



**Hearing before the New York City Council  
Committee on Parks & Recreation  
Oversight: Forestry Legislation  
October 20, 2016**

**Testimony By: Jennifer Greenfeld, Assistant Commissioner of Forestry,  
Horticulture, and Natural Resources Group**

Good morning, Chair Levine and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Jennifer Greenfeld, and I serve as Assistant Commissioner of Forestry, Horticulture, and Natural Resources at the New York City Parks Department. I am joined by our First Deputy Commissioner Liam Kavanagh, and our Director of Government Relations, Matt Drury. Thank you for inviting us today to testify regarding Introduction 349, regarding notification of tree removal, Introduction 1112, regarding online information about tree maintenance work, and LS. 8737, pertaining to notice of temporary parking restrictions related to the removal of trees.

I'd like to begin by providing some context about NYC Parks. NYC Parks is the steward of approximately 30,000 acres of land, 14 percent of New York City, including more than 5,000 individual properties, ranging in size and variety, from Coney Island Beach and Central Park, to Pelham Bay Park and Alley Pond Park, to community gardens and neighborhood pocket parks.

In my position, I oversee a division that doesn't manage a specific geography of the city, but rather nature wherever you might find it within Parks' jurisdiction. That means the 10,000 acres of forests, salt marshes, rivers, grasslands and other natural areas; pint-sized gardens within the public right of way, called Greenstreets, many of which are now designed to provide more than a beautiful break from the passing traffic but also to capture stormwater, and the more than 600,000 trees planted along city streets. We carefully plan for these resources, select appropriate species, and manage over \$ 210 million worth of expense and capital contracts to plant and maintain the urban forest. We manage two nurseries, one of which is internationally known for its plant conservation work, collecting seeds to grow native plants for restoration projects throughout the city. Through the Urban Field Station, we partner with the U.S. Forest Service to attract researchers from around the country to study New York City's nature, improving the quality and impact of our work. We are also working to connect New Yorkers to their city by blazing and mapping nature trails and leading volunteer stewardship activities throughout the year.

The variety and breadth of the work we do at Forestry, Horticulture and Natural Resources is a reflection of the many ways that New Yorkers interact with and benefit from our city's natural areas, which is why we're so dedicated to their maintenance and protection. Parks connect people through open spaces across the urban mosaic. Downtown Greenstreets blooming with ornamental plants punctuate green corridors of sidewalk trees that link to the shared open space of vibrant and beautifully landscaped neighborhood parks. Many of our parks contain natural treasures that link us to our past, offer respite and beauty as well as protect coastlines and clean and cool the air. Together these spaces form the interlacing network that is our parks system.

Since the legislation being discussed today focuses largely on our forestry efforts, I'd like to offer some background and context on our city's urban forest. New York City's

street trees, one piece of our urban forest, are living, breathing parts of our communities, and they are vital city infrastructure that produce an estimated \$121 million dollars annually, in economic, environmental and health benefits. Maintaining New York City's urban forest is one of NYC Parks' most important responsibilities, and we have dedicated staff in each borough to protect and support the safety and health of our trees. Through Citywide and Agency initiatives over the past several years, NYC Parks has made the maintenance, health, and growth of our urban forest a major priority, and we have some notable updates to share with you on these efforts.

Last fall, New York City celebrated the planting of the millionth tree of the MillionTreesNYC initiative, two years ahead of schedule. This unprecedented initiative has become a model for other cities around the world, helping reduce New York City's carbon footprint and furthered our efforts to become a more environmentally responsible and equitable City.

NYC Parks is also proud to announce the recent completion of the TreesCount! street tree census. The census, which occurs every ten years, was a success thanks to the hard work of thousands of volunteers who spent countless hours cataloging street trees in all five Boroughs. The critical information collected through the census will help us better maintain and care for our existing street trees and plan for the future of our urban forest. NYC Parks executed the census with the help of innovative new technology and mapping tools, which will translate to an interactive online Street Tree Map enabling all New Yorkers to personally connect with their neighborhood street trees, like never before.

