



June 18, 2024

Committee on Parks & Recreation

Oversight: The State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture & Int. 642

Introduction: Karina Smith, Assistant Commissioner for Community Outreach & Partnership Development, NYC Parks

Good morning, Chair Krishnan & Parks Committee Members, my name is Karina Smith, and I serve as Assistant Commissioner for Community Outreach & Partnership

Development for NYC Parks. Our division oversees many of the teams within our

agency that specifically focus on external engagement and interaction with New Yorkers, and all with the shared goal of improving and sustaining our park system. For example, our division is overseeing the agency's "Let's Green NYC" initiative, which encourages New Yorkers to get out in their green spaces and help beautify them through volunteer service projects. Last month, we were thrilled to announce that we officially surpassed our previous record, with over 500,000 people participating as volunteers since the initiative began in 2023. Joining me on today's panel are representatives from two of Community Outreach & Partnership Development's teams: Matt Drury, our Chief of Citywide Legislative Affairs, and Carlos Martinez, our Chief of NYC Parks GreenThumb, and we're pleased to be here to testify at today's hearing.

When GreenThumb was created in 1978, at a time when New York City was in the midst of significant financial crisis and social upheaval, it was able to assist neighborhoods in revitalizing local spaces and creating new and important community resources. Today, after 45 years since its inception, GreenThumb has become the largest urban community gardening program in the nation. With more than 550 community gardens across the five boroughs, an ever-growing network of more than

20,000 volunteer gardeners in its membership, and its own operations and administrative teams, GreenThumb functions as a mini-park system inside of NYC Parks, providing vital green oases to relax, connect with nature, and create social connections. Its original mission continues today by providing free programming and material support for its 550+ community gardens in this city, including educational programs and workshops that cover topics on urban agriculture as well as group development. Community gardens are stewarded by dedicated volunteers - many of whom are longstanding members of their garden and community - demonstrating the strength of community bonds and what can be achieved when local government works in close partnership with New Yorkers. To help provide more detailed background information about our GreenThumb program and the various efforts we undertake alongside our community garden partner groups to help maximize the potential of these special gardens throughout the city, I'll now introduce the Chief of NYC Parks GreenThumb, Carlos Martinez.

Testimony by: Carlos Martinez, Chief, NYC Parks GreenThumb

Good afternoon, Chair Krishnan & Parks Committee Members. Thank you, Assistant Commissioner Smith, for your remarks. I am Carlos Martinez, and I serve as Chief of GreenThumb at NYC Parks. We are very pleased to be here today to discuss GreenThumb community gardens, as well as the efforts we have undertaken at GreenThumb to support community gardening and urban agriculture in New York City. Given that several new members have joined both the Council and the Parks Committee in the last few years, please allow me to quickly provide more information about our community gardening model and our support of urban agriculture initiatives.

As Assistant Commissioner Smith mentioned, GreenThumb is the community gardening program of NYC Parks, with a mission of supporting land stewards who care for community gardens and urban farms across the five boroughs while preserving 100 acres of combined open space. GreenThumb was founded in 1978 to support the community gardening movement that had arisen during a time of disinvestment and abandonment of public and private property. Today, we sustain a growing network of over 550 community gardens and tens of thousands of volunteer community gardeners throughout all five boroughs. GreenThumb assists neighborhood volunteers by facilitating free access to public land and providing materials, technical assistance, operational support, public programming, and community engagement. We also serve thousands of New Yorkers who are interested in community-led environmental stewardship through our public programming, as well as hundreds of thousands of annual visitors to GreenThumb gardens who enjoy these cherished public open spaces.

GreenThumb community gardens are unique public spaces that are stewarded by volunteer New Yorkers, which help catalyze sustainable, resilient, healthy, and equitable communities across our city. Gardens thrive through a long-standing partnership between New York City government, community gardeners, and countless partners who collectively care for these spaces in a shared spirit of service.

GreenThumb community gardens reflect the history and diversity of New York City's neighborhoods and serve as platforms for neighborhood beautification, social cohesion, teaching and learning, cultural and artistic expression, food production, health and wellness, environmental justice, sustainability, resilience, and more. Reflecting the unique personalities and needs of our city's neighborhoods, GreenThumb gardens

range widely in size and nature, and host a variety of activities, from botanical horticulture and food gardening to passive recreation, special performances and programming, providing opportunities for all New Yorkers to participate and collectively engage with their fellow neighbors. It is important to note that each garden group determines the uses of these places. Our core philosophy is that the local community volunteers that make up the garden groups best understand the needs and hopes of their community. Within this context, we best add value by helping these groups realize their unique vision for each garden. That means that whether gardeners plant ornamental gardens, food gardens, or both, we support them in that undertaking.

Thanks to increased support from City government in recent years, including City Council discretionary capital and expense allocations such as the Parks Equity Initiative and A Greener NYC funding, GreenThumb has experienced tremendous growth and an expanded ability to support gardens in addressing decades-long disinvestment.

Specifically, this has allowed us to provide new and higher quality materials, to increase the number of annual workshops, to develop new specialized trainings for gardeners, and to work with emerging garden groups to initiate over 25 new community gardens since 2016. In addition, GreenThumb is rebuilding, expanding, and sustaining 50 gardens in 50 public housing developments through an innovative partnership with the New York City Housing Authority.

With the additional funding and seasonal staff provided by Council discretionary funding since Fiscal Year 2020, we have been able to make unprecedented levels of investment in gardens and expand the ways we serve local gardeners. This includes addressing overdue infrastructure improvements, including the installation of new fencing,

sidewalks, accessible pathways and garden structures, new workshops and specialized trainings for gardeners, and expanded provision of material and plant supplies, as well as expanded operational support through the addition of new seasonal staff.

NYC Parks GreenThumb has supported urban agriculture since its founding, providing tools, equipment, training and materials that support food production in gardens. Food production has been deeply rooted in community gardening since gardens began sprouting across the city, and this has been a growing trend in recent years.

GreenThumb has adjusted its programming and support accordingly, to remain responsive to the needs of our network. We have developed new workshops and trainings on growing food, permitted garden groups to sell their own produce to support on-site efforts, and formed new partnerships to provide additional supplementary support for food producing gardens. Today, more than 80% of gardens on NYC Parks property grow food in some way, and we estimate that a significant amount of food is grown in community gardens each season, typically for household consumption or local distribution. Some gardens are able to distribute food to their community to supplement healthy food access through farm stands, community supported agriculture and food box programs in partnership with regional farms.

