

Staff: Thomas Curry, Counsel  
Frank Neely, Policy Analyst  
Chima Obichere, Financial Analyst  
Leticia Theodore, Communications



THE COUNCIL  
REPORT OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE DIVISION  
Marcel Van Ooyen, Legislative Director

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION  
Helen D. Foster, Chair

September 22, 2004

Res. No. 512

By: Foster, Boyland, Clarke, Comrie,  
Gerson, James, Liu, Palma, Perkins,  
Reed, Rivera, Sanders and Serrano

Title: Resolution calling upon the United States Department of the Interior, the New York State and City Parks Departments and private sector nurseries to plant trees in communities of color, communities of low income and communities with the highest asthma rates, that have historically had the fewest tree plantings.

Background:

The Committee on Parks and Recreation, chaired by Council Member Helen D. Foster, will hold a hearing on Wednesday, September 22, 2004 concerning the state of the street and park trees throughout the City of New York. The Committee will also consider Res. No. 512, which calls upon the United States Department of the Interior, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the New York City Department of Parks and

Recreation, and private sector nurseries to plant trees in communities of color, communities of low income and communities with the highest asthma rates, that have historically had the fewest tree plantings. Invited to testify are representatives from New Yorkers for Parks, the New York Tree Trust, the Horticulture Society of New York, Environmental Action Coalition, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Bronx Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces, Greening for Breathing, and the Point Community Development Corporation.

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) is responsible and has jurisdiction over all trees growing in the public right-of-way, including trees along streets, parkways, and in all City parks. DPR is responsible for the maintenance of over 2.5 million street and park trees that make up the City's urban forest. In addition to their aesthetic value, these trees improve air quality by capturing small particles that can be harmful and reducing pollution. DPR's Central Forestry Division and the forestry divisions of each borough are responsible for the maintenance of the nearly 500,000 street trees in the City. According to a 1996 report by DPR entitled "The State of our Street Trees," Queens was shaded by 217,111 (43.6%) street trees, Brooklyn had 112,400 (22.5%) street trees, Staten Island had 75,171 (15.1%) street trees, the Bronx had 47,995 (9.6%) street trees, and Manhattan had 45,793 (9.2%) street trees. According to DPR, there are internal discussions currently being held considering another tree census in the future.

Besides providing shade and positive aesthetic qualities, trees also provide economic advantages. According to a study by Trees New York and Trees New Jersey, entitled Trees Mean Business, tree cover provides a number of economic benefits. First, the study concluded that in 1975, \$1.1 million in benefits were provided by having tree cover in relation to the removal of air pollutants. This was reduced to \$896,000 by 1995, and is projected to drop to \$715,000 by 2015. The study's findings found, although not scientifically quantifiable in dollar amounts, that trees on

commercial and residential sites provided benefits and values to many parties. For example, the study found that commercial developers found that forest elements helped save money because it lowered the amount of money spent on on-site stormwater management systems, increased the long-term value of the property and provided a competitive edge for tenants and buyers. Owners of commercial establishments found that trees attracted customers and guests, helped define traffic patterns and encouraged neighbors to upgrade their landscapes, increasing the property value. Tenants and merchants found that trees influenced their decision to buy or rent, attracted customers and guests, made them more competitive and created environments that were more comfortable and places people would stay longer, which translated into better financial returns.

The report also indicates that for the municipality and region there are a number of benefits. First, tree cover gave the physical appearance of a human scale and provided a sense of security. Also, trees mitigate the impact of commercial development, creating vegetative buffers from noise, light and traffic. In addition, trees improve air quality by removing air pollutants and store carbon, conserve energy by shading buildings and the street (thus lowering the ambient air temperature during hot days and creating a wind buffer on cold days), decreases the amount of stormwater runoff, and can provide a greenway link to parks that are often separated by commercial developments.<sup>1</sup>

According to a report issued by the United States Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control, dated February 27, 2004, the highest rates of asthma are generally in communities of color and low income. According to the report, an estimated 16 million U.S. adults suffer from asthma (7.5% of the total population). The following charts indicates the breakdown by racial/ethnic group and by income for lifetime asthma prevalence in New York State, according to the report.

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<sup>1</sup> *Trees Mean Business*, report published by Trees New York and Trees New Jersey, no date available, pp. 9-11

**Risk Factor for lifetime asthma prevalence**

Race:		At Risk	Not at Risk
White	% CI n	11.6 (10.5-12.7) 465	88.4 (87.3-89.5) 3566
Black	% CI n	16.0 (12.2-19.7) 80	84.0 (80.3-87.8) 433
Hispanic	% CI n	11.2 (8.5-13.9) 82	88.8 (86.1-91.5) 494
Other	% CI n	7.2 (3.4-11.0) 21	92.8 (89.0-96.6) 266
MultiRacial	% CI n	9.9 (1.4-18.3) 6	90.1 (81.7-98.6) 51

% = Percentage, CI = Confidence Interval, n = Cell Size  
 Percentages are weighted to population characteristics.  
 Use caution in interpreting cell sizes less than 50.  
 See notes for data users.