The Map will serve as a portal to the urban forest, allowing New Yorkers to go online to view a map of all city street trees. Users can select a specific street tree, learn basic features about the tree, including its species and value to the neighborhood. The Map will also have a direct link to our web/311 forestry request system to report issues or concerns. Neighbors can also track their stewardship efforts and link their work to their social media accounts, creating communities of like-minded stewards. NYC Parks looks forward to announcing the results of the tree census, publicly debuting the online Street Tree Map and recognizing our all-star tree census volunteers at a TreesCount completion celebration on the evening of November 3<sup>rd</sup>, a celebration we would like to invite all Parks Committee members to attend.

Looking forward, NYC Parks' Natural Resources Group worked with our non-profit partner, the Natural Areas Conservancy, to develop a Forest Management Plan for 7,200 acres of natural forest under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks. This framework characterizes the current condition and distribution of natural forests, while identifying a suite of restoration and management scenarios and their costs and staffing needs. While the funding and implementation strategy is still developing, Parks has begun to share initial ideas with stakeholders, including Chair Levine, and we would welcome the opportunity to gather additional feedback from the Council.

NYC Parks is dedicated to working towards objectives established in the Mayor's "OneNYC: A Plan for a Strong and Just City," including the goals of improving air quality and protecting our city's tree canopy, currently an estimated 21% of our city's land area. We will continue to gain greater knowledge about our City's tree canopy through FY 2017 federal CDBG Disaster Recovery funding to acquire and process an updated dataset using LiDAR surveying technology, which will assist in generating a

new land cover map for New York City. This data will allow us to identify areas of the city that have lost tree canopy and other vegetative cover in recent years, and help to prioritize future greening initiatives to equitably distribute ecological benefits throughout the city.

This administration is prioritizing the care and maintenance of our natural resources, including our city trees. The Fiscal Year 2016 budget included \$2.6 million in increased baseline Mayoral funding for additional tree pruning, including park perimeter trees as well as street trees. A \$3 million baseline increase in funding in Fiscal Year 2016 doubled the funding for our Trees & Sidewalk program to \$6 million, allowing us to address twice as many sites. For Fiscal Year 2017, the Mayor also provided an additional \$1 million for tree stump removals, allowing us to address approximately 3,000 additional sites, for a projected total of 9,000 stump removals, nearly half of our current stump backlog.

Through these completed, current, and upcoming initiatives, NYC Parks looks forward to protecting and supporting our urban forest for generations to come for the benefit of all New Yorkers. We appreciate that the Council has taken interest in topics related to city trees, and wanted to offer some feedback on the proposed legislation as currently drafted.

With regards to Introduction 349, NYC Parks recognizes the importance of notifying communities of planned tree removals in their neighborhoods. As the stewards of the city's urban forest, NYC Parks always seeks to minimize the impact of our projects on parks trees. As context, removals are necessary for a variety of reasons: trees that have died, trees that present a public safety concern, invasive species that are removed during forest restoration, and when necessary, trees that are removed due to new park development. Specific to this last scenario, throughout Parks' capital design process, we engage community boards and other public stakeholders regarding the details of pending capital projects. The schematic designs that we present to the Community Board, elected officials, and the Public Design Commission include a tree inventory slide, to indicate trees which will be impacted by a project, some of which may be in good health and others which have been pre-approved by Parks' foresters for removal based on condition. Since this notification already occurs through our standard design process, the legislation as written would be administratively cumbersome. With the enthusiastic support of the Council, the Agency is working hard to streamline its capital process, and to add even more administrative steps would encumber our efforts to deliver park improvements to the public. It is also important to note that in many cases NYC Parks performs tree removals where advance formal notice would be impossible, including emergency tree removals that are necessary to ensure public safety.

Regarding LS. 8737, NYC Parks understands the importance of providing notice regarding parking restrictions in advance of tree removals. As a standard policy, NYC Parks generally conducts tree removals in accordance with alternate-side parking practices, to minimize disruption and take advantage of established parking patterns. When further parking restrictions are needed, our Forestry teams already provide 24 to 48 hours advance notice by posting signage prior to planned street tree removals. A legal mandate of three days' notice presents logistical challenges, due to the variety of site conditions, inclement weather, staffing levels and other variables which could delay or postpone a removal. We believe NYC Parks' existing protocol of parking restriction notification provides New Yorkers with sufficient notice regarding imminent tree

removals. That being said, if specific issues arise in a given district, NYC Parks is always happy to work with Council Members' offices to address any concerns.

