

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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B E F O R E:

MARK LEVINE  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

ALAN N. MAISEL  
ANDREW COHEN  
DARLENE MEALY  
FERNANDO CABRERA  
JAMES G. VAN BRAMER  
MARK TREYGER

2 [gavel]

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Good afternoon

4 everybody. We're going to get underway. I'm Mark  
5 Levine, Chair of the City Council Committee on  
6 Parks and Recreation. Pleased that I'm joined by my  
7 very punctual colleagues on the committee; Council  
8 Member Cohen from the Bronx, Council Member Van  
9 Bramer from Queens, and Council Member Maisel from  
10 Brooklyn. Today we will consider Intro 558, a bill  
11 that I have introduced which will require the Parks  
12 Department to submit annual reports to the council  
13 on the status of disability access and its  
14 facilitates and its compliance with the  
15 requirements of the Americans with Disabilities  
16 Act. This committee has focused intently on the  
17 goal of ensuring that all New Yorkers can enjoy the  
18 benefits of our parks. And that surely must include  
19 New Yorkers with disabilities. But in a vast park  
20 system with thousands of structures and  
21 recreational features spread out over tens of  
22 thousands of acres of dramatically varying terrain  
23 achieving full accessibility represents a  
24 monumental challenge. Comfort stations,  
25 playgrounds, pools, basketball courts, beaches,

1 gardens, recreation centers, ball fields, hiking  
2 trails, each pose unique obstacles to allowing for  
3 full accessibility to people with disabilities. And  
4 sadly throughout most of our history the park  
5 system didn't even try to achieve this goal. The  
6 Americans with Disabilities Act of course ensures  
7 that all new construction and major renovation and  
8 recreation centers comfort stations and similar  
9 structures in our parks meet accessibility  
10 standards. But the ADA does not mandate retrofits.  
11 And a quarter of a century after passage of this  
12 landmark legislation an unacceptably high number of  
13 comfort stations in our parks still remain  
14 inaccessible to New Yorkers with disabilities.  
15 Exactly what portion of parks... are accessible  
16 today? How quickly are we retrofitting them? How  
17 long will it take to achieve the critical goal of  
18 100 percent accessibility. Has the pace of  
19 accessible upgrades been greater in higher income  
20 areas... low and moderate income neighborhoods. In  
21 other words does our city have a parks equity gap  
22 in accessibility. Intro 558 will give the city  
23 council and the public answers to these important  
24 questions. This bill would require that by December  
25

1  
2 1<sup>st</sup> of each year DPR submitted report to the mayor  
3 and the council identifying which of its park  
4 facilities are compliant with the standards for  
5 accessible design of the ADA. The report would  
6 cover each park restroom station, park comfort  
7 station, playground restroom area, playground  
8 comfort station, recreation center, pool, and  
9 beach, and contain information on the location of  
10 each facility, a statement as to whether the  
11 facility is in compliance. And for each such  
12 facility that is not in compliance, an explanation  
13 of when it will be brought into ADA compliance.  
14 This information will serve as an unprecedented  
15 tool for those of us advocating for significant  
16 acceleration in the pace of retrofits in our park  
17 system. I also hope it will spark a broader  
18 conversation about what accessibility, what  
19 accessibility means not just in parks buildings but  
20 in parks themselves. A new generation of designers  
21 advocates and regular citizens are extending the  
22 concept of accessibility in dramatic and exciting  
23 new directions. Reenvisioning playgrounds and  
24 gardens and hiking trails in ways that welcome and  
25 include everyone regardless of whether they use

1  
2 Mobility devices and even whether they have visual  
3 or cognitive impairments. If you want to get a  
4 taste of this inspiring new movement you need go no  
5 further than a visit to the highline. The parks  
6 tent avenue amphitheater features innovative zig  
7 zag seating which allows a wheelchair user to roll  
8 down to the stage level. The exposed rail tracks in  
9 the newest section of the highline include wooden  
10 ties and gravel but still somehow leave a smooth  
11 solid surface that a wheelchair can easily glide  
12 over. These features prove that the best in  
13 accessible design doesn't detract in any way from  
14 use by the general population. In fact most people  
15 would likely think that the amphitheater zig zag is  
16 just some sort of cutting edge design. I personally  
17 didn't even realize the rail tracks were accessible  
18 until I saw commissioner Calise roll by on them.  
19 The truth is that time and time again  
20 accommodations we have made for people with  
21 disabilities have ended up benefitting us all. So a  
22 little interaction here. By a show of hands how  
23 many of you have ever used a subway elevator? Okay,  
24 almost all of you. How many of you have ever used  
25 closed captioning on television? Alright. How many

1  
2 of you have ever used a curb cut on a New York City  
3 street? Alright. My point is proved. So, so let's,  
4 so let's push the envelope. Let's accelerate the  
5 pace of retrofitting comfort stations. Let's design  
6 playgrounds which allow all kids with all levels of  
7 ability to play together effortlessly. Let's create  
8 gardens and pathways which allow New Yorkers at all  
9 stages of life and all levels of Mobility to enjoy  
10 our beautiful parks together. Let's consider the  
11 ADA to be a floor not a ceiling. And by all means  
12 let's pass Intro 558. I look forward to hearing  
13 comments from the Department and members of the  
14 public on the particulars of this bill and on the  
15 broader issues at stake here. Thank you very much  
16 and now I'm going to turn it over to the  
17 administration for their remarks. And I'm reminded  
18 that we need to have an affirmation with, which our  
19 council will administer.

20 COMMITTEE COUNCIL SARTORI: Sure. Chris  
21 Sartori, Committee Council. Do you affirm to tell  
22 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but your,  
23 the, but the truth in your testimony before this  
24 committee and respond honestly to Council Member  
25 questions.

2 [combined affirmations]

3 CHRIS NOEL: Good afternoon Chairman

4 Levine and members of the Parks and Recreation  
5 Committee. I'm Chris Noel, the ADA accessibility  
6 coordinator for New York City Department of Parks  
7 and Recreation. Joining me on this panel are Kevin  
8 Quinn, Chief of Architecture and Engineering and  
9 Matt Dreary Government Relations Director.

10 Additionally we have with us Cleo King, Deputy  
11 Commissioner and General Counsel for the Mayor's  
12 Office for People with Disabilities. Thank you for  
13 inviting me to testify today regarding Intro 558  
14 which amends chapter one of Title 18 of the  
15 administrative code of the city of New York. To  
16 begin I would like to say a few words about my role  
17 at New York City Parks. The ADA accessibility  
18 coordinator for New York City parks ensures that  
19 facilities, programs, and services are accessible  
20 to people of all abilities, is responsible for  
21 providing technical assistance to the design staff  
22 and general public, and works to oversee the  
23 implementation and expansion of existing adaptive  
24 sports programs and indoor and outdoor adapted  
25 aquatic programs designated for children, teens,

1 and adults with autism, physical, and mental  
2 disabilities. In short the ADA accessibility  
3 coordinator works to ensure opportunities for  
4 active recreation and participation in New York  
5 City Parks programming for all New Yorkers. The  
6 position was created in 2006 and in fact my  
7 predecessor as ADA accessibility coordinator at New  
8 York City Parks was Victor Calise who just last  
9 week was reappointed as Commissioner of the Mayor's  
10 Office for People With Disabilities. Even before  
11 the ADA was signed into law New York City Parks has  
12 been exploring ways to bring recreational  
13 activities to all New York City residents. In 1984  
14 New York City Parks opened the first playground for  
15 all children in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park which  
16 was the first playground constructed in the United  
17 States to accommodate children with disabilities  
18 that use Mobility devices such as crutches, canes,  
19 walkers, or wheelchairs. The park provides many  
20 opportunities for social, cognitive, sensory, and  
21 motor activity for children with and without  
22 disabilities and has served as a prototype for  
23 similar sites across New York City, the United  
24 States, and the world. As you're aware New York



1 City parks oversees more than 19 hundred parks,  
2 1,000 playgrounds, 14 miles of public beaches, 67  
3 pools, and 48 recreational facilities. We work  
4 closely with other city agencies especially the  
5 Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities to  
6 ensure that the voice of the disabled community is  
7 represented when we redesign or design New York  
8 City Parks facilities that our programs and  
9 policies address the needs of people with  
10 disabilities. Through the recreation division of  
11 New York City parks we offer a variety of adaptive  
12 sport and recreation activities for individuals of  
13 all ages and abilities exposing participants to  
14 programs that will help them grow socially,  
15 emotionally, and physically. The ultimate goal of  
16 these programs is to show individuals living with a  
17 disability how participation in a sport and living  
18 a healthy active lifestyle can have a profoundly  
19 positive impact on their lives. Additionally New  
20 York City Parks serve those with cognitive and  
21 developmental disabilities through a variety of  
22 programs primarily focusing on creative arts and  
23 therapeutic practices. To help fulfil this  
24 objective each borough features adaptive hubs. The  
25

1 recreation centers that lead their borough in  
2 offering programs for New Yorkers with disabilities  
3 they're fully wheelchair accessible and act as a  
4 source of additional information for people with  
5 disabilities about everything New York City Parks  
6 has to offer. Our adaptive programming features a  
7 rich and diverse set of activities ranging from  
8 youth and adult wheelchair sports such as  
9 basketball, soccer, football, and tennis, adapted  
10 aquatics offering a complete body workout and  
11 ranging from gym to water walking in water to high  
12 energy exercise and other adaptive sports such as  
13 basketball and bowling. The Paralympics track and  
14 field open, an annual even held at Icahn Stadium on  
15 Randalls Island where children with physical  
16 disabilities can come together to compete in a  
17 variety of events; seated fitness classes  
18 accessible for people in wheelchairs and those with  
19 limited Mobility including aerobics, dance, weight  
20 training, and yoga, visual arts programs which  
21 provide artists with disabilities the opportunity  
22 to develop their skills and socialize with other in  
23 the program and sign language classes where  
24 registrants can learn the basics of sign language;

