-consuming and resource-intensive effort. These are state-of-the-art facilities that, you know, with construction in New York City, it won't be any surprise, can cost, you know, you know, 100, 150 million dollars. Like, these are major investments, but necessary investments. As you say, a preventative approach to engaging youth and, you know, saving at the end of the day, you know, possibly millions and millions and millions of dollars of health care, you know, the criminal justice system, like, you name it, like all those other impacts that can happen. We

believe that our centers are a vital and a wise investment. So, we're excited to be advancing the projects that are going to be coming online. We're always looking for more opportunities. I know you've been very keenly, you've been a vocal and energetic advocate for a center in your District. That's something we want to continue that conversation. It is a serious investment that requires, you know, the provision of a lot of resources, and that can be a complicated conversation, but it's one we're very, very, you know, excited to have.

COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I love complicated conversation. I'm a registered nurse and ER nurse, so let's have it for the kids to prevent them from getting in the cycle that they should not be in the first place.

So, thank you, Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I do have one follow-up question to Council Member Narcisse's line of questioning.

Do you have any buildings with green space designed on the top of the building, by chance?

DIRECTOR DRURY: Yeah. Thanks for the question, Chair.

We do. At about 41 or 42 of our Parks facilities, some of which are just sort of, you know, parks, M and O facilities, or what have you, we have several green roofs that absorb, you know, rainwater. You know, broadly speaking, and they also help with, you know, heating costs, cooling costs, things of that nature. Happy to give you a tour of some of our facilities and show some of the great work that's happened.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay, I do have some follow-up questions, but I don't want to take up too much time.

I'm going to jump to Council Member Morano.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you both for your testimony, and as a representative of the Borough of Parks, thank you for all the work you're doing for the parks of our city.

In your testimony, Deputy Commissioner, you said the mandate to create 300 miles of trails is impractical, and that resources should focus on maintaining existing trails. How many miles of trails today are currently in poor condition, or not

properly maintained, and what would it cost to fix them?

ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Thank you for that question, Council Member, and the trails in Staten Island are particularly wonderful. We have already formalized 275 miles of trail across the city. As I mentioned in our testimony, we have mapped trails of all sorts of conditions to the extent of about 450 miles, so our process of going through, you know, park by park to really look at what the best and safest network of trails is for every location involves essentially screening out those trails that are not in good condition, that are not safe, that are, you know, perhaps duplicate or redundant, but that don't serve the public, and that's how we essentially got to our goal of formalizing 300 trails. So, we're actually quite aligned. We have a goal of formalizing 300 miles of trails run in our natural areas, and we think we'll be able to achieve that this year. By the end of 2027, or by 2027, we hope to have all those formalized trails actually updated on our Parks website.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: You noted that natural areas are most abundant in the Bronx, Queens,

and Staten Island. Of the 300 miles of formalized trails that you say are being delivered, how many miles are actually in Staten Island?

ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Thank you for the question. It's a great question. I don't actually believe I have that number handy, and we're happy to provide that that after the hearing.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: That would be great. Thank you.

You rely heavily on the... in discussing Intro. 740, you rely heavily on the Walk to a Park metric, and say that 84.2 percent of New Yorkers have access. Does that metric account for the quality, safety, or usability of those parks, or is it just distance on a map?

ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Thank you for the question. We fundamentally, Parks, of course, are always concerned about the quality and condition of our parks, so we expect every park to meet a certain standard and work, you know, on a daily basis to achieve that. The metric looks at access to a park that, for the full given hours of a park, you know, period. So, an open space wouldn't be, in a community garden, for example, that's closed

to the public for a given time. So, in general, the conditions of our parks really meet our agency standard when we're accounting for them.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Council Member Wong asked you guys about Intro. 805, and you mentioned a pilot program on cool pavement, and said expansion shouldn't happen just yet. How much has been spent on that pilot so far, and what specific benchmarks need to be met before you move forward or abandon it?

DIRECTOR DRURY: It's a good question. Our understanding from our colleagues at DOT is that they're still in the planning stages. The bill was passed, I believe, late last year, and I believe they're expecting to kick off the pilot, which by law I think was anticipated to last two years, I believe, and I believe they're supposed to kick off in the fall.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: And finally, for Intro. 806, the wildlife plan, you already described an existing wildlife unit doing education, monitoring, and management. What specifically would this bill require that isn't already happening today, and what would be the additional cost?

DIRECTOR DRURY: Thanks for the question, Council Member, and I may ask our Chief of Education and Wildlife to correct me if I mischaracterize anything, but what the bill contemplates is the creation of an advisory board of numerous members, including the Parks Department. But because wildlife, you know, our management efforts are pretty strictly focused on property that's under our jurisdiction, you know, 30,000 acres, plenty, and there is certainly a, as you heard, a lot of wildlife, the presence of wildlife is throughout our park system. What the bill seems to contemplate is the creation of an advisory board that takes a citywide sort of perspective and creates a plan. (TIMER CHIME) So, you're asking a very good question about the cost of that. I think it's going to be hard for us to, I'm not sure we're quite aware of that at the moment.

COUNCIL MEMBER MORANO: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Council Member.

We're going to jump to Council Member Salaam.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for your testimony so far.