**Risk Factor for lifetime asthma prevalence**

Income:		At Risk	Not at Risk
Less than \$15,000	% CI n	14.7 (11.3-18.1) 90	85.3 (81.9-88.7) 486
\$15,000- 24,999	% CI n	11.4 (8.8-14.0) 102	88.6 (86.0-91.2) 706
\$25,000- 34,999	% CI n	12.1 (9.1-15.0) 76	87.9 (85.0-90.9) 554
\$35,000- 49,999	% CI n	13.0 (10.2-15.8) 97	87.0 (84.2-89.8) 645
\$50,000+	% CI n	10.2 (8.7-11.7) 207	89.8 (88.3-91.3) 1856

% = Percentage, CI = Confidence Interval, n = Cell Size  
 Percentages are weighted to population characteristics.  
 Use caution in interpreting cell sizes less than 50.  
 See notes for data users.

According to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOH), in a press release dated May 4, 2003, approximately 300,000 children and 700,000 adults in New York City have been diagnosed with asthma at some point in their lives. “Asthma is the leading cause of hospitalization among children 0-14 years of age and a major source of school absenteeism. It also causes adults to miss work and limits physical activity.” Additionally, DOH indicates in the Mayor’s Management Report for fiscal year 2004 that the hospitalization rate for asthma among children ages 0-14 in New York City is 6.5 per 1,000 children (an increase from 6.0 for fiscal year 2003). The Health and Hospitals Corporation indicated that emergency room visits for pediatric patients with asthma rose from 3.9% in FY 2003 to 4.3% for FY 2004.

On April 30, 2004, Governor Pataki announced that a \$25,000 grant will be given to the group Greening for Breathing to implement a plan to plant trees and forestry management in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx, to mitigate air pollution in this heavily industrialized area. In

addition, DPR will receive a \$125,000 grant from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and federal money to use with Greening for Breathing to create a “green ring” around the residential area of the Hunts Point peninsula, to shield it from the diesel fumes and other air pollutants from the industrialized parts of Hunts Point. This money is part of a \$500,000 funding commitment for a statewide tree-planting program.

Res. No. 512

Resolution calling upon the United States Department of the Interior, the New York State and City Parks Departments and private sector nurseries to plant trees in communities of color, communities of low income and communities with the highest asthma rates, that have historically had the fewest tree plantings.

By Council Member Foster, Boyland, Clarke, Comrie, Gerson, James, Liu, Palma, Perkins, Reed, Rivera, Sanders and Serrano

Whereas, The United States Department of the Interior, the New York State and City Parks Departments and private sector nurseries have resources to plant trees in communities of color, communities of low income and communities with the highest asthma rates, that have historically had the fewest tree plantings; and

Whereas, According to a 1995 census of street trees published by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation's (DPR) Central Forestry Division, there are approximately 500,000 street trees in New York City, with 219,000 in Queens, 112,000 in Brooklyn, 75,000 on Staten Island, 48,000 in the Bronx and 48,000 in Manhattan; and

Whereas, The highest rates of asthma are generally in communities of color and low income according to a report by the United States Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control and Prevention dated February 27, 2004; and

Whereas, According to a press release by New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene issued May 4, 2003, one method to relieve asthma, a major disease affecting 300,000 children and 700,000 adults in New York City, the leading cause of hospitalization among children 14 years of age and younger and a cause of limited physical activity in adults and absenteeism from work, is to provide additional oxygen through the planting of trees; and

Whereas, The organization Greening for Breathing has been partnering with the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation to use \$125,000 in funds from the New York

State Department of Environmental Conservation and the federal government to plant a “Green Ring” around residential parts of the Hunts Point industrial area to shield residents from truck fumes and other hazards to clean air; and

Whereas, Governor Pataki announced during his State of the State address in January, 2004, that the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation will plant thousands of trees in urban neighborhoods throughout the State to assist local communities in saving energy, creating new habitats, raising property values and improving the overall quality of life; now, therefore be it

Resolved, that the Council of the City of New York calls upon the United States Department of the Interior, the New York State and City Parks Departments and private sector nurseries to plant trees in communities of color, communities of low income and communities with the highest asthma rates, that have historically had the fewest tree plantings.

LS# 1431  
THC – 8/4/04