1 colors, numbers, basic greetings, and general  
2 conversation starters. Also several of our  
3 recreation centers feature wheelchair accessible  
4 fitness equipment that can be used by people with  
5 disabilities or limited Mobility. New York City  
6 Parks is committed to providing accessible  
7 facilities at parks and recreation centers  
8 throughout the city and improving the quality of  
9 life for people with disabilities. We work to  
10 ensure our facilities can be enjoyed by all New  
11 Yorkers and are fully compliant with the ADA, the  
12 Americans with Disabilities Act. I'd like to  
13 provide a bit of background since there is often  
14 confusion on what the ADA requires. The act was  
15 passed in 1990 with the goal of preventing  
16 discrimination on the basis of disability. The law  
17 required some immediate changes regarding  
18 employment protocols in another areas. It required  
19 the Parks Department to make any new buildings or  
20 structures accessible and to make portions of  
21 existing buildings and structures accessible  
22 whenever they are modified. It also required the  
23 Parks Department to evaluate the programs and  
24 services it provides to determine whether they meet  
25

1 the ADA program access standard which states that  
2 programs and services offered by a government  
3 agency must be accessible to people with  
4 disabilities when viewed in their entirety. The ADA  
5 program access standard permits the use of older  
6 buildings that are not fully accessible when  
7 services and programs offered at such places are  
8 made available to people with disabilities at  
9 alternate sites or by alternate methods. To be  
10 clear it's important to note that a great many of  
11 the comfort stations, AKA restrooms, in our city's  
12 parks and playgrounds date back to the Moses era  
13 when Robert Moses served as New York City Parks  
14 Commissioner from 1934 to 1960. This is why many of  
15 our facilities may not be what we consider  
16 accessible but are still compliant with ADA  
17 regulations. This is why using the term ADA  
18 compliant may not be the best measure of actual  
19 accessibility for structures that were built before  
20 the act was passed. Existing ADA building  
21 requirements vary based on how much work is being  
22 done and whether the building is landmarked and has  
23 a host of other parameters. However newly  
24 constructed or reconstructed buildings must comply  
25

1 fully with ADA requirements and New York City Parks  
2 takes that mandate very seriously ensuring that all  
3 of our new capital projects meet or exceed ADA  
4 building requirements. We know that our facilities  
5 are critical components to the daily lives of  
6 disabled New Yorkers as well as senior citizens. We  
7 treat the laws requiring accessibility as a  
8 starting point, not a ceiling. In consultation with  
9 a team of trained architects and landscape  
10 architects in our capital division I personally  
11 review every single capital project design to  
12 ensure that we're providing the best experience  
13 possible for all people. This often results in  
14 simple changes to designs that aren't required by  
15 law and do not increase cost but result in a better  
16 experience for all park patrons. This review is a  
17 critical step in our design process. A good example  
18 of how we have successfully integrated  
19 accessibility features into our designs is the  
20 Alley Pond Environmental Center in Queens which has  
21 completed the design phase and now is in the  
22 contractor procurement phase. Because this project  
23 is located in a flood zone it's necessary to raise  
24 the floor of the building several feet. Working  
25

1  
2 together with our architects we were able to build  
3 this building better for everyone. The entrance has  
4 a graceful gently sloping path that is easy to use  
5 whether a patron is using a wheelchair or pushing a  
6 stroller. The reception desk is designed to be  
7 easily used from a seated position and also works  
8 well for children visiting a center at the back of  
9 the facility we were able to take advantage of the  
10 raised floor height to build an outdoor classroom  
11 with tiered seating to grade. By providing an  
12 accessible path in front and above the ceiling we  
13 were able to design an outdoor classroom that works  
14 well for teachers and students with disabilities.  
15 We apply the same standards to our passive  
16 landscapes. We closely examine park paths to make  
17 sure grades can be traversed by everyone whenever  
18 possible. For instance in Riverside Park in  
19 Manhattan where portions of the path are ADA  
20 compliant but long we've provided places for people  
21 to rest. We're especially excited about our  
22 playgrounds which are at the cutting edge of  
23 accessible playground design. As every New Yorker  
24 knows lifetime friendships are formed on the  
25 playground. It's where parents meet their neighbors

1 and where kids meet their earliest friends. No  
2 child or parent should be prevented from  
3 experiencing this quintessential New York  
4 experience. The ADA requirements for playgrounds  
5 are fairly minimal but we strive to exceed them  
6 because it's good design and it's the right thing  
7 to do. We carefully select and in some instances  
8 invent play equipment that can be used by all  
9 children. Playground 1-2-3 in Morningside Park in  
10 Harlem and Sunset Park in Brooklyn are great  
11 examples of this. Beginning in 2006 New York City  
12 parks drafted and enacted a transition plan, a  
13 document which is defined by the ADA identifies  
14 physical obstacles that can limit a person with a  
15 disability and provides a plan for its removal. The  
16 transition plan accessed various categories and  
17 properties under Parks' jurisdiction including  
18 playgrounds, comfort stations, beaches, and  
19 historic house museums. The transition plan  
20 outlined the effort to train staff that would  
21 conduct site visits across the park system to  
22 assess accessibility of our various facility over  
23 two years. Facilities that were deemed to be less  
24 than fully accessible were designed, were defined

1 as work projects assessed one, on one of four  
2 levels of achievability. Trained parks maintenance  
3 and operation staff began quick fix repairs that  
4 could be handled in house right away removing  
5 barrier, installing bench armrests and adding  
6 signage to inaccessible entrances. More significant  
7 projects such as constructing ramps and widening  
8 doorways or pathways were handled by either park  
9 staff or contractors as funding became available.  
10 Immediately following the drafting of the  
11 transition plan over 50 park comfort stations were  
12 improved in this manner. And other improvements are  
13 made on an ongoing basis. Our five borough  
14 maintenance staff house within our citywide  
15 services division and our borough operation trade  
16 staff are available to make repairs and  
17 improvements short of a major capital construction  
18 that helped make our facilities more accessible  
19 while we await further funding to redesign these  
20 facilities. Since 2011 our capital division has  
21 completed work on 35 new or reconstructed comfort  
22 stations that are fully ADA compliant and  
23 accessible including five post Sandy modular  
24 comfort stations and we currently have 26  
25



1 additional comfort stations projects in either  
2 design, procurement, or construction. Recently we  
3 have redesigned our standard parks comfort station  
4 to provide a completely accessible experience from  
5 brail signage on the outside to fully accessible  
6 fixtures and fittings. Regarding our existing stock  
7 of comfort stations the agency is examining every  
8 variety of Moses era comfort stations. The bulk of  
9 our inventory and we hope to identify methods of  
10 upgrading them as funding becomes available. In our  
11 recreation centers we have swapped out many pieces  
12 of inaccessible fitness equipment and replace them  
13 with dual use fitness equipment such as upper body  
14 bikes, chest press, lat pull down, and shoulder  
15 press machines that wheelchair users and able  
16 bodied members can use with equal ease. We'll also  
17 be adding more pieces of dual use outdoor fitness  
18 equipment to many upcoming park and playground  
19 capital projects. New York City Parks is committed  
20 to making sure that everyone can enjoy the  
21 beautiful beaches of New York City. To this end in  
22 the past four years we've purchased 11 thousand  
23 feet of Mobi-Mat, protective plastic matting that  
24 provides wheelchair access on beaches and provided  
25

1 beach wheelchair use for many at our beaches  
2 citywide nearly doubling the devices that will be  
3 available this year from last year. Our pools are  
4 enjoyed by young and old alike and ensuring their  
5 accessibility is a priority for us. We've purchased  
6 additional pool wheelchairs for people with  
7 disabilities and seniors who may not want to use  
8 the hydraulic pool lift but prefer the ramp pool  
9 entrances where available as a means to enter and  
10 exit the pool. And we've added ramps providing easy  
11 entry into our mini pools. As for future  
12 renovations and improvements as council members are  
13 well aware it is often difficult to forecast when  
14 funding will become available for a given capital  
15 need. Still we are committed to prioritizing ADA  
16 compliance and accessibility whenever capital  
17 improvements are made. To this end as part of the  
18 framework for an equitable future announced last  
19 year by our parks commissioner Mitchel J. Silver  
20 we're planning to institute an ongoing capital  
21 needs assessment plan for Parks property and  
22 facilities which will track and catalog necessary  
23 capital improvements on a rolling basis. As these  
24 improvement are being tracked we will take special  
25

1  
2 note of any changes needed to make all of our  
3 facilities ADA compliant and as accessible as  
4 possible. We're happy to announce that the mayor's  
5 preliminary budget includes funding that will allow  
6 this process to begin and we look forward to  
7 working with you as we move forward. To make sure  
8 our staff have the tools they need to inspect our  
9 facilities in a sensitive and accurate manner this  
10 spring our managers and our play equipment program,  
11 newly standardized management system for each  
12 borough set up to manage and repair the  
13 maintenance of play equipment which will be fully  
14 trained on ADA accessibility issues as well. We're  
15 also very proud of the transparency and public  
16 access to information offered by New York City  
17 Parks regarding our facilities and programs. Our  
18 accessibility in New York City Parks website is a  
19 one-step source of helpful information about the  
20 wide variety, wide variety of programs we offer  
21 geared specifically towards people with physical  
22 disabilities as well as more information about the  
23 accessibility of our facilities. Users can even  
24 contact me directly if they have questions or  
25 concerns. And they can use the website to formally

1 file an ADA complaint. As to the annual report that  
2 this legislation would mandate New York City Parks  
3 look forward to working with the council to provide  
4 information about the accessibility of our beaches,  
5 pools, recreation centers, park comfort stations,  
6 and playground comfort stations. Since we are now  
7 just beginning our process of real time assessment  
8 in the field to ensure that reporting is as full  
9 and accurate as possible we would recommend the  
10 phased implementation of the report beginning with  
11 an assessment of pools and beaches in 2015, adding  
12 recreation center in 2015, and finally park and  
13 playground comfort stations in 2017. Regarding the  
14 facilities we will be reporting on New York City  
15 Parks is pleased to work with the council and the  
16 Mayor's Office for people with disabilities to  
17 define categories of compliance and accessibility.  
18 We would also like to work with the office of  
19 management and budget to properly categorize our  
20 plans to address inaccessible sites and properly  
21 describe their funding status. We look forward to  
22 continued collaboration with the city council to  
23 implement a useful and transparent report on this  
24 topic. And we will update you as we make progress  
25

1  
2 in our broader efforts to improve the way we ensure  
3 our parks and facilities are accessible to as many  
4 New Yorkers as possible. Thank you for the  
5 opportunity to testify you, before you this  
6 afternoon. My colleagues and I will be happy to  
7 answer any questions you may have.