I want to go into Intro. 805 as well. Community districts with the highest heat vulnerability indices and low median income often have playgrounds and court surfaces that are heavily used year-round by residents who lack access to private recreational spaces or air conditions. Can the Department commit to ensuring that Manhattan pilot sites are located in neighborhood tabulation areas that meet both heat and income thresholds and have the highest recreational surface usage and foot traffic?

DIRECTOR DRURY: Thanks for the question, Council Member. And, as we noted in our testimony, we undergo a lot of interventions to reduce, you know, that sort of heat vulnerability, not the least of which is obviously our planting strategy all over the city, including within parks, but also in our playgrounds, for example, using color treatments, you know, of a lighter color or using safety service of lighter colored tiles. Those are things we very much, you know, are very committed to and advancing.

As for the pilot itself, my recollection is that the DOT pilot, which is already, you know, required by law, I believe there is a metric where

they are, I believe, directed to prioritize high heat vulnerability neighborhoods, but I don't want to misspeak so I can double check on that, but my understanding is that's very much part of the guiding principle for that pilot.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Sure. Absolutely.

And going into 806, in dense communities where parks are heavily used and bordered by high-density residential buildings, residents face persisting wildlife-related challenges including rat infestations in and around parks. In designated rat mitigation zones, 85 percent of Park property failed initial inspection despite significant investments. Will this wildlife management plan address rat and rodent management alongside charismatic species like coyotes and raptors, and how will the plan prioritize community-level public health concerns?

DIRECTOR DRURY: Yeah. Thanks for the question, Council Member. And I think what I, you know, obviously that the City is, you know, taking rat mitigation efforts very, very seriously. Parks has a dedicated team working closely with Department of Health and the Mayor's Office, and you know, there's been significant funding added, you know, for

targeted teams on the Parks side to help address some of those concerns for sure, and we always want to hear about that and address it as timely as possible.

As to whether that aspect would be incorporated, it's hard for us to contemplate what this theoretical advisory board will or won't consider, so you know, respectfully, it's hard, but I don't think we want to speculate whether what they will or won't include.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Well, we definitely want those included, of course.

Going into Intro. 740, does DPR currently have internal data on green space per capita at the community district levels? Trust for Public Land data shows that neighborhoods of color have 44 percent less nearby park spaces, and low-income areas have 38 percent less than high-income areas. Can the Department share preliminary findings on which Manhattan community districts fall furthest below the CEQR standard of 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents?

ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Thank you for the question, Council Member.

I don't have that data with us. The community districts that we are focusing on don't

happen to include Manhattan, but we can certainly look at the data that we have for that District and share that with you.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: And also, for community districts with higher population density and lower green space per capita, what strategies beyond traditional parkland acquisition has DPR explored? Specifically, has the Department evaluated partnerships with NYCHA to activate the approximately 2,400 acres of NYCHA open space or expansion of Schoolyard to Playground programs which converted 266 schoolyard citywide at 111 million dollars?

DIRECTOR DRURY: I'll just start on the NYCHA front just to, you know, that we've actually worked in close consultation with them on a variety of different efforts, including helping formalize some of their community garden spaces.

Now as the Deputy Commissioner noted, that doesn't technically impact our Walk to a Park score, but we still think it's an important, you know, effort that obviously helps beautify and engage, you know, the local residents. And, you know, we've been very, very proud to work with NYCHA on that. And I believe we also have numerous playgrounds

and other areas that are, you know, technically under Parks jurisdiction, but either directly adjacent to or within, you know, NYCHA campuses. So, you know, I'd say we have a very, very close relationship and are always open to exploring, you know, new and additional opportunities.

And I'll turn back to the Commissioner on the acquisition piece.

ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Yes. Thank you for the question.

We certainly are very proud of the Schoolyard to Playground Program. We most recently were able to add 11 schoolyards into (TIMER CHIME) that program. And we're, you know, throughout our divisions in the Parks Department, even when, you know, acquisition is difficult, as was mentioned, we work with our community gardens through our Green Thumb Program, and as I previously mentioned, we work with our stewardship program throughout the city to focus on street tree care so we have a lot of emphasis on programming when we have challenges, perhaps, in being able to acquire more open space in dense communities.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Chair, if I may,
3 just one last question?

4 On our Intro. 577, dense inland community
5 districts in Upper Manhattan are adjacent to park
6 properties with significant acreage, steep terrain,
7 and mature tree cover that could support trail
8 infrastructure, yet they currently have no
9 formalized, blazed, or mapped trails. How would DPR
10 ensure that inland districts with high population
11 density and limited existing trail access are
12 prioritized under this bill, rather than
13 concentrating investment in outer borough parks that
14 already have trail networks?

15 ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Thank
16 you for that question. We're very excited to be
17 working in, you know, across all boroughs, and
18 Manhattan represents some of the best and most
19 beautiful trails, trail systems, trail networks, and
20 we've been working very closely with partners in High
21 Bridge and Inwood in northern Manhattan to make sure
that those trails are formalized, that the networks
are available on the website. We're constantly
thinking about other ways in which we can get that
information to the public more readily through,

ultimately, we hope, looking at interactive maps and looking at increasing and improving and standardizing our trail information at entrances to parks. We're very proud of the partnership that we have with the Natural Areas Conservancy, for example, that has allowed us to greatly expand our stewardship and empower community groups and individuals through a program that we call the Path Keepers, and that allows us to be able to train and give community groups and individuals access to tools and sort of the techniques and understanding of what's needed to maintain trails. So, I think that's something that we're very proud of and that we're looking forward to expand, particularly in Manhattan.

COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you, Council Member.

I'm going to jump to Council Member Sanchez.

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you, Chair. I like it when you're like, now we're going to go to the Bronx.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I didn't do it
3 this time, but the next hearing I am.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: I will appreciate
5 that forever.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Oh, I'm sorry.
7 Right before you, I want to acknowledge our Finance
8 Chair, Council Member Linda Lee.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you. Thank
10 you, Chair, and good afternoon to the Administration
11 today.

12 So, in connection with Intro. 740 and
13 identifying the districts with the least green space,
14 I'm not sure where Council District 14 that has
15 Community Districts 5 and 7 where we rank, but I'm
16 sure we're up there because we're quite dense. And
17 then, in connection with the testimony saying that
18 you're considering site acquisitions across the city
19 where, to help meet the goal of reaching, of 85
20 percent of New Yorkers reaching a park within walking
21 distance, I want to ask about the 2018 Jerome
rezoning. Matt, you might remember. There was a
commitment in there to improve access within the
aqueduct walk to specifically considering reopening
of the southern portion of it. There was a CPSD, a

capital planning study, that was funded to the tune of 10 million dollars within that plan, and I believe we still don't have that planning study, and there have been some complications with Department of Environmental Protection. So, just in connection with that commitment that was made in the rezoning, I wanted to ask whether you have a status update about the timeline for the publication of that CPSD, and specifically, there would have to be conversations with property owners whose backyards are adjacent to that public land, that park land there, and whether there have been conversations with the Friends of the Aqueduct, the Homeowner Association, in connection with increasing park space using that property.

ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Thank you very much for the question. I'm picturing the location, and it certainly has huge potential and also very complicated. I regret to say I can't give you an update right at this moment, but I know who can. Probably is trying to text us right now, but he'll be very glad to follow up with you right after the hearing to give you an update on the status of that.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Excellent. Thank
3 you.

4 So, then, a couple of other questions. I
5 have a very beautiful District, but we have like
6 really incredible topography in the West Bronx. We
7 have these hills, and these mountains, and we have
8 step streets, and all of that, and quite a few of
9 those are Parks properties, and so, specifically, I
10 have Deegan Landing that is in front, you know, it's
11 on the intersection of Fordham and Sedgwick. So, just
12 wondering about the approach to properties like that,
13 whether there's consideration of adding steps to
14 properties that are sort of parkland but they're on
15 cliffs to try to increase access.

16 And then, just to bundle the rest of my
17 questions together, can you tell us which schoolyards
18 are now parks, or where I can see that?

19 And then, in your testimony, you also
20 said that the public can report on wildlife
21 sightings, and can you just tell us how?

22 ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Thank
23 you for the question. I will comment just generally
24 that we are very aware of challenging access to
25 parks, particularly in the Western Bronx and what we

think of as the Harlem River watershed, and have been thinking very carefully for really decades, but strategically, increasingly, about where we can achieve more access, but where we can actually seek funding to do some studies, and to actually explore sort of the geotechnical and structural issues, and we hope that by learning a little bit more over time, we'll be able to identify where there are places that we can actually scope out a project, and glad to follow up with you on specific locations, always interested in knowing where the suggestions are.

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Deegan Landing and University Woods.

ACTING DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LARSON: Yes. University Woods was very much in the forefront of our thinking, and really looking forward to hoping to focus on that in the coming years.

And I don't have a list right now of the schoolyards of playgrounds closest to you, and very happy to send that to you following the hearing.

DIRECTOR DRURY: Although I'll add, I believe they are designated on our website as well, on our playgrounds, like subpage, and again, to be clear, these are New York City Public Schools

2 properties that they open up outside of school hours,
3 and those are, you know, I think they may be set
4 apart, or color-coded in a certain way, I can't
5 recall, but definitely they are included on our
6 website as well.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Great.

8 And how does the public report on
9 wildlife sightings?

10 DIRECTOR DRURY: Yes. Sorry. So, so if
11 they can record a sighting through the NYC Wildlife
12 website, and if it is a concern or condition, 3-1-1
13 is the best route for that.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: All right.
15 Awesome. Thank you so much. Thank you, Chair.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: All right. We're
17 going to circle back to Council Member Wong, and then
18 we will, if no other Members have questions, then
19 we'll wrap up the agency's portion and go into
20 testimony.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Thank you, Chair.

I have a follow-up. Again, this is about
the edits to the Bill 805, and again, the intent and
the spirit of the bill is about parks, the cool
pavement materials on the parks and playgrounds under

the jurisdiction of DPR, and I looked at the edits, and the first edit I'm really having an issue with, that you replaced the words parks and playgrounds with pedestrian space. It seemed to me that pedestrian space is so vague, it could be out of the jurisdiction of DPR, and why did you make, that changes the bill, why was this edit made?