In 2022, GreenThumb secured more than \$46 million in federal funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Plan, to provide critical on-site water supply infrastructure that will ease access for irrigation and maintenance to over 260 food producing community gardens under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks. This represents the largest capital investment in the history of the GreenThumb program, which will allow thousands of volunteer land stewards

involved in urban agriculture across the city to grow more healthy and fresh food while providing vibrant green spaces for all New Yorkers.

In closing, we thank the City Council for the opportunity to testify at this hearing, to shine a spotlight on the tireless work of the volunteers that steward community gardens across New York City and to showcase the work that we have been doing to support them. You will now be hearing from our colleagues at the New York City Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture, after which we'll be happy to answer any questions that you may have. I will now introduce Qiana Mickie, the first-ever Executive Director of the Office of Urban Agriculture.



June 18, 2024

Committee on Parks & Recreation

Oversight: The State of Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture

Good morning, Chair Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation. My name is Qiana Mickie and I am the Executive Director of the NYC Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture. I am joined here today by Deputy Director, Evan Burr. We are very happy to be here to testify at this hearing on the important topics of community gardens and support for urban agriculture. Established by Local Law 123 of 2021, the Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture – or 'MOUA,' as we like to refer to it – it is a newer office and we are tasked with leading New York City's efforts to increase access to and production of fresh, healthy, locally grown food, while strengthening climate resiliency, and spurring economic activity across our city. Through research, policy development, advocacy, and community outreach, MOUA aims to address the climate, health, and food disparities in our natural and built environments. We collaborate with other city agencies to advance agriculture and equity on several fronts, including community gardens and urban farms, regional food systems, workforce development, environmental justice, and building a green, resilient economy.

New York City has a long and rich history of urban agriculture and land stewardship dating back to the Lenape, the indigenous people of the land that now comprises the five boroughs. Many of the active community gardens across the city arose out of a grassroots movement in which New Yorkers stepped up to reclaim trash-strewn, vacant lots and transformed them into green spaces for public use and benefit. The majority of these gardens are within the current NYC Parks GreenThumb network.

New York City is now home to a breadth of urban agriculture models, such as soil-based community gardens, urban farms, rooftop gardens as well as non-soil, controlled environment models like aquaponics and hydroponics. Some of these models are built to teach through growing, others have a focus on food production. Some are places of respite and wellness - and quite a few strive to do all these activities and more. All of these models and sites are critical elements in our city landscape.



Infrastructure that extends the season of growing such as greenhouses or multipurpose buildings to provide educational centers and hubs of learning are also a part of urban agriculture in New York City. Some great examples that I would like to share are exciting new agricultural educational sites taking shape now in our city including the Farms at NYCHA expansion, the coming greenhouse facility soon to begin construction at NYCHA Marlboro Houses, and the District 22 Learning Farm in Bergen Beach, Brooklyn, now finishing construction and due to open in October of this year.

Yet, despite this good news, there are many barriers that stakeholders face, and the office strives to address, in our efforts to expand urban agriculture in NYC. Constraints on scaled food production and revenue generation, limited access to land to steward beyond a volunteer capacity, and lack of urban agriculture infrastructure in all boroughs are all formidable hurdles to urban agriculture stakeholders. In our quest to address these barriers, MOUA has developed initiatives and achieved success in our first year-and-a-half of operation.

We created the Reimagining Farm to School in NYC initiative in collaboration with NYC Public Schools. We are leveraging New York State and USDA Farm to School grant funding to develop and integrate agricultural education in the classroom and on urban and rural farms for approximately 350 NYC public school students across the five boroughs. The students learn about the important life cycle of food, and what culturally relevant crops are grown throughout the city, directly from urban farmers. The pilot also includes the city's first farmer/producer training which kicks off this Fall to support more small-mid scale farm businesses primed to apply for school food procurement contracts, funding to refurbish or restore 14 school gardens, as well as on-site cooking demos at urban farms.

MOUA's efforts to foster equitable economic development opportunities in the food and agriculture sector also extend to other initiatives. For over a year, we have collaborated with NYC Small Business Services to provide free M/WBE certification workshops to ensure eligible small food, farm, and other relevant businesses are getting into the pipeline to earn their M/WBE certifications. New York City is a city of small businesses.



Improving the pathways to city-based procurement as well as building a stronger bridge to critical resources for food, climate, and other related agriculture-based businesses is work that our office has undertaken to help meet the city's M/WBE goals and support emerging businesses.

Another innovative approach that MOUA has taken to address the intersecting needs of food production and climate resiliency is the development of a rooftop urban agrivoltaics pilot. Agrivoltaics is the co-location of solar energy and agriculture in a model. We believe a pilot that focuses on the co-location of both solar and food production could be one of the next advancements needed on NYC rooftops. We are also researching and exploring ways to develop new license agreements for underutilized city-owned land, as we recognize that this is a barrier to be addressed that members on the council as well as urban farmers have identified. These new agreements would be focused on enabling revenue generating urban agriculture activity such as scaled food production or climate resiliency and would allow for profit generation in the selling of urban agriculture products and services. Our office has also been involved in policy advocacy and legislation including the Community Gardens Water Bill Exemption, Green Roof Tax Abatement, our Growing Opportunities in Innovative Farming Act introduced in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate, and informing ongoing discussions around Farm Bill policy. We have also partnered with NYC Department of City Planning over the last year on info sessions, briefings, and advocacy for the City of Yes for Economic Opportunity, as these zoning changes will allow a greater breadth of urban agriculture business development, creating exciting new economic opportunities for the food and agriculture sector in New York City. Great news that this passed in the City Council two weeks ago. We are very much looking forward to partnering with you in the future on urban agriculture policy and projects in your districts and I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Thank you.



JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON PARKS & RECREATION
JUNE 18, 2024**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Shekar Krishnan and the members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for holding this hearing.

Community gardens have become an essential part of life for many New Yorkers. Not only does it provide green spaces for relaxation and recreation, but it plays a vital role in the education of our youth, as well as provides relief to people in food deserts. Many gardens are used by their communities for multiple purposes, including education and the arts. Our community gardens serve as a testament to our past: when this city was at its lowest, New Yorkers came together to stake a claim in their communities and make them a better place by removing the rubble and garbage in empty or abandoned lots and converting it into green spaces. We must continue to provide resources to our community gardens and support organizations that work with community gardens to provide beneficial programs to area residents.