8 CLEO KING: Yes I was. Okay thank you.  
9 Good afternoon Chairman Levine and members of the  
10 Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Cleo  
11 King. I'm the deputy commissioner and general  
12 counsel at the Mayor's Office for People with  
13 Disabilities. I would first like to thank you for  
14 having this hearing to raise the issue of  
15 accessibility. Discussions like these raise social  
16 awareness, build acceptance and tolerance, and  
17 ultimately make a difference not only for the 800  
18 thousand plus people with a disability living in  
19 New York City but for the aging population as well.  
20 As you may know prior to be appointed commissioner  
21 of MOPD Commissioner Victor Calise was the first  
22 ADA accessibility coordinator at New York City  
23 Parks. And in this role he evaluated the  
24 accessibility of the more than 19 hundred parks,  
25 1,000 playgrounds, 14 miles of public beaches, 67

1 pools, 48 recreation facilities, and 685 bathrooms.

2 Building on this work New York City Parks is taking

3 a proactive approach to remove barriers to

4 accessibility and existing facilities, ensure all

5 design or redesign of New York City Park Facilities

6 meet and more importantly exceed the accessibility

7 requirements set forth in the ADA and provide

8 programmatic access to people with disabilities. We

9 have and we continue to see a great transformation

10 of accessibility throughout New York City Parks.

11 MOPD's mission is to coordinate and analyze

12 existing city programs for people with

13 disabilities, develop and promote additional

14 programs, and act as the liaison between the city

15 and agencies, organizations, and individuals in the

16 development of programs affecting people with

17 disabilities. To that end MOPD works closely with

18 New York City Park staff to ensure its facilities

19 and programs meet accessibility requirement for the

20 more than 800 thousand New Yorkers with

21 disabilities. If this legislation is passed we will

22 work with New York City Park staff to implement a

23 useful report on the accessibility of New York City

24 Parks facilities for individuals with disabilities

1 who wish to enjoy the parks, beaches, playgrounds,  
2 and other New York City Parks facilities and  
3 services. MOPD and New York City Parks share a  
4 commitment to ensuring that New York City parks,  
5 beaches, playgrounds, and other facilities are  
6 accessible and welcoming to New Yorkers with  
7 disabilities. We thank the city council for  
8 discussing this important issue with us. Thank you  
9 for the opportunity to testify before you this  
10 afternoon and I would be happy to take any  
11 questions along with the members from City Parks.

12  
13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you  
14 Commissioner and thank you Mr. Noel. I just want to  
15 acknowledge we've been joined by our colleague  
16 Councilman Treyger from Brooklyn. So you didn't  
17 mention in your remarks of course the total number  
18 of conversations and restrooms in the system. What  
19 is that number?

20 CHRIS NOEL: I believe it's, I'm sorry  
21 657.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Sorry forgive me...  
23 mention it Commissioner King. Okay so there's six,  
24 657. How many of them are currently accessible?  
25

2 MATT DREARY: About, fully accessible  
3 again I think this is where we want to sort of you  
4 know make the distinction, what we consider to be  
5 fully accessible in a bathroom requires, sorry one  
6 second here. A five foot turning radius as well as  
7 grab bars and amenities that are placed at a height  
8 appropriate.. [cross-talk]

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So, so I guess a  
10 small formality Matt.. we, we have to have you  
11 affirm as well..

12 MATT DREARY: Oh of course.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Oh... [cross-talk]  
14 affirm forgive me. Just introduce yourself Matt. I  
15 know you, everyone might not.. [cross-talk]

16 MATT DREARY: No, no of course Matt  
17 Dreary Director of Government Relations for the  
18 Parks Department.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay sorry for the  
20 interruption. Go ahead.

21 MATT DREARY: My apologies. No it's  
22 alright. And so again speaking to what Chris  
23 mentioned in our testimony that we make the  
24 distinction between compliance and we look forward  
25 to, you know we sort of self-define if you will



1 sort of a broader definition of accessibility. And  
2 internally we use that as a five foot turning  
3 radius in a bathroom including grab bars and then  
4 amenities being placed a height appropriate to  
5 people in wheelchairs. And that number citywide I  
6 believe is about 131.  
7

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay so at the, at  
9 the, so 131 out of, out of 685.

10 MATT DREARY: What we would kind of  
11 define as... there's not a technical term but fully  
12 fully accessible I suppose.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right so we're...

14 MATT DREARY: And then there's degree-  
15 ing sort of...

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Beneath that. But  
17 there, where, where I left in a quarter today then  
18 at, at this highest level.

19 MATT DREARY: At this highest level yes.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right. That strikes  
21 me as, as quite low. Is that to say that the other  
22 554 were built before the ADA was implemented?

23 MATT DREARY: I mean many were, many  
24 are, many of our facilities are older from, from  
25 the Moses era and the, and the WPA sort of era and

1  
2 again as these projects are you know sort of  
3 approached with new capital it's, it's obviously a  
4 top, it's a top priority for us.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And so what, what's  
6 the, the, the, is there a kind of an average annual  
7 pace of retrofit? How many were getting brought up  
8 to, to speed on a given year?

9 MATT DREARY: I mean it's my  
10 understanding that upon the creation of the  
11 transition report in 2006 there was a set of about  
12 you know 50 or 75 that were assessed that could be  
13 sort of quote unquote quick fixes and those were  
14 addressed. And the, and then there are others that  
15 are more significant moving forward. And those are  
16 sort of approached you know as, as capable and as,  
17 you know as those sort of enter the capital  
18 pipeline.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So you, you've got  
20 the low hanging fruit where all you needed was bars  
21 and things like that but...

22 MATT DREARY: Correct.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: What, what really  
24 is the barrier or the costs going forward? Do you  
25

1  
2 have kind of an average for an accessibility  
3 upgrade for comfort station?

4 MATT DREARY: I mean it's hard, it's  
5 hard to kind of characterize that. Again it's why  
6 we're looking forward to our, to rolling out the,  
7 you know the capital needs assessment program that  
8 the commissioners announced last year and that's  
9 really going to kind of give us a much more sort of  
10 broader based kind of programmatic view of the  
11 capital improvements that need to be made.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But if, if so many  
13 of these conversations are at least 25 years old  
14 and probably a lot older. They, they gotta  
15 [phonetic] be due for modernization and upgrade  
16 anyhow right?

17 MATT DREARY: Certainly and I think you  
18 know the Parks Department's challenge in priority  
19 is to you know make those improvements you know  
20 whenever possible and it's a question of resources  
21 obviously and prioritization and we do our best to,  
22 to keep in mind that when those improvements are  
23 made that accessibility to the widest degree is, is  
24 made a priority.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right understood.

3 So, so we, we actually don't have... could we in  
4 ballpark estimate the cost to bring the entire  
5 system up to speed? I'm sure it would be in the  
6 billions but...

7 MATT DREARY: It, it would certainly be  
8 considerable. I'd, I'd be, I'd be wary of, of a  
9 dollar estimate because as we know the capital  
10 process is a, is a, is a considerable undertaking.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right. You, you  
12 made some reference to some concern about lack of  
13 sufficient data today to report on all these. And  
14 since, since then, when Victor Calise was working  
15 at Parks he inventoried the entire system. It was,  
16 must have been an amazing amount of subway rides he  
17 took to do that. Don't we, don't we at least have...

18 [cross-talk]

19 MATT DREARY: Yeah I mean the transition  
20 plan kind of created what you might call a baseline  
21 and it's, and it's been an updated sort of in  
22 phases on, on, on an ongoing basis. I think we'd be  
23 you know in terms, and that's been more or less an  
24 internal document that we've used to kind of guide  
25 our decisions. If it came to, you know we'd want

1  
2 sort of some assurances that this is as full and  
3 complete and, and, and accurate as possible. So I  
4 think that's why we're suggesting the phasing in  
5 the sense that it'll be the best way to kind of  
6 ensure that we get you the most accurate..

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: But, so what's  
8 missing is, is perhaps an assessment of, of how  
9 long it would take to, to modernize, is that right?

10 MATT DREARY: Certainly that piece. And  
11 then there also could have been you know I believe  
12 it was last you know it was last updated in a  
13 formal degree you know several years ago. So and,  
14 and that, the initial plan in 2006 took up to two  
15 years I think to do that complete, that complete  
16 inventory not including I believe pools and beaches  
17 was sort of an addendum that was added in 2012. So  
18 that was actually additional time. So it's, it was  
19 just a more, not only those questions you raised  
20 but also sort of the, the actual just logistics of  
21 it are, are pretty time consuming.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And are you, are  
23 you reliant on the capital money for this entirely  
24 from allocations of council members and borough  
25 presidents?

2 MATT DREARY: In terms of the capital...  
3 in terms, I mean roughly... [cross-talk]

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Anytime you want to  
5 modernize, make accessible a comfort station or  
6 restroom does DPR have a pool of capital money you  
7 can draw upon to do this or do you have to wait  
8 until one of us comes to the plate with money out  
9 of our discretionary fund.