As for Introduction 1112, as we noted in reference to the aforementioned bill, NYC Parks engages in active advance communication with Community Boards and other local stakeholders regarding upcoming tree work and we work hard to engage communities in caring for their street trees. In fact, our new Street Tree Map will provide the public with an enormous amount of information about the trees in their neighborhood. Beyond that, we engage community boards directly about upcoming tree work. For example, we provide a list of planned planting locations to every Community Board, in advance of each planting season, in the Fall and Spring. We recognize that in today's world, we all expect more robust information to be available online about City services, and NYC Parks believes that the forthcoming online tree portal could serve as a host for notifications of this nature in the future. But building out the functionality required to accomplish this properly and in a way that will be useful to both the Council and the public will require a significant investment of staff time and financial resources. Monthly reports, as currently proposed in the legislation, would present challenges, as that frequency would be out of sync with NYC Parks tree planning cycles and work planning timelines. Also, similar to the concerns expressed about the previous bill, we would again advise that this advance reporting would only be possible regarding regularly scheduled tree work, as we often need to react to emergency conditions in the interest of public safety.

As we hope today's testimony has demonstrated, Forestry, Horticulture and Natural Resources is committed to protecting, restoring, expanding and managing New York City's natural areas, and the Council's support and leadership is vital to our efforts. Though we may have concerns regarding these specific bills, we appreciate the Council's interest and advocacy regarding these topics, and look forward to continuing to work with you and your colleagues to make New York City's urban forest even greater, for all to enjoy. Thank you for inviting us to testify, we would now be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**TO:** New York City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation  
**FROM:** Aaron Bouska, Vice-President for Government and Community Relations,  
New York Botanical Garden  
**DATE:** October 20, 2016  
**RE:** Testimony on **Intro. No. 349**

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Thank you Chairman Levine and all the members of the Committee for giving me an opportunity to speak about Intro. 349.

My name is Aaron Bouska, I am the Vice President of Government Affairs at New York Botanical Garden, I am here on behalf of New York City's five Botanical Gardens – Brooklyn Botanic Garden, New York Botanical Garden, Queens Botanical Garden, Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Garden and Wave Hill. All five gardens are "living museums" of horticultural excellence and science and cultural education, while serving as urban sanctuaries for our communities. We operate as excellent examples of a public / private partnership with the New York City of Cultural Affairs, and have - in some cases for a century or more - had the stewardship responsibility to keep these treasured places beautiful and sustainable.

While we do not believe it is the intent of this legislation to impact our operations and stewardship of our ever evolving living collections, and because it is not clear in the legislation that botanical gardens and cultural institutions were not the intended actors to provide such advance notice on tree removal, I am here to request a specific exemption to this legislation for the Botanical Gardens and possibly, pending your review, for all cultural institutions as defined by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Our experts in tree care are the most knowledgeable in a highly-specialized field, and have the expertise necessary to make decisions regarding the care of our natural collections.

Tree stewardship and care is critical to our missions and we applaud the Councils attention to the matter, and I think you could imagine many scenarios where this notification is just not possible for institutions like ours: Storm damage from the everyday to the catastrophic, removal of trees with diseases, or the removal of invasive species that have been introduced to our collections.

We respectfully request that we be able to continue our world class stewardship and curatorial excellence of our properties, which range from 5 acres to over 250 acres, without the restrictions that would be imposed by the proposed legislation.

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/20/16

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: First Deputy Commissioner Liam Kavanagh

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: The Arsenal 830 Fifth Avenue

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1112 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
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Date: 10/20/16

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Name: Jennifer Greenfeld

Address: 1234 5th Avenue NY

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Appearance Card



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in favor,  in opposition

w/request for changes Date: Oct 20, 2016

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aaron Bouska

Address: 2900 Southern Blvd. Bronx, NY

I represent: New York Botanical Garden

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 10/20/16

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Name: Artistic Design Center

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