Organizations like Green Guerillas and its Youth Empowerment Pipeline program, which teaches youth urban farming, community gardening, and the social permanency of food justice—or its Summer Youth Tiller program, which offers youth the chance to assist local community gardeners—engage in team-building activities and attend trips and workshops.¹ GrowNYC has a Zero Waste Schools initiative where they work with all public schools enrolled in DSNY's School Curbside Composting Program, which benefits the environment, helps to mitigate rodent and pest issues, and offers educational and leadership opportunities for students.² Share Shed NYC, which has 20,000 volunteer growers serving 550 community gardens provides seed banks, tool libraries, and fosters food equity all over the city.³ Community gardens provide an opportunity for people to have a stake in their communities they otherwise would never have. We are also encouraged by Green Thumb's work with NYCHA to provide community gardens on NYCHA facilities.

In 1995, most community gardens were transferred to the Parks Department. However, they remain at risk for development, and while some believe these gardens should be sacrificed to

¹ <https://www.greenguerrillas.org/youth-empowerment-pipeline>

² <https://www.grownyc.org/education>

³ <https://www.shareshednyc.com/>



JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS

build apartment buildings to help alleviate the city’s housing crisis, community gardens are essential to their communities and provide much-needed green spaces in many neighborhoods. We must find solutions for addressing the housing crisis while maintaining our community gardens. While fighting to keep the gardens we have, we also ask The Department of Urban Agriculture to explore potential locations suitable for additional community gardens.

As a city we must do all we can to work with existing organizations to provide resources to existing community gardens and ensure that they continue to provide important benefits to our youth and our communities at large. We should strongly consider the request laid out in the 2020 petition by Earthjustice and NYC Community Garden Coalition which calls on the city to recategorize all NYC community gardens as Critical Environmental Areas under state law that would provide a layer of protection from development by requiring a full environmental review of any potential adverse effects to the surrounding community.⁴

⁴ <https://earthjustice.org/feature/petition-protect-new-york-city-community-gardens>



New York City Council
Committee on Parks and Recreation, Hon. Shekar Krishnan, Chair
Oversight Hearing in regards to GreenThumb on June 18, 2024
Testimony Submitted by
Raymond Figueroa, Jr., President, NYC Community Garden Coalition

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Thank you, Chair Krishnan, and distinguished members of the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation, for convening this oversight hearing on the GreenThumb program in regards to community gardens. And thank you for allowing me this opportunity to submit testimony accordingly, wherein I am testifying in support of budget restorations for GreenThumb.

My name is Raymond Figueroa, Jr. I am president of the New York City Community Garden Coalition, a membership organization engaged primarily in policy analysis and advocacy at the legal as well as policy-making levels as it relates to community gardens. Through the coalition, I have initiated and coordinated a number of policy initiatives, several of which include:

1. the Community Gardens as *Micro Food Hubs* initiative with the CUNY Graduate Center, Bronx-based community gardeners, and the New York City Department of Health;
2. the Community Gardens as *Critical Environmental Areas* regulatory designation initiative with Pratt Institute, community gardeners from around the city, the environmental law firm, Earthjustice, and the New York State Legislature;
3. with the New York City Council's report, "*Food-Works: A Vision to Improve New York City's Food System – Accomplishments and New Ideas*"; and
4. with the *Mayor's Urban Agriculture Task Force* under the Bloomberg administration as a member of that task force.

Additionally, I am member of the Sustainable Environmental Systems faculty at the Pratt Institute – Graduate Center for Planning and Environment. And, finally, and most importantly, I am a community farmer with the Brook Park Community Garden in the South Bronx where I co-founded and have been coordinating community-based Alternatives-to-Incarceration initiatives for gang-affiliated youth through their engagement with our Youth Farm and have – in the process – cultivated relationships of trust with gang leaders that have allowed us to develop the capacity for gang mediation through our community garden – and, as a result, we have successfully kept youth from killing or being killed.

New York City Community Garden Coalition

232 East 11th Street • New York NY 10003 • (347) 699-6099 • www.nyccgc.org

New York City Community Garden Coalition is a non-profit organization incorporated in 1998. Our mission is to promote the preservation, creation, and empowerment of community gardens through education, advocacy, and grassroots organizing.

Ostensibly, this oversight hearing is about GreenThumb and the funding cuts to this program that provides support to community gardens. Yet, the ramifications of these funding cuts for the communities in which community gardens are located run deep. That is because, community gardens are not so much gardens in communities as much as they are *communities in gardens*.

Who, then, are these communities that are facing the government's funding cuts? They are, for the most part, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities. They are facing the government's cuts while in the throes of survival and subsisting on the generational poverty that is the legacy of government's racially animated institutionalization of de jure structural violence intended for the benefit of white people at their expense. So, the proposed funding cuts come on top of this massive social injustice, which includes:

1. the economic disinvestment and concomitant neighborhood deterioration of Redlining; and
2. the implementation of **quote**: "*federal and state labor market policies, [that] with undisguised racial intent (emphasis), depressed [BIPOC] wages . . . [and that o]nce government implemented these policies, economic differences became self-perpetuating (emphasis)*" . . . **unquote** – from the book by the legal scholar, Richard Rothstein. 2017. THE COLOR OF LAW: A FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF HOW OUR GOVERNMENT SEGREGATED AMERICA. W. W. Norton & Company. New York.

In these same places of racialized economic discrimination and dislocation, community gardens are to be found where entire communities have been further devastated – bulldozed and burned down – forcibly displacing and destabilizing BIPOC residents *against their will* as a result of the destructive policies of:

1. Urban Renewal and
2. Planned Shrinkage.

It is significant to note that the preeminent scholars of Planned Shrinkage, Wallace and Wallace (2018), uncovered how New York City's Planned Shrinkage policy was utilized as a tactic promoting the fires in order to so displace and destabilized communities as to keep the impacted residents from voting.

Yet, in these same places – of structural economic and physical violence – referred to respectively by experts in the field as: "Negro removal" (Marc A. Weiss, 1988); "ethnic cleansing" (Wallace and Wallace, 2018); and "city-engineered holocaust" (Loren Miller, Jr., 1968) – the impacted community residents in these same places have risen-up. Much like the proverbial Phoenix rising, they have risen from the ashes of urban devastation. With very little resources, these residents in the fullness of their humanity have begun resurrecting their communities from the rubble of destruction and begun the process of repairing and reclaiming their communities after the City triaged and ultimately abandoned them. Through their collective grassroots efforts – organizing community gardens – these impacted community residents have quietly resisted being dictated-to by policies of displacement, poverty, and pollution. And through their community gardens, they have – and continue to this day – to *re-define* and to

determine for themselves that their destiny is one that allows them to fulfill their aspirations and priorities for their families and communities in a manner that honors their sense of human dignity.