10 MATT DREARY: I don't want to  
11 mischaracterize this. One second.

12 KEVIN QUINN: My name is Kevin Quinn.  
13 I'm the Chief of Architecture for the Parks  
14 Department. And I think what Matt is trying to get  
15 at is that all the low hanging fruit can be done  
16 when, with tradespeople, with Parks Department  
17 tradespeople. So when we go in and we rehang a door  
18 or we fix a broken lock we make sure that all the  
19 hardware is ADA compliant and then we go in and we  
20 adjust bars and we do all sorts of easier things.  
21 The, the more difficult places are when a lot of  
22 these Moses era comfort stations were actually  
23 placed six or seven inches above grade so there's a  
24 step to get into them okay, so that's one thing to  
25 do is how to deal with the grading issues in that,

1  
2 in that regard. And the other issue is that the  
3 doors are too narrow. And so we need to cut the  
4 doors to make them lighter. Both of those  
5 operations are basically, really need to be done by  
6 a contractor. And then once you're cutting doors,  
7 working on the grades, you might as well replace  
8 the roof. And so it gets into, they're basically  
9 capital projects to do a full, make a Moses era  
10 comfort station completely accessible as we would  
11 define which is beyond what the ADA calls for.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right. But again so  
13 the, the money for the, those capital projects is  
14 going to have to come from council members and  
15 borough presidents or do you have some pot you can  
16 draw upon to do this work?

17 KEVIN QUINN: Do you want me to take  
18 that Matt or... yeah okay. The, there is some  
19 baseline funding for buildings in Parks that's  
20 mayoral funding. And we do do that. There's done in  
21 a requirement style contract but the majority of  
22 our funding for buildings is individual elected  
23 allocations.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And so how much is  
25 in that baseline funding? But I would imagine it's

1 pretty poultry relative to the scale of the need. I  
2 mean it's probably less than 10 million maybe  
3 that's dedicated out of that fund, out of the  
4 mayor's pot to accessibility upgrades.  
5

6 KEVIN QUINN: ...buildings require..  
7 contracts also we, we apply to our rec centers and  
8 you know a whole wide variety of buildings... [cross-  
9 talk]

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right sorry.

11 KEVIN QUINN: ...comfort stations. So how  
12 much goes to comfort stations, how much goes to rec  
13 centers it's a...

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right but that,  
15 that only...

16 KEVIN QUINN: ...it's not, it's not enough  
17 to do everything.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right it only  
19 further proves the point that it's very little  
20 relative to the scale of the need.

21 [background comments]

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And why, why  
23 doesn't the mayor allocate more to the Parks  
24 Department centrally to address the kind of capital  
25 needs that are not perhaps as, as politically



1  
2 expedient for council members to jump on, kind of  
3 the core infrastructure needs that are critical but  
4 might not have as much of a popular outcry.

5 MATT DREARY: I mean I, you know I think  
6 that's a conversation you know we're having with  
7 city hall and we, you know we want to join you in  
8 partners in that conversation obviously I think in  
9 the community in terms of what funding needs are  
10 available and you know obviously the, the  
11 administration's doing you know everything it can  
12 to kind of address these concerns and, and funding  
13 in a lot of different areas is, is obviously a  
14 concern and this is one of those.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I'm going to pause.  
16 Do my colleagues have questions? Do any of my  
17 colleagues have questions. Go ahead Councilmen  
18 Cohen.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you for  
20 your testimony. I'm getting the, the sense from,  
21 that there's a, a lot of work to be done on  
22 facilities alone. I was wondering if you could  
23 expand the conversation below, you mentioned  
24 passive landscapes and access to that. It's been a  
25 challenge in my district. I was wondering if you

1  
2 could just talk a little bit more about when you  
3 think that's appropriate, what are the ways that we  
4 can make landscapes more accessible.

5 MATT DREARY: On the design side... defer  
6 to Kevin a little bit.

7 KEVIN QUINN: Well again it's, the big  
8 problem with passive landscapes in particular is  
9 the grading. And I'm not quite sure what, what  
10 district you're in but I'm sure it's a  
11 topographically challenging one.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Northwest Bronx,  
13 it's quite hilly.

14 KEVIN QUINN: Right. That's a, it's a  
15 real, it's a real problem if the grades are not on  
16 your side it becomes a major capital project again  
17 to redo the grades and in some cases changing paths  
18 significantly and in some cases it's just, honestly  
19 it's just not possible. And in those cases we try  
20 to make the signage explain what is accessible,  
21 what is not accessible so that we don't have  
22 patrons going long ways down a dead end place,  
23 things like that. But our general landscape for,  
24 for most projects where we can address grades we  
25 send a landscape architect out there, all of our

1  
2 landscape architects, all of our architects all  
3 have the ADA guidelines on their desk. Everybody  
4 knows... the law. So they go out, take a first pass,  
5 and if it's simple they just do it. If it's more  
6 complicated Mr. Noel comes out with us and we try  
7 and work out the best way to do it. But we look at  
8 it each case by case basis and we take it very  
9 seriously because we know it's important not just  
10 for people with Mobility devices but people who are  
11 aging and have difficulty walking. It's, it's a  
12 real important thing. I hope that answers your  
13 question.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: It, it does. If  
15 you had to repair a path... whatever the material  
16 that was there it degraded in such... you can do that  
17 and it, have it still not be ADA compliant. That,  
18 that's within your understanding of the law?

19 KEVIN QUINN: Yes. Yes. The law does not  
20 require you to do things that can't be done. So if  
21 the path cannot be made... you know the, the point,  
22 from point A to point B can't be achieved without  
23 meeting a, a grade that exceeds ADA allowance  
24 you're allowed to repave that. You would not be  
25 allowed to create that path from scratch you know.

1  
2 When we build things new, a new capital project  
3 everything in there is ADA compliant.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I know also is,  
5 everybody who deals with parks there's a, often  
6 tensions between different user groups in terms of  
7 materials for paths you know runners obviously are  
8 looking for softer surfaces, people who use  
9 wheelchairs are looking for firmer... how do you try  
10 to strike that balance, how does that...

11 CHRIS NOEL: We try to make sure that  
12 all paths are ADA compliant as Kevin mentioned when  
13 it comes to new construction. So if we have a  
14 natural path in some cases such as... We've tried to  
15 make it as accessible as possible so that all can  
16 enjoy while still keeping the natural aesthetics of  
17 the natural surfacing when the outsides of it. So  
18 where we almost try to combine for use for all and  
19 for enjoyment for all. But as Kevin mentioned we  
20 definitely want to make sure that if it's new  
21 construction we're trying to make it as ADA as  
22 possible so that more so you can have use for  
23 people with Mobility impairments.

24 KEVIN QUINN: I'm...

25 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Sure.

1  
2 KEVIN QUINN: If you don't, if you don't  
3 mind. I, I think the point you'll hear over and  
4 over again is that we always meet ADA. I mean  
5 that's a, that's a law we always do. What we do is  
6 exceed the ADA. So meeting ADA is actually pretty  
7 simple. What we do and we're pretty proud of how we  
8 do is working with Chris's exceeding the ADA. And  
9 we find that in doing so we make it better for  
10 everybody. I mean it passed strollers, as, as you  
11 said elevators, we all use these things. So by  
12 making it easier for everybody to use we actually  
13 make it easier for everybody to use which is the  
14 great thing about it. So I'm not trying to dodge an  
15 ADA question, we always meet it. That's kind of  
16 pretty simple in the landscape. It's, it's meeting  
17 our own goals to exceed it that's kind of the  
18 challenge it.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: I don't think  
20 anybody's trying to dodge it and, and... it sort of a  
21 separate issue for me. But, but just, I, just  
22 trying to understand sort of philosophically like  
23 what if we wanted to build a quote unquote running  
24 path that was, is that possible in...

2 KEVIN QUINN: Yeah you can, you know  
3 it's an indoor facility but it's, it's, uses a  
4 material that we've used other places at the ocean  
5 breeze track and field facility in Staten Island  
6 which is under construction uses a MONDO rubberized  
7 surface which is accessible and runners like it.  
8 It's a, you know internationally known as a, as a  
9 good running surface. They have events on it. So  
10 it's, it's possible. But again you get into capital  
11 costs. It's not a you know an inexpensive product.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council  
14 Member Cohen. Council Member Treyger.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you  
16 chair. So I, I want to first acknowledge and  
17 actually say I appreciate last year the Parks  
18 Department added some additional Mobie-Mats to the  
19 beaches in southern Brooklyn which is a, a  
20 longstanding issue for many many years. But we keep  
21 hearing about the request for more. And one of the  
22 challenges last year was that we were told that  
23 there's apparently a shortage of Mobi-Mats on the  
24 eastern seaboard can you speak to the stockpile of  
25 Mobi-Mats and the availability of them to add on

1  
2 because there are many seniors and people with  
3 disabilities who would like access to the beach, to  
4 the water and that of course helps enable them. So  
5 can anyone speak to what is the, the forecast this  
6 year.

7           CHRIS NOEL: Well I'll, I'll speak to  
8 the Mobi-Matt conversation. I like going to the  
9 beaches as well and from here peruse around the  
10 beach I would need Mobi-Mats. What we've done this  
11 year is we've actually ordered more that are going  
12 to your area for Coney Island and Manhattan Beach  
13 and actually all of our beaches. As I'm also the  
14 central point for a lot of questions and concerns  
15 that come from constituents in New York City I hear  
16 about it as well. And we want to make sure that  
17 everyone's able to enjoy all of our beaches,  
18 especially in the summer time when you just want to  
19 get out. What we've also done not only with the  
20 addition of Mobi-Mats to all of our beaches we've  
21 also added beach wheelchairs. And we've had that  
22 already in your area as well. We've actually added  
23 more due to requests for more.