DIRECTOR DRURY: Thanks for the question, Council Member. In consultation with our partners at DOT and the Law Department and the Mayor's Office, we believe that the direction that the bill should head in is to amplify the work that's already being planned, and we think that there is a lot to be gained and learned from exploring pedestrian spaces, which are paved spaces, very similar to our multi-purpose play areas, to our seating areas, you know, so we believe that there's a lot to be learned. We're happy to work with you and your team on bill language, if that could be clarified further. Obviously, you know, in these discussions and negotiations, we're always happy, you know, we want to work closely with you, we understand the spirit of the bill very much, we're very excited about DOT's pilot. Again, we think there's going to be a lot to

learn, and if there are ways that we can, you know, work with you to clarify, you know, the types of spaces that DOT will include in their pilot, we're happy to have that discussion in consultation with DOT.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. Yeah.

And I'm looking at the other edit, because you added the word to the DOT program, included the word or DOT, which gives the Parks Department a way out of this for having to do nothing. You know, you just pass the buck to DOT. That's my interpretation of this edit. You're going to shift this to the DOT.

DIRECTOR DRURY: As we've made clear, we believe that the bill as it's currently drafted would be a challenge and an inadvisable approach. We do believe that working with the pilot that's already being planned and executed by DOT is the thoughtful approach. If there are ways that we can work with you and our partners at DOT to ensure that more parks-like spaces get considered in their pilot, we're all for that. We can continue those conversations.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Okay. Thank you.

2 I have some more time, right? Oh, yeah.

3 Okay. I wanted to get to the wildlife
4 management bill. Do we have a plan on dealing with
5 birds that either needs rescue if they have a nest on
6 private properties, like the roofs of private
7 buildings, or like private cemeteries? And my second
8 part is, what about, like, dolphins or whales are
9 stranded on the beach? I mean, is that something...
10 does the City have a plan for that, or that's not a
11 Parks Department issue?

12 DIRECTOR DRURY: I'll start with the
13 second part first, which is that, you know, a whale
14 or dolphin that's stranded upon a city beach could
15 very well be a condition that's noted. In my
16 experience, you know, when that does take place, and
17 I believe it's quite uncommon, the animal is normally
18 are already deceased by that point, I believe, in
19 some cases. But please, yeah, please, yeah, that'd be
20 great. I don't want to misspeak.

21 CHIEF AUCCOIN: Hi. Thank you for your
question.

Yeah, okay.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL SARTORI: Thank you.

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member questions?

CHIEF AUCOIN: Yes, I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL SARTORI: Thank you.

CHIEF AUCOIN: We actually had a whale and a dolphin stranded this week on Rockaway Beach, so it is something that happens, and we do have a plan. We have a response plan that has been for the Parks Department for when that happens on any Parks property, and that plan involves securing the area to ensure, and sometimes they are alive, sometimes they're stranded and they're living, often they're dead, but we need to secure the area because the public's very interested, and we want to keep them away from the carcass or the animal for the animal's safety and also for theirs, and then we coordinate with our local and state partners. So, we work very closely with the Marine Atlantic Conservation Association in Long Island, and they come out almost immediately to help assess what happened. They've already performed a necropsy, which is looking at the cause of death for the sea whale that was stranded in

2 Rockaway last week, and then we have a plan for
3 either disposal or usually burial. So yes, we have a
4 plan for that.

5 I don't remember what...

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: What about like
7 private properties, like what if we have invasive
8 species in the tree that is at the back of the yard
9 of a private house, you know, the Asian longhorned
10 beetle, for example, we're going to see that again.
11 Or like birds that are injured on the nest that's on
12 the roof of a private property. Can you talk about
13 that?

14 CHIEF AUCOIN: Sure. So, the Parks
15 Department specifically oversees and responds to
16 wildlife concerns and inquiry on Parks Department
17 property. However, we work closely with partners
18 throughout the city to try and answer the public's
19 questions about wildlife, even if it's happening on
20 their own property. If it is on private property,
21 it's the private property owner's responsibility, but
we try to provide, because it's seen as unusual in
New York City, and someone who owns private property
in New York City might not be familiar with where
those resources are, we try to work with our other

local partners to ensure that there are resources available.

COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: Like, I have a tree in my yard that was infested with Asian longhorned beetle. When I called the Parks Department years ago, it's not their jurisdiction, so I'm concerned because we will have invasive species and they will kill trees. Do we have a plan for that?

DIRECTOR DRURY: For the tree canopy that's under our jurisdiction, which is to say street trees, our natural forests, and parks, there's very much an aggressive... our forestry division would be happy to meet with you and give you a whole briefing. We have a very aggressive approach to making sure that we're fending off tree disease. We have foresters and arborists that are keenly focused on that. As noted, if a tree is located on private property, like in a backyard or whatever, you know, that is that property owner's responsibility, but the agency, we like to think of ourselves as a great source of information and guidance. We're always happy to help, you know, when there's concerns, you know, but when a tree is on private property,

2 ultimately it is that property owner's
3 responsibility.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: But do you do
5 rescues if there's an injured bird on the roof of a
6 private property?

7 CHIEF AUCOIN: So, we don't, but we work
8 closely with partners in the city who will either
9 provide information about how to find someone who
10 will. Our animal care and control centers will
11 respond to wildlife issues across the city, so even
12 on private property, but we also work with our State
13 Department of Environmental Conservation, and they
14 have a list of private entities that can respond on
15 private property as well. So, again, always giving
16 information about where those resources are, but we
17 won't respond to a private property to rescue an
18 animal.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: That really enforces
20 the fact that we need a wildlife management plan that
21 covers all the wildlife, not just in parkland, but
the whole city.