Community gardens are very much like life-rafts that one sees in the wake of a shipwreck. Community gardens can be found in places like the South Bronx, Brownsville, Bedford Stuyvesant, El Barrio, Central Harlem, East New York, the Lower East Side, etc., where communities have been wrecked by government policies targeting and forcibly displacing and destabilizing primarily BIPOC communities. And like the life-rafts where people are paddling in the wake of a shipwreck, community gardens are the “life-rafts” cobbled together by the locally impacted residents where people are also “paddling” – not with oars – but they are working with lumber, shovels, pitchforks, soil, and plants. To be sure, the people in the life-rafts would not be able to get away from the disaster without the oars to paddle with. Likewise, community gardeners can’t cultivate, grow and harvest fruits and vegetables – much less help themselves, their families and their communities – without the proper equipment and supplies.

Being historically wrecked by the aforementioned government policies and their legacy of generational joblessness and poverty – has left many communities to deal with the sinking shipwreck that includes severe rent-burden and the ongoing eviction crisis. As a result, many of the residents in these communities are making hard choices – they are going without food to eat – just to save money to pay for the rent.

This was all exposed and exacerbated by the onset of the pandemic.

In response, community gardens in the Bronx, for example, organized a community-based network of regional ***Bronx Community Farm Hubs*** – i.e., North Bronx, South Bronx, East and West Bronx – respectively aggregating their community gardens’ harvests and distributing in the first year 11,000 lbs. of fresh greens, herbs, peppers, tomatoes, beans, and so much more to local organizations such as Part Of The Solution, “pay what you can” harvest boxes, mutual aid / public “friendly fridges,” schools, hospitals, NYCHA senior housing, community-run farmers markets, soup kitchens, and food pantries.

These Bronx-based community gardeners are continuing to help stem the tide of hunger and food insecurity through their ***Bronx Community Farm Hubs*** by growing food for themselves and their neighbors and in the process helping residents to save money for their rent and avoid eviction.

With the City cutting what meager support community gardens get from GreenThumb, it would be like those in the life-rafts losing their oars. It would disrupt their movement to get away from the sinking shipwreck and to provide for much-needed urban ***community*** agriculture.

In conclusion: A deep systemic historical analysis of the advent and presence of community gardens logically calls for government accountability to BIPOC communities and justice for their residents. It should not be lost on anyone that the current conditions of communities – in which community gardens are located – are the result of racist

government policies – intended to benefit white people at the expense of BIPOC communities – policies that have been promulgated across decades at the City, State, and Federal levels.

While budget deliberations are cyclical in their nature, the issue of government accountability to BIPOC communities is structurally perennial. And, the government must be held accountable to the communities that have been so adversely impacted by its policies.

Thus, from this perspective, incorporating community gardens into a comprehensive policy initiative for community reparations would be the ethically responsible thing to do.

Short of that, in terms of the current cyclical budget deliberations, the City can still – as a matter of government accountability and social justice – take responsibility and engage in good faith efforts by – at the very least – increasing – not cutting – the budget for GreenThumb – in the name of *Justice* for historically marginalized BIPOC communities. Remember: community gardens are not so much gardens in communities as much as they are *communities in gardens*. The government cannot and should not cut funding to communities that have been devastated and – as the pandemic revealed – made precariously vulnerable to destabilization as a result of the legacy of its policies. Communities through their community gardens are like those in the life-rafts who are heroically struggling against massive adversities. They should be helped and certainly not hindered by funding cuts by the same government that induced those adversities.

Final point of information: Community gardeners are very civically engaged. And, community gardeners do vote!

Thank you, again.

Respectfully Submitted



Raymond Figueroa, Jr.
President
New York City Community Garden Coalition

Member
Sustainable Environmental Systems Faculty
Graduate Center for Planning and the Environment
Pratt Institute – School of Architecture

Co-Founder and Coordinator
The Youth Farm – Community-based Alternatives-to-Incarceration Initiatives
Brook Park Community Garden



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New York Restoration Project

Testimony before New York City Council, Committee on Parks and Recreation

Oversight- Community Gardens and Support for Urban Agriculture
06/10/2024

Good afternoon. My name is Lynn Bodnar Kelly, and I am the Executive Director of New York Restoration Project (NYRP). Thank you, Chair Krishnan for convening this hearing on urban agriculture, a topic which is very near and dear to our organization.

NYRP's Urban Agriculture program was founded in response to the pandemic in 2021. NYRP transitioned many of its gardens into urban agricultural oases for the surrounding neighborhoods. NYRP's Urban Agriculture program has since doubled its capacity to offer over 165 workshops, skill shares, and technical consultations in 2023 alone. The team's two full-time and two seasonal staff serve NYRP's 52 portfolio gardens citywide and our Gardens for the City partners.

NYRP's implementation of our Urban Agriculture program, during the COVID-19 pandemic, was a strategic decision to utilize our spaces to address the growing problem of food insecurity in low-income communities. The program provides urban gardeners with agricultural education and material resources to successfully feed themselves, their families, and their neighbors.

As the average temperature rises and the growing season in NYC gets longer, there are opportunities to grow new crops that were not possible (or as common) to grow in this region even just 10 years ago. NYRP Urban Ag team helps growers experiment with new tropical crops regularly. Ginger and turmeric are the two we work with most as they are the most popular with our growers.

According to The Food Bank of New York City, NYC residents make up half of all food insecure people living in New York State and the city's food insecurity rate is 12% higher than the national rate. Access to fresh and healthy food is more important now than ever and we



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need to ensure that gardeners have the tools and support they need to continue to feed some of our most vulnerable communities.

New York City has the opportunity to support the work of the urban agricultural community by committing 1% of the City's budget to the Parks Department. Programs that allow NYC residents to grow their own food need to be funded and expanded to meet the growing demand in our city, especially as the pandemic has shed light on the growing food insecurity in disadvantaged communities.

In food deserts where access to affordable fresh and healthy food is scarce, community gardens serve as a lifeline to New Yorkers. New York City must recognize the importance of this work as they consider the upcoming budget by supporting and funding programs that expand urban agriculture. As New York City continues to navigate from uncertain times, community gardens and urban agriculture will be critical, ensuring communities are safer, healthier, and happier.

Thank you.



Testimony of

Chrissy Remein, Policy and Planning Manager, before the

New York City Council Committee on Committee on Parks and Recreation

On

Community Gardens and Support for Urban Agriculture

Thursday, June 18, 2024

Good Afternoon. We thank the Committee on Parks and Recreation for your stewardship of New York City's community gardens and urban agriculture and for offering us the opportunity to testify today.