24           COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Right.  
25

2 CHRIS NOEL: That's a greater way to  
3 traverse the beaches so that you're not just  
4 confined to the Mobi-Mats but actually able to go  
5 further distances. So we trying to do things that  
6 help make the public happier but also to make  
7 people with disabilities happier when they visit  
8 any of our facilities or parklands.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you. And  
10 so to be clear you've ordered more but do we have  
11 them at this point and is there any indication of  
12 their availability for the upcoming beach season.

13 CHRIS NOEL: Well as you know with  
14 everything when you're making a larger purchase it  
15 goes through a bidding process so currently that's  
16 where it's at now. So I believe we should have it  
17 before the opening.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: And I'd like to  
19 work with the Parks Department about locations for  
20 them.

21 CHRIS NOEL: Sure.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Because there  
23 are certain senior complexes that boarder on some  
24 of the entrances to the boardwalk and beach that  
25 I'd like to work with you on, on that.



2 CHRIS NOEL: That's not a problem.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: I appreciate  
4 that. And the second point is, I, I think it's  
5 dramain [phonetic] to this hearing is the issue and  
6 I, I appreciate the chair for really tackling this  
7 issue. It's a very very important issue. It's also  
8 about language accessibility in addition to  
9 physical handicaps. In the past, in years past I,  
10 I've had to deal with situations where there are  
11 immigrant communities using parks and there were  
12 some questions about the usage of the comfort  
13 stations and what times they close. And sometimes  
14 there were temporary closures and there was  
15 confusion and I, I had to come down to interpret  
16 and translate myself in Russian to explain to them  
17 what's going on. Are there efforts underway in the  
18 Parks Department to hire bilingual or staff that  
19 could speak the language that's spoken in many of  
20 our diverse communities to address language access.

21 MATT DREARY: Yeah I mean language  
22 access technically you know isn't, isn't  
23 technically you know the AD, you know isn't  
24 technically Chris' job but we do have a, a  
25 department that's you know that's, that is focused

1 on language access and try, in terms of our website  
2 and things like that having accessibility. But we'd  
3 love to have a conversation with you about where  
4 you feel you know translation services might be  
5 required or, or helpful.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Right.

7 MATT DREARY: And I think that's  
8 something we'd absolutely like to look into.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Right. Because  
10 I, I think this hearing's certainly about  
11 accessibility and we have to look at it in many  
12 different prisms.

13 MATT DREARY: Absolutely.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: And so I we  
15 certainly have people with certain special needs  
16 that have to be met but I think language is also an  
17 important one.

18 MATT DREARY: Yeah I think we, we agree  
19 and we'd definitely like to look... on that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Thank you.  
21 Thank you Chair.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Council  
23 Member. Actually I'm excited by that question on  
24 language accessibility. I just want to clarify  
25

1 something. You have an entire department devoted to  
2 language accessibility?

3  
4 MATT DREARY: I wouldn't say it's a, a  
5 department sorry but we have you know...

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: It's like a  
7 department of one?

8 MATT DREARY: ...in our... Well I mean in  
9 our, in our, in our programs division it's, it's  
10 sort of a component of the work that's, that's done  
11 and, and sort of, sort of threaded through sort of  
12 the work we do. So in terms of materials that are  
13 presented or you know programs that are offered you  
14 know it's, so it's less a position in the sense  
15 that Chris' is and more of sort of a, a guiding  
16 principal.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Though it's not  
18 covered in the ADA I thought that maybe it was the  
19 2007 plan, 2006 plan that the idea of having very  
20 clear signage and wayfaring postings is part of  
21 making a park accessible right? And is  
22 multilinguality [phonetic] an ingredient to that?

23 MATT DREARY: Yeah absolutely. I mean  
24 our, our standard park signage I, I think is you  
25 know depending on the area is you know definitely

1 sort of strives you know to, to that when possible.  
2  
3 And in terms of, at least in terms of the ADA you  
4 know our comfort station signage having brail and  
5 things like that. So in, in signage when we can  
6 make those improvements especially for newer  
7 projects you know those, those standards are, are...

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You, you have a...  
9 maybe it's at parks of a certain size but you, I've  
10 seen very large signs with the park rules. There's  
11 a lot of fine print but important to be posted for  
12 sure. Are any of those translated?

13 MATT DREARY: I think it would depend on  
14 the site. I'm not, I'm not quite sure off hand. But  
15 we are all actually in, in the process of looking  
16 at our standard signage to try in some cases  
17 consolidate you know an, an... standardized. That's  
18 certainly an effort that we're, that has begun and  
19 if you drop by the... and a couple other places  
20 you'll start to see sort of the newer design and  
21 and language assets. You know in certain  
22 neighborhoods is definitely going to be... [cross-  
23 talk]

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: The, the... issues  
25 that actually come up for me a couple times. I

1  
2 happen to chair also the Jewish Caucus and there  
3 are a few times a year where there's, it's very  
4 very popular for Jewish families to come into the  
5 parks around Passover, other days in between call  
6 it... [speaking foreign language] and then [speaking  
7 foreign language] also a few days where people can  
8 go to the park, it's very popular. And it's a large  
9 Yiddish speaking community that I've heard requests  
10 for posting of parks rules in Yiddish. How  
11 difficult would that be to, to comply with, to  
12 accommodate?

13 MATT DREARY: You know I guess in terms  
14 of the actual signage itself I think we'd have to  
15 kind of look at like you know the physical space on  
16 the sign and things like that. There are sort of  
17 some, just some technical aspects to it you know  
18 since these can't really be billboards. These are,  
19 you know...

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right.

21 MATT DREARY: ...these are signs. But we'd  
22 absolutely love to kind of you know partner with  
23 you and the other elected officials to kind of hear  
24 more about where there's a, a clear desire for this

25

1  
2 sort of thing and then see where we could  
3 accomplish that.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I can get you a  
5 good translator if you need one. I'd like to ask a  
6 couple questions about playgrounds which appear to  
7 have very limited requirements under the ADA. Could  
8 you explain to me what the ADA mandate then the  
9 ways that which you all can go beyond that in  
10 playgrounds?

11 CLEO KING: The ADA playground  
12 regulations as Chris had said are very limited. It  
13 talks about percentage of play features that, so  
14 that they're interactive for people with  
15 disabilities. So it depends on like if you have  
16 elevated play structure then you have to have so  
17 many ground level play pieces so that a child with  
18 a disability could, can access those. But in order  
19 to, what parks does beyond the minimal ADA  
20 requirements I would have to turn that over to  
21 Chris.

22 KEVIN QUINN: Maybe we can both... this.  
23 It's, it's very important... see if you can, can you  
24 hear me?

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: If you could just  
3 pull the mic to you a couple more inches yeah.

4 KEVIN QUINN: Hello.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Yep.

6 KEVIN QUINN: Okay. It's, ADA is really  
7 about getting access to the features in a  
8 playground. What we try to do is make sure that  
9 both parents with some disabilities can have equal  
10 experience as a parent without any disabilities.  
11 And a child with any disabilities has the same  
12 experience as a child with all abilities. So the  
13 idea is to make sure that our playgrounds are the  
14 same for all people you know. Which, which, which  
15 Chris said the quintessential New York City  
16 experience of meeting your first friends on the  
17 playground. It's, I mean that's what makes a lot of  
18 us New Yorkers. You know so we think this is really  
19 critical that, that the experience is the same. So  
20 to that end we've modified a lot of our play  
21 equipment so that people in wheelchairs can get  
22 actually up on the play equipment and roll around  
23 and, and interact with the other kids running  
24 around the playground. We've made sure that there  
25 are different types of swings for different types

1 of kids who have different impairments so that they  
2 can enjoy a swing and I, I know speaking with  
3 Victor that this has been a transformative  
4 experience for some, some kids. They, they, they  
5 become destination playgrounds for these kids.  
6

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You actually have  
8 swings I think that a child's wheelchair could roll  
9 onto and they can... is that, have I seen that?

10 KEVIN QUINN: I'm talking about the J  
11 swings as we, maybe you should take it...

12 CHRIS NOEL: there are, there are  
13 equipment that, that dose that. But just in general  
14 I'd like to if possible go through the definitions  
15 of accessible playgrounds that we have listed on  
16 our website. We have level one playgrounds which  
17 are playgrounds for all children. The basic  
18 definition of playgrounds for all children are  
19 designed to provide recreational opportunities for  
20 children of all ages and abilities. Playground  
21 features include ramped play equipment, ground  
22 level play features, accessible swings, wheelchair  
23 accessible tables and drinking fountains. Some  
24 playgrounds also have adjustable basketball  
25 backboards that can be raised and lowered for



1  
2 athletes of level two. Then we have accessible  
3 playgrounds with ramp play equipment and/or  
4 universally accessible swings. Accessible  
5 playgrounds can include accessible swings and or  
6 ramped play equipment, transfer platforms, and  
7 ground level play features. These playgrounds can  
8 also include accessible amenities which can include  
9 drinking fountains and comfort stations. We have  
10 level three playgrounds which are accessible  
11 playgrounds with universally accessible swings.  
12  
13 Playgrounds with universally accessible swings  
14 would low unimpeded access to the swings and  
15 provide at least one universally accessible swing.  
16 These playgrounds may not necessarily have ramped  
17 equipment. Level four playgrounds which are  
18 accessible playgrounds with transfer platform and  
19 ground level play features. Transfer platforms  
20 allow children to transfer out of their wheelchairs  
21 if they choose and are able to onto a placer if it  
22 was to use equipment such as slides and bridges.  
23 Ground level play features allow a child who cannot  
24 transfer out of his or her wheelchair or climb to  
25 be able to interact with others in a play  
environment. Yeah and, and also working with, we

1  
2 have a talented group of designers at Olmsted so as  
3 Kevin mentioned earlier when it comes to exceeding  
4 just the standard we'll probably have a, a number  
5 of ground level play features if we can add it just  
6 so that we don't have to just stick with the norm  
7 or just say well we've met our ADA requirement  
8 we'll stay with that. I work with the designers to  
9 make sure we place more pieces there so that if a  
10 child can't use a particular play feature they'll  
11 have something there that they can use so that they  
12 don't feel like their friends who might be non-  
13 disabled are having more fun than they are because  
14 they're disabled. We want to involve many forms of  
15 inclusion. And as we mentioned in our, in my  
16 testimony that's what we want out of New York City  
17 Parks going forward.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So there's roughly  
19 I believe a thousand playgrounds. Does anyone know  
20 what the exact number is? [cross-talk]

21 MATT DREARY: Around a thousand.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Around a thousand.  
23 Can you tell me how many fit in each of these  
24 categories, levels one, two, three, four?