CHIEF AUCOIN: Yeah. We do coordinate very
closely with other agencies throughout the city and
with our federal partners and our state partners,

2 too. So, you know, we're already doing a lot of
3 coordination that includes working with agencies to
4 address issues that are not Parks' property.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WONG: All right. Thank
6 you. Thank you, Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: All right. With
8 that, thank you to the Parks Department for joining
9 us today for this hearing.

10 At this time, we're going to going to
11 public testimony.

12 Okay. I now open this hearing for public
13 testimony. I remind members of the public that this
14 is a formal government proceeding, that decorum shall
15 be observed at all times. As such, members of the
16 public shall remain silent at all times.

17 The witness table is reserved for people
18 who wish to testify. No video recording or
19 photography is allowed from the witness table.
20 Further, members of the public may not present audio
21 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 to speak on today's hearing topics, Intros 577, 740, 805, and 806. If you have a written statement or additional written testimony you wish to submit for the record, please provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant-at-Arms.

With that, we're going to call our first panel. Katie Swabb, Gabriel Cummings, Leslie Garcia, Ashley Roelofs. Thank you.

KATIE SWABB: Good morning, Chair Hankerson. My name is Katie Swabb, and I'm here on behalf of City Parks Foundation.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Just pull the microphone just a little closer.

KATIE SWABB: We support Intro. number 740 and commend the Council's multi-agency approach to identifying neighborhoods most lacking in green space and expanding access. This is an important step towards a more equitable park system. Equity means access, but it also depends on how easy we make it for people to engage with the system. Through Partnerships for Parks, we work with roughly 420 grassroots groups caring for parks and open spaces,

from large parks to small playgrounds, medians, traffic triangles, and street trees.

Doing business with the City is not always easy. We spend a lot of time helping people navigate permits, insurance requirements, and other complexities. Most New Yorkers don't know or care which City agency maintains a public space, be it a sidewalk managed by DOT, a street tree managed by New York City Parks, or a bias wall managed by DEP. They just see this as infrastructure that is part of the neighborhood. But when issues arise, this can create real barriers. Our goal is to make sure community members have the least amount of friction in their dealing with City government.

Through the New York City Green Fund, we also provide direct financial support to community groups to build capacity and sustain programming. This work is critical because green space inequity does not happen by accident. It reflects decades of disinvestment due to redlining and other harmful policies, and will require sustained investment in both people and places. The City is already struggling to adequately care for its 30,000 acres of parkland. If we're serious about expanding access to

green space, which we should be, we must match that commitment with a fully funded, fully staffed Parks Department, as well as continued investment in community partners. We urge both the Council and the Mayor to commit at least 1 percent of the City budget to Parks, so we can both sustain the system we have and responsibly grow it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

ASHLEY ROELOFS: Hello, Chair and Members of the Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Ashley Roelofs, and I am representing Trust for Public Land.

Trust for Public Land's mission is to connect people to nature, ensuring that everyone, regardless of zip code, has access to the outdoors. Across New York City, we work to expand access to parks, trails, and green space, particularly in neighborhoods that have historically lacked this critical infrastructure. We are here today to express our strong support for the proposed Bill number 0577 to create 300 miles of trails across New York City. This bill represents a significant opportunity to create a more connected, equitable, and resilient city. Expanding the City's trail network will improve

access to open space, create safer options for walking and biking, and strengthen connections between neighborhoods, transit, parks, and local businesses.

We also strongly support Bill number 0740, requiring the Department of Parks and Recreation to identify the community districts with the least access to green space, and recommend strategies to address these gaps. This type of data-driven approach is critical to ensuring that future investments are directed to the communities that need them most. The need is especially clear in Queens. 13 of the 20 least parked neighborhoods are in Queens, including communities like Ozone Park and Rego Park. Even where large parks exist, such as Forest Park, safe access can be difficult for those walking or bicycling. This is why projects like the Queensway are so important. The Queensway will transform a three-and-a-half-mile abandoned rail corridor into a trail, bringing green space within walking distance of nearly 245,000 residents, and creating safer, more direct access into Forest Park and other neighborhood destinations. The City's investment in the first section, the Metropolitan

Hub, is an important step forward, and reflects a strong commitment to addressing these disparities. The Queensway demonstrates how strategic investments in trails can help close park access gaps, while also improving mobility, public health, and neighborhood connectivity.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to expanding access to green space for all New Yorkers.

LESLIE GARCIA: Hello. Good afternoon. I'm Leslie Garcia, Trail Stewardship Manager for Van Cortlandt Park Alliance, and I'm here to testify on behalf of VCPA's board, staff, and more than 3 million annual park visitors. We thank the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation and Chair Hankerson for holding this important hearing.