Riverkeeper is a nearly 60-year-old non-profit member-supported organization devoted to the protection and restoration of the Hudson River from source to sea and the safeguarding of drinking water supplies through advocacy rooted in community partnerships, science and law. As part of our mission, we sample water quality throughout New York City, advocate for climate adaptive stormwater management, and whenever possible, work with our partners and city agencies to develop solutions oriented stormwater management policy. To that end, Riverkeeper had developed critical green infrastructure recommendations in our 2022 report, Building an Equitably Green New York City. We encourage the council to review our recommendations, there are many opportunities for improved green infrastructure implementation.

Among many other important benefits, community gardens are critical green infrastructure and open space that passively manage stormwater and intentionally collect and manage stormwater through cisterns and rain barrels. We support community gardens for the stormwater management that they contribute, and more, we support community gardens as a space and place to connect communities to green space, as centers that foster community cohesion, improve air quality, and mitigate the urban heat island impact.

New York City community gardens have a long history of grassroots development and their founders are also some of the city's green infrastructure advocates. Though our priorities for green infrastructure are usually centered on stormwater management and water quality, adapting

our city to climate change across the city requires all hands on deck and collaboration across sectors.

We support community garden's improved access to water and funding across the city.



Contact: Clare Miflin
admin@centerforzerowastedesign.org
718 306 9525

I am Clare Miflin, Executive Director of the Center for Zero Waste Design, a member of the Save our Compost Coalition and supporter of Forest for All, NYC. We work to design systems into the city for circularity, especially getting food and yard waste back into soils. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

We agree with Councilmember Krishnan's statements about community gardens and the need to support them. Community gardens bring so many volunteers together to care for each other, their own health – growing vegetables and community – and provide access to nature for neighbors. They are so important to so many New Yorkers, and as the Councilmember said, at a federal level the importance and benefits of them, and community composting, is being recognized. Whereas in NYC community gardens are being hit twice by current budget – funding for Green thumb and also for community composters, who support gardeners by providing compost and wood chips and taking away excess food scraps and education and training. Community composting came out of the need for community gardens for good soil, they work hand in hand.

NYC's own 2021 Food Forward plan has an initiative to “Bolster community-owned waste management initiatives” saying that the city will identify and address barriers to community composting. But they are doing the exact opposite – de-funding and not renewing leases for established well-loved community compost sites.

It's also the law that Parks yard waste must be separated and composted, by the NYC Administrative Code, since 1989, and can be seen in section 16-308 section c:

“Within eighteen months of the effective date of this chapter, the department of parks and recreation or any other city agency that generates a substantial amount of yard waste shall provide for the source separation, collection and composting of yard waste generated by the department of parks and recreation, any other city agency that generates a substantial amount of yard waste, or any person under contract with the department of parks and recreation or any other city agency.”

Yet, very little Park's yard waste is composted. Until the recent defunding of NYC Compost Project there was an exception in Western Queens where Parks brought compost to Big Reuse's Queensbridge site, alongside food scraps, which Big Reuse made into compost, and gave back to Parks and community gardens and applied to street trees. We need to scale these types of initiatives up citywide, to engage communities, enhance climate resilience and grow healthy vegetables and trees. I have looked at how community composting in Parks could take place citywide, to regenerate the soils of parks and street trees, as part of our Put Waste to Work campaign, see [post](#).

DSNY Commissioner Tisch stated at a recent hearing that DSNY can't even give all the compost they make away. I'd say there are 2 reasons for this. Firstly the city's soils are degraded because there is not enough compost being used, because the benefits are not valued. Secondly she is talking about municipal compost, which is mostly made from yard waste, so not as nutritious for gardens, and also accepts plastic bags which have to be screened out, and that is impossible to do fully. Community composters make much better quality compost, they don't allow plastic bags and they oversee and educate the people dropping off waste, so there are no bits of plastic within their compost. They take more food scraps so the compost is higher in nitrogen and other nutrients which are essential for growing healthy vegetables, and better for turf areas and planting beds.



Contact: Clare Miflin
admin@centerforzerowastedesign.org
718 306 9525

Moving to the urban forest plan – it's not just planting trees, we need to keep trees healthy. In a time of climate chaos it can be a question of survival. I am not sure if any of you have been upstate to Harriman or Minnewaska State Parks recently – if you did you would have noticed that most trees have no leaves – they have all been decimated by an outbreak of [spongy moth caterpillars](#). If these trees are healthy, and if they get enough moisture later in the year, they will grow more leaves. But if they suffer drought and are overly stressed they won't re-leaf and risk dying. This could happen in the city too. Compost can store around 5 times its weight in stormwater, helping keep trees hydrated and provide cooling and clean air. We need healthy hydrated trees for the increasingly extreme heat NYC is getting.

It is a fundamental question of how we want kind of a city we want NYC to be. Do we want to support community gardens and composters, which can provide so many volunteers to support street trees and parks and also bring thousands of inspirational green jobs to maintain green infrastructure? Do we want to educate and engage and inspire New Yorkers to separate their food scraps and put them to good use? Do we want a green, cool, engaged and resilient city that uplifts community initiatives? Or do we want a city where nobody knows where their food comes from, where we rely solely on centralized grey infrastructure, and just give out fines if New Yorkers do the wrong thing?

For more information about why we need volunteers and community engagement to maintain green infrastructure, see my opinion article written with Samantha MacBride, for more: [Don't Kill Community Composting in NYC](#)

Thank you for the council's work in supporting community composting and gardens, and for holding this hearing. I am very happy to discuss or expand on any of these ideas further,

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clare Miflin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Clare Miflin
Executive Director, Center for Zero Waste Design



**Citizens' Committee
for Children** of NEW YORK

**Testimony of Jenny Veloz, Policy and Advocacy Associate
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Submitted to the New York City Council
Oversight Hearing on Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture
June 18th, 2024**

Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through research and advocacy. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

We would like to thank Chair Krishnan and all the members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for holding today's oversight hearing on community gardens and urban agriculture.

The pandemic elevated the importance of city parks, particularly as families sought safe and public opportunities to engage children.¹ Parks provide a vital service for families and children, helping promote play, exercise, and positive mental health. Children explore and learn in playgrounds and natural areas. In a city where few residents have access to a backyard, parks are an invaluable resource that foster physical and mental health, provide spaces for social interaction, and mitigate climate crisis.

The budget cuts to NYC Parks this year and the proposed budget for next fiscal year jeopardize the very heart of our communities. The NYC Parks budget has been cut by 5%, or \$25 million, for this fiscal year. The FY25 Preliminary Budget is nearly \$55 million less than this fiscal year's budget. Years of underfunding have presented challenges for NYC Parks employees in keeping parks clean, safe and accessible. The hiring freeze and reduced budget will result in nearly 1,000 fewer parks works, making it impossible for the agency to ensure parks are safe, clean, green, and resilient across the city. NYC Parks has fewer workers than it did before the pandemic despite increased demand and clear need for these spaces.