25 MATT DREARY: Actually yeah.

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: You knew I was  
3 going to ask that.

4 MATT DREARY: No totally. So the total  
5 is 811 of some degree of accessibility. I apologize  
6 we don't have the actual breakdown category by  
7 category.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Got it. That, that  
9 would be very important information to have because  
10 you, you, you have...

11 MATT DREARY: It is, it is on our  
12 website. I just don't have the counts.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay. Alright so  
14 maybe maybe...

15 MATT DREARY: ...hard to find.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: ...maybe someone  
17 who's currently on their blackberry can call this  
18 up for us. It, is there, is there an effort  
19 underway to transition existing playgrounds to the  
20 greater level of accessibility outside of the kind  
21 of major capital process that doesn't happen very  
22 often?

23 MATT DREARY: I mean I think similar to  
24 the improvements we're making on just say comfort  
25 stations it's sort of on like an as possible basis.

1 So if we're reconstructing a, a playground from  
2 scratch obviously then it's, it's, you know that,  
3 that design is taken on from the get go. If it's a,  
4 if it could be a quick fix or like an element  
5 that's designed I mean that's sort of taking on  
6 sort of a you know case by case basis.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Right.

9 MATT DREARY: So in, in a similar way  
10 it's, it's kind of a, sort of..

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And as great as  
12 category one of playground accessibility sounds  
13 there are people including some in this room who  
14 are really pushing the envelope on this and kind of  
15 trying to take us to the next frontier of  
16 accessibility with some, some incredibly creative  
17 and inspiring ideas coming out of this. Is, is it,  
18 is this kind of thinking also taking place in the  
19 parks capital division and can you say a few words  
20 about where it's heading?

21 KEVIN QUINN: Sure I, I think one of the  
22 best things that we have is we do so many  
23 playgrounds that the playground equipment  
24 manufacturers are really working with us. We're  
25 their prime customers. So they've been willing to

1 change their designs. We've invented play  
2 equipment. It's, it's really been a transformation.  
3 I think we're driving the whole playground industry  
4 towards this direction. We look at every  
5 opportunity. Sometimes where we have grading  
6 problems they become actual exciting pieces of the  
7 accessible play equipment where you can go up on a  
8 grade and then ramp down through the play  
9 equipment, it's a lot of fun. So we, we see it as  
10 an opportunity for design really. And it's making  
11 it better for everyone. So we always do it... Chris  
12 is at every design review. We look at every  
13 playground for opportunities left out.

14  
15 CLEO KING: And, and jut to add the  
16 requirements for playgrounds were you know other  
17 than to get to the equipment became more fuller  
18 when the ADA was upgraded in 2010 and, and parks  
19 with their different levels was kind of ahead of  
20 the curve. They saw what was coming with the new  
21 regulations and really jumped ahead of it and a lot  
22 of their playgrounds are over and above the minimal  
23 requirements of ADA.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Well thank you all  
25 very much. That's it for questions from me. Really

1 appreciate your testimony. Thank you. Alright I'm  
2 going to call up our next panel which will include;  
3 Edith Prentice from Disabled in Action DIA, Sheldon  
4 Fine from the Community Board 7 Accessible  
5 Playgrounds Taskforce, and Gonzalo Casals from  
6 Friends of the Highline. We'll leave it at that for  
7 this panel. Okay Edith we're going to queue you  
8 first if that's okay.

10 EDITH PRENTICE: Sure. Okay. Hello, my  
11 name is Edith Prentice. I am the Vice President of  
12 Legislative Affairs for DIA and a whole school of  
13 other things. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of, of July it'll be the  
14 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ADA. The ADA is primarily a  
15 regulation that came about almost by happen stance  
16 in the, in congress. And it just sort of fell by  
17 and it's based on standards that are developed by  
18 the Department of Justice known as ADAGS  
19 [phonetic]. And a major problem with the ADA is the  
20 lack of, of enforcement. Enforcement happens by  
21 complaints to the feds, to the Department of  
22 Justice and then you wait and wait and wait. And  
23 there are a multiplicity of complaint that could be  
24 in their hopper. So if I'm complaining about not  
25 being able to reach the, the sink in a bathroom

1  
2 versus a major issue of accessibility I certainly  
3 hope DOJ would focus on the bigger issue. But the  
4 fact that I can't reach the water or the soap or  
5 get into the stall in a bathroom, it's a major  
6 problem. I want to first describe two very simple  
7 bathrooms. In Fort Washington Park near where I  
8 live there's the one by the tennis courts, 160  
9 something. Again as was mentioned, the step. I'm  
10 sorry I think you can do the step without doing the  
11 ceiling and everything and the roof etcetera. Let's  
12 talk about doable small fixes. A six inch step, six  
13 foot ramp. Simple relationship. It's not brain  
14 surgery people. You put in... then there's the other  
15 bathroom which is I think it's the wright brothers  
16 which is actually level but is pretty horrible. And  
17 I have, I, I actually wheel up and down through the  
18 park to go to fairway to do my grocery shopping so  
19 I come around da-da-da-da-da, wheel up, wheel up to  
20 either the ramp at 157<sup>th</sup> street or if I'm really  
21 feeling industries wheel up past the little red  
22 lighthouse, up and over the, over the, the highway.  
23 The one at the 150s if I were a kid, if I were a  
24 parent I wouldn't let my child go in there. It is  
25 just scavy [phonetic]. But I have used it and you

1 know you got to poke your wheelchair into it, reach  
2 up, grab the top of the wall, and transfer. You do  
3 what you have to do. Hopefully you remember to go  
4 to the bathroom before you leave fairway. That's  
5 the important part of this step. There are a number  
6 of problems and I'm not going to really read my  
7 testimony. I would like to first address the issue  
8 of membership fees. Membership fees are really  
9 pretty interesting. Chris and I have had this  
10 discussion many of times. If you are a, under the  
11 age of 18... I always, I always get this confused.  
12 School children are free, young adults which goes  
13 to 24 are 25 dollars, seniors which is above 61,  
14 starting at 62 I guess are 25 dollars. The  
15 disability community has a problem with this  
16 concept. In the days before they raised their fees  
17 tremendously. At 50 dollars okay it was doable. It  
18 was a, it was a, it was a chunk for some of us but  
19 we get it. When it went to 150 dollars for a center  
20 with a pool, an indoor pool 150 dollars. I'm sorry  
21 for many members of our community that's a great  
22 big chunk. And I'm sorry don't tell me it's 75  
23 dollars for six months because believe me 75  
24 dollars is just as hard a chunk for some of our  
25



1 budgets. And yes I gave up TV, I gave up the other  
2 things but I'm not about to put 150 dollars in the  
3 pockets of New York City Parks. Remember all  
4 outdoor pools are free. Every pool that your kid's  
5 day camp goes to all summer, those are free. This  
6 is a little silly. And I'm tired of being told  
7 blink costs more, planet fitness costs more, the Y  
8 costs more. A lot of things cost more in this life  
9 but that doesn't mean people can afford it. We very  
10 strongly believe that there should not be a means  
11 task as has been suggested. You don't means test  
12 school children. You don't mean test young adults.  
13 And you don't mean test seniors. Why should you  
14 mean test people with disabilities. People with  
15 disabilities have the highest percentage of  
16 unemployment. It's a higher percentage of  
17 unemployment than ethnic. And the highest  
18 unemployment is of individuals who have education  
19 and graduate and other degrees. This just... not  
20 getting jobs. And yeah the city's telling us we all  
21 need to be fit we all need to be healthy but you  
22 can't afford to go to the, the city parks. There  
23 were many issues that, it's nice to hear all these  
24 little things and all these big things that have  
25

1  
2 been done but I want to point to something very  
3 specific. In Inwood Park there are a series of  
4 education walks that are pretty cool and I've done  
5 them. Except the problem is the major path through  
6 the Indian Midden [phonetic] which is the area  
7 where all the shells are found the entire path has  
8 been washed out for years pre-Sandy. You go on this  
9 little walkway and suddenly you can't go anywhere  
10 because the entire asphalt path is washed out. I  
11 understand it's a capital project but you know what  
12 telling people before they get on that how to go  
13 around it and having some signage might be really  
14 helpful. One of the biggest problems to me as an  
15 individual is getting lost. I actually have left a  
16 hysterical message on Jennifer Happers [sp?] phone  
17 I was lost in... totally lost, I was hysterical. I  
18 had gone up from, from Broadway and wanted to end  
19 up at Fort Washington by the Heather Garden and I  
20 was lost. Don't ask me where I went wrong. And this  
21 is, this is the thing I do maybe a couple of times  
22 a year. Finally a dog walker found me and lead me  
23 out. I understand we need millions of dollars to do  
24 Way Ferry [sp?]. I don't think putting up a sign  
25 when there's a million dollar restoration of a

1  
2 stairwell that would simply say wheelchair access  
3 around this way. That's... make a project so  
4 wonderful but it doesn't get me from Broadway to  
5 Fort Washington when I need to. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Edith.  
7 Thank you so much. Alright. Next up Sheldon Fine.