Van Cortlandt Park is home to a world-renowned cross-country course, which hosts national, regional races, and welcomes more than 50,000 permitted runners each year. The course last underwent a capital project in the 1990s, but there was no maintenance funding tied to that project. We are way overdue for another capital project, but if the course had been properly maintained within the

last three decades, it would be in a better, much better shape today. This is an ongoing issue with all of our parks. With exciting capital projects, we get beautiful new playgrounds, fields, and basketball courts, which quickly degrade because there is not enough staff or funding to care for them. Van Cortlandt Park has 20 miles of trails that have suffered from years of neglect because there isn't enough staff or vehicles to carry out trail maintenance. In the two years that I've been working in this capacity, I began to implement regular maintenance of the trails, working with the seasonal crew of four people and a handful of regular volunteers. VCPA has received positive feedback from the community and the cross-country runners on the improved conditions of the trails.

Even though the City cannot keep up with the parks that it has, the Council continues to introduce new initiatives that will add more responsibilities to a dramatically underfunded agency. In theory, Intro. 577 is a great idea, but we can't help but wonder how it could possibly work when the preliminary budget for New York City Parks is 33 million less than last year's adopted budget. How can

New York City Parks be asked to do so much more when the budget is lower than last year? Along the same lines, Intro. 740 and T2026-1506 and -1507 are great ideas, but how will they be implemented? New York City Parks has lost 700 positions in the last years. Yet, year after year, New York City Parks staff does more with less. (TIMER CHIME) The staff is already stretched too thin and we are frustrated. All these new requirements have merit, but the Mayor and the City Council need to work together to figure out how to properly fund New York City Parks and fulfill the most basic needs. Thank you and happy trails.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

GABRIEL CUMMINGS: Good afternoon. I'm Gabriel Cummings, Training Manager for the Urban Path Program at the Natural Areas Conservancy. Thank you, Chair Hankerson and to the Committee.

I've submitted written comments that outline NAC's feedback on Intro. 577 and Intro. 806. NAC supports the intent of these two proposed pieces of legislation and offers feedback that will help strengthen the impact of these bills. On Earth Day 2023, my Parks Trail colleague, Isaac, and I had the opportunity to work alongside then Mayor Eric Adams

to construct a punction over a flooded trail at Alley Pond Park in Queens. This symbolic gesture was the conclusion of the Mayor's Earth Day press conference to announce a historic 2.4 million in baseline funding to create 26 new New York City Parks trail positions. This was a significant win for NAC and our Parks colleagues who'd finally have the in-house capacity needed to fully care for our 300-mile nature trail network. We advocated for this investment in our 2020 strategic trails plan for New York City report. This funding allocation was also named a key priority in the 2023 PlaNYC Getting Sustainability Done report. Parks was in the process of actively recruiting, interviewing, preparing candidates for offers for the team when the Mayor announced citywide budget cuts that impacted every agency in November of 2023. The promised funding has yet to be restored.

I was just out in Pelham Bay Park this week installing a check step to mitigate erosion on a steep trail. Well-managed trails are safer for public use, help protect ecosystems by reducing fragmentation, and preserving fragile habitat. With just three full-time and four seasonal trail team members, our Parks colleagues had limited capacity to

2 ensure 300 miles of trails are actively managed and
3 improved.

4 As the Committee considers today's
5 legislation, we urgently ask that the Council ensures
6 this funding is included in the FY 27 budget. Thank
7 you.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'm sorry. I
9 didn't realize the mic wasn't on. My apologies.

10 Toni Simone, Kathy Nizzari, Tina Pina,
11 and Patricia Tristan.

12 KATHY NIZZARI: Good afternoon, Parks
13 Chair Hankerson, Committee Members, and Council
14 Member Wong. Thank you for the opportunity to speak
15 today in support of 806. And I just wanted to really
16 quickly say that we support all four bills, but I'm
17 here talking about 806.

18 I'm Kathy Nizzari, founder and Chair of
19 Lights Out Coalition, representing 60 organizations
20 and experts united to protect the hundreds of species
21 who call New York City home or rely on it as a
critical stopover. Urban wildlife plays an essential
role in our ecosystem, and their survival is directly
tied to our own. Yet wildlife in our city faces
constant human-driven threats, artificial light

disorientation, building collisions, rodenticide poisoning, illegal fishing practices, and too often bicycle and strikes, and too often outright cruelty. Our rescuers witness the grisly consequences every day. To be clear, this is not a wildlife problem. It is a human problem, and it is solvable.

Right now, responsibility is fragmented across agencies, and approaches are inconsistent, outdated, non-existent, or unenforced. Intro. 806 is a turning point. It establishes a board of experts to guide humane science-based practices and brings coordination, accountability, and compassion into how New York City supports wildlife. We know humane solutions work. While traditional methods have failed for decades, a rat contraception pilot program led by Council Member Shaun Abreu and Lights Out achieved a 60 percent reduction in just weeks without killing a single animal. This is the kind of progress we should be scaling.

Intro. 806 creates (TIMER CHIME) a framework for long-term protection of biodiversity, public health, and the values of our city. It is our sincere desire that implementation will lead to the eventual creation of a Department of Wildlife

2 Protection to ensure ongoing and future success, and
3 we respectfully ask the word management be replaced
4 by support. We support all today's...

5 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'm sorry. I'm
6 going to have to cut you off.

7 KATHY NIZZARI: I just want to say thank
8 you.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Okay.

10 KATHY NIZZARI: Thank you for your time.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: No. Thank you.

12 KATHY NIZZARI: And we are happy to be a
13 resource for you.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much
15 for your advocacy.