These cuts will make it even more difficult for the already understaffed, under-resourced Parks Department to carry out the basic work needed to ensure parks are equitable and accessible for all New Yorkers. **CCC joins the Play Fair Coalition in calling on the City to fulfill the Mayor's commitment to increase the New York City Parks budget by 1%**

Increasing the Parks budget by 1% would ensure that parks are clean throughout the year, safer for children and families to enjoy, and provide relief from heat due to a protected urban forest.² Increased funding will also allow the NYC Parks to maintain programs and initiatives, like GreenThumb, that allow youth to learn about urban agriculture and community gardening their neighborhoods.

¹ New Yorkers for Parks. "1% for Parks Impact Report." March 2023. <https://www.ny4p.org/client-uploads/pdf/NY4P-1-Percent-for-Parks-Impact-Report.pdf>

² New Yorkers for Parks. "1% for Parks Impact Report." March 2023. <https://www.ny4p.org/client-uploads/pdf/NY4P-1-Percent-for-Parks-Impact-Report.pdf>



**Citizens' Committee
for Children** of NEW YORK

There is a critical lack of City investment through grant funding or programming to effectively support urban agriculture and gardens. In particular, there is a lack of resources to ensure easy and equitable access to land, healthy soil, and clean water sources. Growing spaces such as gardens, community land trusts, and urban farms are critical green spaces that provide benefits including increased access to and production of locally grown fresh food; minimizing contributions to the climate crisis and lessening air pollution; increased community education and well-being; mitigating stormwater run-off; and driving local economic activity. Therefore, it is disappointing that GreenThumb, the one City department that does focus on providing resources to community gardens, is consistently underfunded.

As the largest urban gardening program in the country, GreenThumb provides environmental, social and economic benefits and allows individuals to take pride in their community gardens. GreenThumb also provides technical assistance, supports and resources to ensure long-term success. Participants in the program gain skills like composting, environmental stewardship, and urban agriculture. Youth get a sense of pride and ownership in their gardens, while making a positive, healthy impact on their neighborhoods and communities.

Given the many positive impacts of the program, CCC joins the NYC Food Policy Alliance in calling for an investment of \$2.6 million towards GreenThumb in the FY25 City Budget to support the hiring of additional Community Engagement Coordinators and seasonal staff members and to increase the distribution of resources, including the delivery of compost, topsoil, and lumber, for community gardeners. Community gardens serve as vital green spaces and address critical challenges such as food security, environmental sustainability, and community well-being.

New York City has a responsibility to make sure that our parks are safe, clean and equitable for all New Yorkers, as well as ensuring funding for programs that offer youth a place to learn the positive health and social impacts of urban agriculture and community gardens.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



**Testimony of Jake Patel, Special Assistant
New York League of Conservation Voters
City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
June 18, 2024**

Good afternoon, my name is Jake Patel and I'm Special Assistant at the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). NYLCV is a statewide environmental advocacy organization representing over 30,000 members in New York City. Thank you, Chair Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to testify today.

NYLCV supports the preservation and expansion of both community gardens and urban agriculture in New York City. As outlined in NYLCV's [2024 NYC Policy Agenda](#), one way to improve the quality of life for New Yorkers is to invest in our parks, open spaces, and sustainable food systems, especially in park-starved areas and food deserts. New York City's community gardens are an integral part of the City's valuable green spaces and are essential to creating more sustainable agricultural systems and reducing environmental hazards. Urban agriculture in community gardens and urban farms supports education, community building, nutrition, and climate mitigation. Many of them operate community composting, run educational programs, and provide dense urban neighborhoods with open green space.

Moreover, community gardens and urban agriculture are not mere patches of green in our urban landscape; they are pivotal elements in our city's fight against climate change and our efforts to build a sustainable future. Climate resilience is a critical aspect of urban agriculture. As our city faces increasing threats from climate change, such as extreme weather events and rising temperatures, community gardens and urban farms can help mitigate these impacts. They absorb rainwater, reducing the burden on our stormwater systems and decreasing the risk of flooding. The presence of green spaces also cools the surrounding areas, helping to counteract the urban heat island effect that disproportionately affects low-income and communities of color.

Historically marginalized communities have borne the brunt of environmental degradation and have had limited access to healthy, affordable food. Community gardens and urban agriculture are a way to fight the food insecurities that disproportionately plague low income and communities of color. In New York City, [about 1.3 million people will go hungry daily because of food deserts. Across the five boroughs, 10 neighborhoods have more than 25 bodegas to every supermarket, and almost 20 neighborhoods have upwards of 15 bodegas to every supermarket.](#) By expanding urban agriculture, we can help address these disparities.

As stated in NYLCV's 2024 Policy Agenda, we encourage the City to ensure every family has access to healthy, local, and affordable produce through the expansion of critical food access

programs such as SNAP, FRESH, GrowNYC Farmstands, and Health Bucks redeemable at farmers markets across the city. We also hope the City expands the number of NYC schools that provide youth education programs on sustainability and healthy eating through workshops and school gardens. NYLCV supports the expansion of both community gardens and urban agriculture as outlined in the city's [Urban Agriculture Report](#). This report included recommendations such as strengthening land security for the city's community gardens and greenspaces, increasing access to and production of healthy foods in historically divested communities, and creating the next generation of climate stewards through the Farm to School in NYC program.

Lastly, as a co-founder of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, it is imperative that the Mayor reverses the proposed FY25 budget cuts to NYC Parks. Parks and green spaces are essential public resources that provide recreational opportunities, enhance mental and physical well-being, and foster community cohesion. Allocating 1% of the City budget to parks ensures they are well-maintained, safe, and accessible to all New Yorkers. Investment in our parks infrastructure is an investment in the health and happiness of all New Yorkers, as well as in the environmental health of our city.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.



New York City Council Committee on Parks
Tuesday, June 18, 2024
Committee on Parks – Oversight on Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture
Deborah Maher, Randall's Island Park Alliance

Good afternoon, my name is Deborah Maher, and I represent Randall's Island Park Alliance (RIPA). We are a member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, which includes over 400 organizations from across the five boroughs, many of whom will testify today. We thank the City Council Finance Committee for holding this hearing.

Parks such as Randall's Island Park play a crucial role in fostering sustainable communities and enhancing urban life. These green spaces provide individuals with access to open green spaces, fresh, locally grown produce, and serve as educational hubs where individuals, especially children, can learn about agriculture, preservation of the environment, and healthy nutrition habits.