8 SHELDON FINE: [off mic] Good afternoon.  
9 Is it on? [on mic] Good afternoon. Good afternoon  
10 Chairman Levine and distinguished members of the  
11 council. I am here. I'm, name is Sheldon Fine. I'd  
12 like to just give you a little background of my  
13 background okay to help you understand where I'm  
14 coming from. In 1968 I worked for a organization  
15 called the Corollians [sp?]. It was the only day  
16 center for people, adults with disabilities that  
17 were multiple, considered multiple, multiply  
18 handicapped. So in addition to having cerebral  
19 palsy they had some other or more than one  
20 challenge. And it was the only opportunity for  
21 parents to have their children, there were younger  
22 children and young adult children get out of the  
23 house twice a week for a few hours and come to a  
24 center. Though problems within the center in terms  
25 of accessibility but I was young and idealistic and

1 I decided we're going to accomplish things. We're  
2 going to play baseball and we're going to play pool  
3 and we're going to build things and I almost got  
4 myself fired a number of times. But the last straw  
5 which got me fired is why don't we take the  
6 children out to the park. It's a couple of blocks  
7 away and they'll be in the fresh air, the trees,  
8 we'll play some games and then problems started.  
9 Besides the streets, the grade of the streets being  
10 awkward and, and holes and, and different angles  
11 for wheelchairs and one wheelchair almost going  
12 over by the time we got to the park we realized  
13 that there were major, major obstacles in terms of  
14 physical accessibility of the wheelchairs, where to  
15 do, there was almost no place we can go directly  
16 other than sitting under a few trees in an open  
17 area. And even that the ground was uneven and not  
18 well kept. So worked about 15 minutes until one  
19 young man said bathroom bathroom and that was the  
20 finished and we realized that we can't take the  
21 kids out because we can't, they're not all in  
22 control in the normal, in normal situations for  
23 them about when they have to go to the bathroom if  
24 we're in a situation where a bathroom is not  
25

1 available it nixes it. So that was my first shot in  
2 the head. I got rehired the following year after I  
3 got fired because they realized that the issues had  
4 to be dealt with and we might as well have someone  
5 who wants to deal with them. I then spent 15,  
6 actually 15 years in special education in the South  
7 Bronx in the New York City public school system.  
8 And we had a... 1967 a new building that had opened.  
9 I entered in 1970 and we had physically handicap...  
10 all, all, many different disabilities and what  
11 happened. Those kids could function on the first  
12 floor. We had an elevator but they couldn't  
13 function on the floors because of the rooms and the  
14 way that rooms was set up. They couldn't use the  
15 equipment because of the heights and locations of  
16 equipment. And so they remained on the first floor.  
17 Whatever was on the first floor was, was for them  
18 and for the other kids. So I got involved in the  
19 special Olympics early on. It's a great when... take  
20 them up to Van Cortlandt Park on the track run. I'm  
21 going to teach them how to do different things and  
22 then the obstacles came. We have no place for them  
23 to practice. The school yard was huge but it was  
24 all gravelly, concrete and gravel. It was  
25

1 dangerous. There were no mats anywhere. There was,  
2 there was nothing. So I realized that although we  
3 were a new school and we had a ramp, wow so when  
4 the kids came off the bus they could go up the ramp  
5 that we were not an accessible school. And that's  
6 for the issues that we talk about Mobility issues.  
7 Forget about other... can you imagine Bill de Blasio  
8 at 17 years old probably was almost as tall as he  
9 is now trying to go and use some equipment on a  
10 playground or our friend Carol who's a little  
11 person who tries to access things in the gym and  
12 doesn't know where to go, what to do. Or, or other  
13 people who have visual issues have size issues,  
14 other health issues, all these things are not taken  
15 to consideration. So where as we strongly support  
16 the resolution and we think it should be really  
17 advocated for strongly we want it to go to another  
18 level. And we think... I don't want to come back 20  
19 years from now, okay and you'll be mayors or  
20 something and say you know we, we, remember when we  
21 talked 20 years ago. All we talked about is a high  
22 level of compliance and therefore we don't have  
23 anything that definitely includes most of the  
24

1 people in society. So I want to explain what CB7,  
2 community board 7 Manhattan has done okay.

3  
4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: I realize you have  
5 a prepared statement Sheldon...

6 SHELDON FINE: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: ...and we do want to  
8 give other people a chance to testify so...

9 SHELDON FINE: Very quickly.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Very quickly.

11 SHELDON FINE: We spent two years  
12 working on accessibility and we came to the  
13 conclusion that there were many issues, many that  
14 you brought up. But the key issue was that  
15 children's playgrounds were a major unmet issue.  
16 And so we began an inclusive playground research  
17 and we've developed a lot of ideas and we're  
18 basically working on universal issues of design  
19 which are on here, body fit being one of them,  
20 comfort, keeping demands within desirable limits of  
21 body function, awareness, ensuring that critical  
22 information for use is easy to see, understanding  
23 making methods of operation to use intuitive clear  
24 and unambiguous, wellness, contributing to the  
25 health promotion, avoidance of disease, etcetera,

1 social integration, probably one of the most  
2 important pieces. If you can't function in the same  
3 space or you're, there's nothing for you to do  
4 there you're not going to be mixed with other  
5 people. And it's important not only for the people  
6 who have issues of certain types of abilities but  
7 all children need to work together. And all studies  
8 were shown that parents want their children working  
9 and playing with all children. Personalization,  
10 incorporating opportunities for choice and cultural  
11 appropriateness that they should be things in the  
12 project that are appealing to the local population.  
13 We are working hard with United Cerebral Palsy,  
14 with schools in our area on a particular project  
15 which we hope the Bloomingdale School which we hope  
16 will become a model, not only good for that school  
17 but a model for inclusive playground idea across  
18 the city. And we urge, so we urge the city council  
19 to take it to one step further. So for 20 years  
20 from now we can say oh we talked about that [cross-  
21 talk]  
22

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you.

24 SHELDON FINE: ...about it.  
25



2 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you Sheldon.

3 And Sergeant I realize I forgot to ask you to put a  
4 clock on. But if you could put us on three minutes.  
5 Not that Gonzalo needs such a reminder. But please...  
6 [cross-talk] let you have the floor. Thank you.

7 GONZALO CASALS: Thank you. Thanks for  
8 having us. My name is Gonzalo Casals. I'm vice  
9 president of programs and community relations at  
10 friends of a highline which is a conservancy that  
11 maintains the programs... park on Manhattan's west  
12 side in partnership with the Department of Parks  
13 and, and Recreation. For the planning and design  
14 and the construction process of all the three  
15 sections of the highline, Friends of the Highline,  
16 and the Department of Parks and Recreation made  
17 sure all the aspects of the park comply with the  
18 ADA standards. But working closely with Victor  
19 Calise in his former role at Department of Parks  
20 but also now as a Commissioner of a Mayor's Office  
21 of People with Disabilities we took compliance to  
22 the next level and ensure that... was integral part  
23 of the design process as pointed by your remarks  
24 early on. Specific examples of that is the five  
25 elevators that we place along the park, the

1 northern most entrance of the highline on 31<sup>st</sup> is  
2 the great ramp, the path wave and general  
3 circulation of the park had been designed with  
4 accessibility in mind. Our rail tracks which you  
5 explain before also has full accessibility with a  
6 wheelchair access. Our beams which is the  
7 exploratory play area for kids that we opened last  
8 September also includes some great ramp and  
9 accessible features for kids with abilities. And  
10 then our picnic tables and other large shading  
11 areas provide a space for... seating for people with  
12 disabilities. ADA's accessibility is one of the  
13 many ways in which we want to make sure that  
14 Highline remains open and accessible public space  
15 for all New Yorkers. Thank you.

17 EDITH PRENTICE: Excuse me I did miss  
18 something.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Very quickly.

20 EDITH PRENTICE: I just... Okay. I would  
21 just like to point out the misutilization of  
22 signage often in the park. For example I wheel up  
23 to Corbin Circle and want to look at what the  
24 events are in Fort Tryon this weekend and it's at  
25 eight and a half by 11 piece of paper mounted above

1  
2 my head or in a piece of plastic on a fence. So  
3 it's probably a 10 or 12 serif font. I can't get  
4 anywhere close enough to read that.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Point, point well  
6 taken. Thank you.

7 EDITH PRENTICE: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And, and Gonzalo  
9 my, my compliments to what you have done with the  
10 highline. It's really, really inspirational  
11 example. Thanks panel for your comments. Next up we  
12 have Rita Gene, not sure if I pronounced that  
13 correctly, okay, Sarah Fisher, am I reading that  
14 correctly, I hope so, Jeffrey Croft, and Joan  
15 Peters. You're up first.

16 RITA GENE: Hello this is the first time  
17 I've ever done this so I'm a little nervous. But I  
18 come here, I'm also on Community Board 7, and one  
19 of the topics that I'm very passionate about is  
20 inclusion which is a word that is used and is  
21 hopefully going to be used in 20 years from now a  
22 lot more. I'm a parent of two school age children  
23 and I've been a very involved parent in the upper  
24 west side community. I made the important decision  
25 early on to fully involve myself and engage in my

1 children's education so that I may learn what they  
2 are learning. For the past several years I was also  
3 the PTA president at a Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup>  
4 grade New York City public school on the upper west  
5 side where both my children attended. This school  
6 embodies a learning community where children of all  
7 abilities and disabilities come together to  
8 celebrate multiple ways of learning about the world  
9 and each other. What makes this school so  
10 exceptional is that it has one of the largest  
11 inclusion programs in New York City for children  
12 with severe Mobility impairments and many other  
13 special needs. There are many other students at  
14 this school have a wide range of other special  
15 needs including social, emotional, intellectual,  
16 spiritual and vocational. In each grade there are  
17 approximately two inclusion classrooms out of three  
18 to four classrooms per grade. The common benefit is  
19 real and very apparent. Both typically developing  
20 children and children with special needs who learn  
21 alongside one another benefit immensely. They are  
22 learning from each other about their differences  
23 and similarities. Why then should children not all  
24 have this same ability to play together. After all  
25

1 children learn when they play. When children play  
2 with each other they learn how to learn. That's why  
3 I am now also a member of an inclusive playground  
4 taskforce on community board 7 where we are  
5 advocating for the development of a new playground  
6 to be not only accessible but designed to also be  
7 inclusive so that all children with different  
8 abilities and disabilities can come together to  
9 play, engage, interact, and learn about the world  
10 and each other. The same way I just described where  
11 some children are fortunate enough to be able to  
12 learn in an inclusive classroom and experience this  
13 type of learning every day. All children should  
14 have the same opportunity to participate in their  
15 own learning. And the playground is a very  
16 important venue for that social learning experience  
17 to happen. Thank you.