16 TINA PINA: (testimony read by Margaret
17 Lee) Excuse my laryngitis. I'm Margaret Lee, but I'm
18 reading for Tina Pina, who couldn't be here today.

19 I'm a member of Lights Out Coalition.
20 Intro. 0806 is extremely important for the protection
21 of our wildlife in this city. As of now, there are no
resources for them. The designer trees and sculptured
fountains do not provide sustenance. When we ignore
and mistreat our wildlife, we show the world we are
heartless. One big misconception is that the animals

do just fine without our help. As we can all see, the creatures struggle to survive. There are many ways to make it much better for them. The activists are here to help. I look forward to a beautiful city where everyone is cared for, where animals thrive, as well as the people. Thank you.

PATRICIA TRISTAN: I'm here to represent the extensive opposition to the 37.5-million-dollar renovation of the Vale of Cashmere in Prospect Park. Opposition from the birdwatching community. This is a terrible waste of money. There are two parts to the Vale. Upper, the rose garden, and lower, the pond. As someone who is a regular visitor to the lower part of the Vale of Cashmere, I have never met anyone who is in favor of this plan. The lower part of the Vale is a major stop for migrating birds. The Vale is secluded, has water, and is blocked from the wind. We feel it is perfect as it is. When it was built in the 19th century, there were many areas of seclusion in Prospect Park. This is no longer the case. Until now, the Vale has been a refuge for both birds and riders who go there to work. This 37-million-dollar-plus project, plus possible overruns, to make the Vale more accessible, including skateboarders and bikes,

will destroy this once peaceful sanctuary that we value so highly. The destruction has already started, but I propose that it is scaled back or stopped. Thank you.

PATRICIA TRISTAN: Hi. I'm Patricia Tristan, and I'm just a civilian. And I didn't write anything.

I have no idea why I feel so emotional. So, I've been a New Yorker since 1980, and I've lived a block from the Tompkins Square Park in the East Village since '93 so I have watched that park go from being a dust bowl to being a beautiful park filled with flowers. And I started being self-employed about 15 years ago, which gave me a lot of time to start going to the park. And with the new, you know, in 2016, my stress levels went up a lot, so I spent a lot of time in the park, and then during COVID also. And, you know, when I was younger, I couldn't, because it's, you're just not left alone if you're a young woman sitting in a park by yourself. But I aged that out, so now I can enjoy it. And what I found is, like, now I'm probably that crazy squirrel lady, but I know many crazy squirrel ladies and men that go to the park. Like, there's a whole community of people.

And there have been, like, days where the weather has been so horrible, where trees are breaking down, and I'll just think, oh my God, all the wildlife out there. And I'll go to the park, and some neighbor has put an apple under every tree. You know, like, people get so involved. Like, I really believe that the wildlife touches so many people. And when I'm out there, and I'm, you know, I'll bring water in the summer, because with climate change, with, you know, just the consequences rising, I saw three squirrels that were just dead, that just dropped dead out of a tree from heat stroke probably last summer so I started bringing water in containers a couple times a day to the park, and people would see me, and I saw them start to bring water for the animals. And, like, when it's winter, and we had all this snow, and animals and birds couldn't get to anything, you know, a few of us started, like, knocking the snow off the trees, so there'd be branches for the birds. And then other people saw it, and they started to do it.

(TIMER CHIME) And there's something very contagious about a community coming together to enjoy and protect the wildlife. And children see it, and they ask questions, and they want to be part of it. And I

just think it's so important to have an advisory board that can expand on things. Because I've talked to Harvey Epstein before about, like, the hand fireworks after and around the 4th of July scaring the hawks, and the hawks dying hitting windows. And how there's just not enough resources, and not enough ranger hours in the park to protect even the juvenile hawks when they come down, from people letting dogs into that park. So, I just think it's so important to have this advisory board.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony and your advocacy. Thank you.

We're going to call our final panel.

We're going to take a two-minute intermission.

All right. We're going to call our final panel. Jordan Wong, Margaret Lee, Lisa Curtiss, and then we'll jump to Zoom.

All right. You may begin.

LISA CURTISS: Hello. My name is Lisa Curtiss, and I am here really just as a civilian who cares deeply about our natural world in the city. I must say it's really inspiring and heartening to hear

the Council and the Parks Department's passion and care for green space and our environment in the City.

My concerns are related to Bill 740, 806, 805, to cooling, equity, wildlife protection in my neighborhood. I live near Prospect Park, Mount Prospect Park, and the Brooklyn Botanical Garden, and I've become very concerned about the amount of build happening in parks in my neighborhood, which to me seem to lessen access and availability of green space and natural space in our neighborhood for us and for wildlife. For example, as Toni referred to in Prospect Park, the quote-unquote restoration of the Vale of Cashmere in Rose Garden has seemed unnecessarily destructive. It seems like too much build. If we need a built environment, we have the City in general, there's a building, there's a pergola, there's trellis, and the timing seems very inconsiderate of wildlife. It's right smack dab in the middle of spring migration. A lot of habitat has been destroyed, and that seems to me like just opposed to some of the concerns that the Council has expressed regarding care for our wildlife. Green space, as you have all apparently also deeply know, is an incredibly precious rarity in New York City.