New Yorkers deserve a fully funded, safe, clean, green and resilient parks' system. The budget cuts to NYC Parks this year and the proposed budget for next fiscal year jeopardize the very heart of our communities. These cuts will make it even more difficult for the already understaffed, under-resourced NYC Parks Department to carry out the basic work needed to ensure parks are equitable and accessible for all New Yorkers.

These cuts will hinder the agency's ability to manage its 15 miles of beaches, 51 recreation centers, 65 pools, 9,900 acres of natural areas, 2,300 athletic courts, 800 ballfields, and 1,000 playgrounds. They will inequitably impact the well-being and quality of life of countless individuals and families. Parks are an invaluable resource that foster physical and mental health, provide spaces for social interaction, and mitigate the climate crisis.

To ensure all New Yorkers have access to these vital spaces, NYC Parks Department funding deserves not just restoration, but significant expansion. Parks are critical infrastructure for public health and safety and are drivers of social equity. They should be funded as such.

Thank you,

Deborah Maher
Randall's Island Park Alliance - President



New York City Council
Committee on Parks and Recreation
Re: Oversight- Community Gardens and Support Urban Agriculture

Tuesday, June 18, 2024

Dear Chair Krishnan:

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance is writing to express our support for Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture in NYC Parks, as they provide tremendous benefits to New Yorkers through access to healthy produce, open space, fresh air, and educational opportunities.

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance's Educational Garden & Compost Site has undergone a substantial renovation in the past year and is nearly five times larger than it was previously. This site is an integral part of VCPA programming to advance our mission of preserving, supporting, and promoting the recreational, ecological, cultural, and historical value of the park. The garden functions as an outdoor classroom for volunteers, interns, and school groups. Each group has the opportunity to get their hands dirty while learning about horticulture, food systems, nutrition, composting, and more.

We have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from people of all ages who have attended educational programs, community workshops and/or volunteer events in the garden. These programs are very popular and we tend to turn groups away due to space and staff capacity constraints.

Nearly 90% of the schools VCPA works with on field trips are Title I schools, meaning at least 40 percent of students enrolled come from low-income families. VCPA internships in the garden provide vital employment for Bronx high school students, for many of whom it is their first job.

Today's young people are suffering. We see reports of it everywhere. They suffer from anxiety, loneliness, and depression. Putting one's hands in the dirt, as you do in gardening, is literally a grounding experience for them. Gardening is a soul-satisfying pursuit because you see the fruits of your labor almost immediately. Bronx kids especially benefit from gardening because they desperately need to be connected to nature and earth to feel like they are part of something positive and full of hope.

For these reasons and more, VCPA would like to ask the City Council to support community gardens and urban agriculture in our parks.

Thank you,

Christina Taylor
Deputy Director



Testimony Provided by
Iyeshima Harris - Ouedraogo , Director of Advocacy and Programs, Green Guerillas
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Budget Oversight Hearing
on the FY25 NYC Budget

July 18, 2024

The Green Guerillas [Council of Gardeners](#) is a dynamic coalition that unites community gardeners from across New York City. Our mission is to advocate for the needs of gardeners, initiate collective actions, explore funding opportunities, foster connections between well-resourced and under-resourced gardens, and provide mentorship opportunities for emerging leaders.

Recent 10% NYC budget cuts, particularly to the Department of Parks and Recreation, have severely affected NYC GreenThumb, responsible for overseeing more than 500 city-owned community gardens. This essential agency has seen a significant reduction in its budget, hindering its capacity to provide technical assistance, necessary supplies, and adequate staffing, thus impeding its ability to effectively support community gardeners.

Community gardeners have been left to fend for themselves for decades. It is time for the city to invest in its communities and uplift the benefits community gardens contribute to neighborhood success. The budgetary constraints facing NYC Parks's GreenThumb division underscore the urgent need for our platform to focus on protecting and enhancing vital services and initiatives integral to the well-being of our city and its residents. Therefore, we call upon the city to invest in:

Policy Recommendations:

- **Parks Equity Initiative**

- We urge the NYC Council to boost funding for the Parks Equity Initiative (PEI). This initiative fosters a more equitable park system by providing discretionary funding for park and garden maintenance, beautification, security, and community engagement projects, thus enabling community gardens to strengthen their role in local communities.
- We urge the Council to allocate \$300,000 of PEI funds to create a pilot program empowering garden groups to access funds directly, through a simplified application and reporting process, fostering equity and sustainability. Funding can be distributed through a re-granting partnership with community-based organizations, like Green Guerillas or the City Parks Foundation, to ensure equitable distribution of resources and support for under-resourced gardens.

- **A Greener NYC**

- Continue investment to empower local organizations in providing youth with green jobs, infrastructure, and advocacy opportunities. Ensure community gardeners receive support from youth-focused organizations for effective garden maintenance and expand funding opportunities for programs that promote environmental

education, advocacy, and community service, contributing to the improvement and conservation of the City's natural resources.

- **Get Stuff Clean Initiative**

- Community gardeners have been experiencing an overwhelming amount of rodent infestation and illegal dumping since the COVID-19 pandemic. These rodents are affecting our food production and our ability to create organic compost in our gardens. We ask council members to implement community-driven solutions to enhance cleanliness and safety in and around community gardens, ensuring they remain vibrant spaces for community engagement and environmental stewardship by:
 - Increasing funding to address rodent infestation and illegal dumping impacting community gardens.
 - Strengthening collaboration between the Department of Sanitation (DSNY) and GreenThumb to promptly address reported issues.
 - Strengthen relationship and outreach between [Department of Health & Mental Hygiene Rat Academy](#) Training program and community gardeners so they can access this citywide resource effectively.

GreenThumb

- We join the [NYC Food Policy Alliance](#) in asking for the Mayor to **restore \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb** to support the hiring of additional Community Engagement Coordinators, seasonal staff members and to increase the distribution of resources, including the delivery of compost, topsoil, and lumber, for community gardeners.

Playfair Coalition

- We support the [Play Fair Coalition](#) in asking for the Mayor to dedicate 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation. The \$25 million dollar in budget cuts to the Parks Department that resulted in 600 job losses, unsafe parks and playgrounds; dirty bathrooms that close early; delayed opening of sprinklers and fountains; reduced recreation center hours and programming; trees that go unmaintained for far too long. It is important for our parks and open green spaces to stay safe for the public and our communities.

Compost Collection

- We join the [Save Our Compost Coalition](#) in asking the city to reinstate \$7 million per year in funding for community composting operations, including the 115 green jobs that facilitate the profound impact of community composting on both environmental sustainability and community engagement.