18  
19 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: And, and thank you  
20 for the important work that you and your colleagues  
21 are doing on CB7. And, and for the record you read  
22 that bet than some people who have testified dozens  
23 of times before our committee so congrats.

24 RITA GENE: Thank you.  
25

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: So I guess next up we're doing Sarah.

SARAH FISHER: [off mic] And I don't have...

CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: No problem at all.

SARAH FISHER: [off mic] I won't, I talked last year about this... [cross-talk] Sorry. [on mic] I spoke briefly at the preliminary budget hearings last year. And I just wanted to call attention to that again since it's just focus specifically on disabilities. I'm here representing Fountain House. And so the invisible disabled population with mental disabilities and while you know I do a lot of work in the parks and the parks are great the lack of access to the paid facilities like the recreation centers, the tennis courts, etcetera, having no sort of consideration for the disabled population. And as I you know tell friends I mean basically if a disabled person goes with their elderly friend to the park they both can ride the bus for the same amount which is with their half price fare, when they get to the park you know if the elderly person wants to buy a tennis pass it's 25 bucks, if you're disabled it's 200 bucks

1 which is excessive. And especially when you're  
2 trying to do programming. Like we can buy a  
3 baseball permit but if we want to have a group of  
4 people that, that go on a regular basis like once a  
5 week and play tennis you know eight, you know eight  
6 people playing on a court that's 16 hundred dollars  
7 for those eight people. And of course you can't  
8 count on the same eight so if we want to get season  
9 passes we'd probably double those costs or we'd be  
10 paying 15 dollars per hour per person. So it  
11 becomes prohibitive. And the precedent is actually  
12 there as I mentioned last year. In fact Edith you  
13 can actually go to a state park, riverbank state  
14 parks in all the state parks have an access pass  
15 for the disabled. And even better is the precedent  
16 that the Department of Interior sets. If you have  
17 an, if you have a disability, a medically  
18 determined disability whether it's physical or  
19 visible or non-visible and it's certified by a  
20 doctor if you get like SSD or SSI so it's a  
21 medically determined permanent condition. Then you  
22 have a free access pass or a discounted pass at all  
23 national parks similar to what they just did for  
24 fourth graders. And so I think that that's  
25

1 something that doesn't cost capital dollars. It's  
2 just a little less on the expense dollars. But I  
3 think it would go a long way. And the reason that  
4 I'm particularly concerned for this population is  
5 that people with mental illness live 25 years less  
6 on average. 75 percent of them are, 75 percent of  
7 people with severe mental illness are tobacco  
8 dependent. Diabetes is three times more prevalent  
9 in people with severe mental illness and more than  
10 80 percent of people with serious mental illness  
11 are overweight or obese. So their ability to not  
12 only go in and use the parks but also go in and use  
13 the recreation centers, east tennis courts,  
14 etcetera would be great. And again this, this is an  
15 invisible population. I just want to end with an  
16 invitation. Fountain House last year did a one in  
17 four 5K in the park. We had about 350 community  
18 members, supportive, friends, and mental health  
19 advocates. It's right in your neighborhood mark.  
20 We're doing another one this year and it is on  
21 April 11<sup>th</sup> 2015 and I would love to invite anyone  
22 on the committee or anyone you know and I will be  
23 forwarding invitations to everyone to join our one  
24 in four 5K. And the one in four is basically mental  
25



1  
2 illness can, will strike over a lifetime one in  
3 four individuals so we would love to have you join  
4 us.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you for that  
6 invitation and for your remarks. Okay Mr. Croft.

7 JEFFREY CROFT: Good afternoon. First of  
8 all I'd like to thank you very much for having this  
9 hearing. This area of the Parks Department has been  
10 a particular frustration for those of us who have  
11 been trying to deal with issue for as long as we,  
12 we have. And I just want to start by just thanking  
13 people like Edith Prentice and Margie Ruben for  
14 their strong advocacy for many many many years. The  
15 issue of accessibility including being able to use  
16 the facilities has long been neglected in the Parks  
17 department. I'm, I'm just going to go over a couple  
18 of issues. The capital division itself what we've,  
19 we used to track these things I mean month by  
20 month. But when the parks, I mean there's so many  
21 examples of the Parks Department renovating a  
22 playground and not touching the, the bathroom.  
23 That's completely unacceptable. And it's  
24 unacceptable for the Parks Department to say oh we  
25 only have the funds for X. Unacceptable. And we

1  
2 keep hearing this dance around of well it's going  
3 to cost, yes that's, that is correct. If you are  
4 going to renovate a park or a, a playground and  
5 there is a bathroom adjacent or, or, and it, it  
6 should not be an option that the Parks Department  
7 feels you know it can renovate or not. Because  
8 that, that bathroom is part of the playground. And  
9 that's something that is very very very  
10 frustrating. Regarding the Mobi-Mats we were, our  
11 organization with our, our advocate colleagues and  
12 partners we long promoted those and try to get  
13 those in the, the city. It's good to hear that we  
14 are explaining that but that needs to be. I mean  
15 again it, there should be those you know every five  
16 or six blocks or whatever it is, at every you know.  
17 That needs to be dramatically increased. The  
18 wheelchairs too again you know we're what 130 140  
19 years of having our beaches connected to the parks  
20 department and we're just you know getting these  
21 things. Again that needs to be tremendously  
22 expanded. It also needs to be promoted. Because I  
23 don't think the average person knows that where  
24 these wheelchairs are. Issue of the transition  
25 plan; we have gone through this for many years. The

1 transition plan in the prior administration again  
2 you know fell to the wayside that, it's that's,  
3 very frustrating things. Most play, playgrounds  
4 are, or some of... may be accessible but you cannot  
5 access the actual equipment. Statistics show, and  
6 this came up during this testimony. And you know  
7 the panel that, that presented, talking about  
8 transfer stations. Statistics show that more than  
9 90 percent of children do not use transfer  
10 stations. So why are we putting them in there?  
11 Again we need to, we need to be installing  
12 equipment that is actually accessible, not, you  
13 know not necessarily a, a transfer station. You had  
14 asked the, this, this panel asked about the level  
15 ones. The, the playgrounds. According to the Parks  
16 Department's website there are only seven out of a  
17 thousand playgrounds. There are only a seven  
18 playgrounds in New York City that qualify as a  
19 level one. And there's one in the Bronx. There's  
20 three in Manhattan, two in Queens, one in Staten  
21 Island, and zero in Brooklyn. Obviously these  
22 numbers are ridiculous. So you know this stuff. I  
23 mean it's, this is a very frustrating part of the  
24 work that we do and yeah. They also, the  
25

1 disabilities, the parks department's own  
2 disabilities taskforce I understand you guys not  
3 have, have not had a meeting in what five or six  
4 months on, on that. Okay, that's just, that's not,  
5 unacceptable. There are people who care about this  
6 stuff. They're willing to help. We're here to help  
7 the parks department. We're here to help the city.  
8 And I know you take your job extremely seriously.  
9 And obviously you know, but we need to really ramp  
10 this up. And it's not, sometimes it's about money  
11 but sometimes it's not. So all play, you know all  
12 playgrounds need to be a level one. And we also you  
13 know strongly... [cross-talk]

14  
15 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: If you can try and  
16 wrap up.

17 JEFFREY CROFT: Sure absolutely. You  
18 know moving forward those city council members  
19 including yourself mark who are interested in this  
20 super important part of this part of the parks  
21 department. We suggest and strongly encourage you  
22 to work with those of us who haven't work on this  
23 for so long. Because it's not rocket science to fix  
24 this stuff. And as I'm sure everyone in this room  
25 will agree Americans With Disabilities Act is

1 extremely limited. It does not address the majority  
2 of things that we're talking about. And so we need  
3 to go way beyond that. But we...

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you.

5 JEFFREY CROFT: ...need to set up an  
6 infrastructure to do that.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very  
8 much.

9 JEFFREY CROFT: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Okay Joan Peters,  
11 our final... [cross-talk]

12 JOAN PETERS: Good afternoon Council  
13 Member Levine. My name is Joan Peters. I'm  
14 executive director of the Brooklyn Center for  
15 independence of the disabled. We're an organization  
16 run by people with disabilities for people with  
17 disabilities. And each year we work with thousands  
18 of people with disabilities and their families. I'm  
19 here to express our support for the passage of  
20 Intro 558. The mission of our agency is to remove  
21 the obstacles that prevent people with disabilities  
22 from becoming part of the main stream. As necessary  
23 as accessibility is to work places, stores, and  
24 businesses accessibility is also imperative for  
25

2 social opportunities. People with disabilities just  
3 want to have the same opportunities as non-disabled  
4 people. I also want to underscore that access needs  
5 to include all people with disabilities, people  
6 with Mobility impairments, sensory disabilities,  
7 and cognitive and mental disabilities as well.  
8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVINE: Thank you very  
10 much. Thanks panel. And this concludes our hearing.  
11 Thank you all for joining us.

12 [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date March 11, 2015