Preserving and creating habitat is crucial. It has two to three times the impact for wildlife and for their health as it does other places, because if a bird comes to New York City, they have no place other to go than these tiny little islands. (TIMER CHIME)

I'm also concerned about a build happening in Mount Prospect Park. There's a plan to put 20,000 square feet of concrete in that park. The end goal of creating a skate facility is wonderful, but I don't understand why it's sited in a green space. Once that land is paved, it's lost forever. It's costing 11 million dollars, and there's not going to be 11 million dollars 20 years from now to take that concrete back out again if we want that green space back. It just seems to me ridiculous. There's got to be a paved space, and we need to preserve the land. Once that land is paved, its absorbency, its functionality, its ability to be green space is lost for forever. I don't understand how that is justified.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: I'm sorry. I'm going to have to stop you there, but thank you so much for your testimony.

2 LISA CURTISS: Okay. Thank you so much for
3 allowing me to speak, and again, I appreciate your
4 passion and your concern.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you.

6 MARGARET LEE: I'm Margaret Lee with
7 Lights Out Coalition, supporting Intro. 806. Sorry
8 about the laryngitis.

9 As an observant New Yorker and animal
10 lover, I notice many things others miss. As I walk
11 along our city streets, I see hazards everywhere. I
12 see the dangers to our city's wildlife, the everyday
13 things humans do that threaten their existence. I'm
14 not able to walk by obliviously. When I see a
15 creature suffering and in need, I see a crisis I must
16 find a way to relieve. Almost all my sad
17 observations, and they are most always sad, I have to
18 respond to alone, because our city largely doesn't
19 care. That is the tragic reality. A reality that
20 hurts us as a city and as individuals. We're a city
21 dominated by human self-absorption. Too busy and
uncaring to notice the pigeon drinking from a puddle
of toxic waste, struggling to eat a crumb of
discarded pizza crust, a rock-hard chunk of bagel,
the starving rat scurrying frantically in sewers and

garbage searching for anything edible, the squirrel begging for a nut, a frail bird fallen from a glaringly reflective window, barely alive, usually not alive, on the unforgiving sidewalk below. I notice all manner of strings casually dropped, entangling the feet of pigeons, leading them to get caught in branches, wires, netting, decorations, where they hang to starve to death. If they manage to avoid hanging, they lose feet to the tightening of the threads, hairnets, dental floss, dropped everywhere by slobs. My primary and forced exercise is constantly bending to pick up such stuff, bringing it home to cut finely and vacuum to keep it out of any future circulation to harm. (TIMER CHIME)

My list of animal concerns is long, including my devoted feeding of approximately 800 birds every day. As a senior citizen, this is hard, costly, and sometimes dangerous, involving lugging heavy bags of seed up three flights of stairs. I also have to contend with many humans who object to non-human animals having anything at all to eat or drink. But I can't look away, which is why I support Intro. 806, the City Wildlife Protection, and I'm grateful to all who support it.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you. Thank
3 you for your advocacy and your vigilance. Thank you.

4 We're going to turn to the Zoom room, to
5 which you'll hear from Edita Birnkrant.

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time starts now.

7 EDITA BIRNKRANT: Good afternoon, Chair
8 Hankerson, and thank you to the Parks Committee for
9 hearing these important bills today. My name's Edita
10 Birnkrant, and I'm the Executive Director of NYCLASS,
11 a non-profit animal protection organization, and a
12 proud member of the Lights Out Coalition. I'm here in
13 strong support of Intro. 806, and I thank Council
14 Member Phil Wong for introducing this much-needed
15 legislation to create a citywide wildlife management
16 plan, and I also support all of the other bills on
17 the agenda.

18 I'm a proud Queens resident, an avid
19 park-goer, and a birder. One of the things I love
20 most about living in Queens is our absolutely
21 incredible parks. And in fact, Jamaica Bay Wildlife
Refuge in Queens is truly the crown jewel of birding
in our city. And these spaces should be a haven for
both people and wildlife. But too often, my park
visits turn into emergency situations. I encounter

animals in serious distress, birds entangled in fishing line, that have swallowed hooks, swans with fishing hooks lodged in their bodies, turtles whose mouths are impaled with barbed hooks. These are gruesome and preventable injuries that are often fatal. And I also regularly see domestic birds dumped in parks, left to suffer and unable to survive. This is happening across the city at parks.

The root problem is a lack of enforcement of laws. People fish without licenses, hooks and lines are left behind in the water or all over, turning our parks into dangerous traps, also for dogs and even children. And citizen rescuers are overwhelmed, responding to these situations every day, often with limited resources, trying to save animals, often in possible situations. So, we need a more hands-on approach with park rangers and real enforcement of existing laws. Fishing licenses are required, but it's never checked. Rules around the fishing is just anything goes. We also need stronger public education and signage, because (TIMER CHIME) too often well-meaning people...

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

EDITA BIRNKRANT: Okay. I just wanted to say that the bill to create a wildlife management program would give the structure for everyone to do better, and our parks should be true oases for both residents and wildlife. And families come to experience nature, not to witness suffering. And I strongly urge the Committee to pass Intro. 806. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANKERSON: Thank you so much.

Given all public testimony has been heard, the Parks and Recreation Committee hearing of April 1st, 2026, on the Council's Earth Day package bills is adjourned. [GAVEL]

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date August 12, 2026