The Green Guerillas Council of Gardeners urges the city council to prioritize the needs of community gardeners and allocate adequate resources to support their essential work. By investing in community gardens, the city can promote environmental sustainability, food security, youth empowerment, and community resilience, fostering healthier and more vibrant neighborhoods for all residents.

Sincerely,

Iyeshima Harris - Ouedraogo

iyeshima@greenguerillas.org , Green Guerillas

Community Gardens Support:

5th Street Slope Garden (D-2)

6th Street & Avenue B Garden (D-2)

Beach 91st Street Community Garden (D-31)

Claremont Neighborhood Garden (D-16)

Feast Community Gardens

FeedingTree Community Garden (D-36)

Garden of Union (D-39)

Greene Acres (D-35)

Harlem Rose Garden (D-9)

Jackie Robinson Community Garden (D-9)

Jardín de la Familia (D-16)

Marie Brooks Community Garden (D-16)

Maple Street Garden (D-40)

Moore Jackson Community Garden (D- 26)

Nehemiah Ten Greenthumb Block Association
(D-42)

Neighborhood Advisory Committee
Community Garden (D-17)

Patchen Community Garden

Parque de Tranquilidad (D-2)

Paradise Community Garden (D-28)

Q Gardens Community Farm (D- 40)

Stars of Hope Community Garden

Smiling Hogshead Ranch (D- 26)

Target Bronx Community Garden (D-16)

The Manhattan Land Trust

Tranquility Farm (D-36)

T&T Vernon Community Garden (D-36)

V&T Vernon Community Garden (D-36)

Williams Avenue Community Garden (D-37)

Church Alive Development Corporation

315 East 170th Street

Bronx, New York 10456

*Bishop Dr. Timothy Birkett, Pres./Senior Pastor, Rev. Laurel Birkett, Co-Pastor
Assistant Pastor Shaun Wills*

June 9th, 2024

Honorable Kevin C. Riley, Councilman
New York City Council
City Hall
250 Broadway, 16th Floor
New York, New York 10007

Dear Councilman Riley,

I am sending this testimony on the importance of the Department of Parks/Recreation support of Community Gardens.

Church Alive is working with Bronx Health Reach and La Finca del Sur, a South Bronx Urban Garden, by bringing both Health Bucks to the Bronx Community as well as fresh produce through our Food Distribution program.

One of the things that is most needed to continue this collaborative effort is more funding for the Health Bucks Program so that we can reach more Bronx residents.

Church Alive also works in cooperation with at least 7 other Bronx churches to ensure that our resources for food distribution are shared with those churches, enabling them to distribute food to those in need.

We see the Dept. of Parks/Recreation a vital component needed to support Community Gardens and urge the Council to seek more funding for the Health Bucks program which enables community gardens and organizations to distribute at their markets and/or food distribution programs.

Respectfully submitted,

Bishop Dr. Timothy Birkett, Senior Pastor
President Church Alive Development Corporation

**Testimony Provided by Alejandro Epifanio Torres, Board Chair of Events & Planning , Francisco “Pancho” Ramos Community Garden (formerly 9C Community Garden)
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Budget Hearing on the FY25 NYC Budget
June 10 , 2024**

Thank you to Chairman Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is **Alejandro Epifanio Torres**, and I am a member of **Francisco “Pancho” Ramos Community Garden** located on 9th Street and Avenue C - Loisaida Avenue in Manhattan . Our garden, Francisco “Pancho” Ramos Community Garden (formerly 9C Community Garden), has a rich history of community involvement, particularly to the Puerto Rican community who helped establish and still preserves and maintains this vital community respite area of our neighborhood.

As a member of the Green Guerillas [Council of Gardeners](#), a dynamic coalition uniting community gardeners across New York City, I want to highlight several crucial recommendations for advancing a sustainable and equitable food system in our city.

Recent 10% NYC budget cuts, particularly to the Department of Parks and Recreation, have severely affected NYC GreenThumb. This essential agency has seen a significant reduction in its budget, hindering its capacity to provide technical assistance, necessary supplies, and adequate staffing, thus impeding its ability to effectively support community gardeners. Therefore, we call upon the city to invest in:

1. Increasing funding to the Parks Equity Initiative (PEI) and allocating \$300,000 of PEI funds to create a pilot program empowering garden groups to access funds directly, through a simplified application and reporting process, fostering equity and sustainability.
2. Continuing to invest in A Greener NYC to empower local organizations in providing youth with green jobs, infrastructure, and advocacy opportunities to community gardeners.
3. Increase funding to the Get Stuff Clean initiative to enable the DOHMH Rat Academy to address rodent infestation and illegal dumping affecting community gardens, while also strengthening collaboration between DSNY and GreenThumb, and enhancing the relationship and outreach of the Department of Health & Mental Hygiene Rat Academy Training program with community gardeners for effective access to this citywide resource.
4. Restore \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.
5. We support the [Play Fair Coalition](#) in asking for the Mayor to dedicate 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Community gardeners have been left to fend for themselves for decades. It is time for the city to invest in its communities and uplift the benefits community gardens contribute to neighborhood success. The budgetary constraints facing NYC Parks’s GreenThumb division underscore the urgent need for our platform to focus on protecting and enhancing vital services and initiatives integral to the well-being of our city and its residents.

Sincerely,



Alejandro Epifanio Torres, Board Chair of Events & Planning - Francisco “Pancho” Ramos Community Garden (formerly 9C Community Garden)

Testimony Provided by
Andrea Pompili | Community Garden Volunteer | Decatur Street Garden
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Budget Hearing
on the FY25 NYC Budget

June 10 , 2024

Thank you to Chairman Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Andrea Pompili , and I am a member of Decatur Street Garden located in Bushwick, Brooklyn. Our garden, Decatur Street Garden, has a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our neighborhood.

As a member of the Green Guerillas [Council of Gardeners](#), a dynamic coalition uniting community gardeners across New York City, I want to highlight several crucial recommendations for advancing a sustainable and equitable food system in our city.

Recent 10% NYC budget cuts, particularly to the Department of Parks and Recreation, have severely affected NYC GreenThumb. This essential agency has seen a significant reduction in its budget, hindering its capacity to provide technical assistance, necessary supplies, and adequate staffing, thus impeding its ability to effectively support community gardeners. Therefore, we call upon the city to invest in:

1. Increasing funding to the Parks Equity Initiative (PEI) and allocating \$300,000 of PEI funds to create a pilot program empowering garden groups to access funds directly, through a simplified application and reporting process, fostering equity and sustainability.
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4. Restore \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.
5. We support the [Play Fair Coalition](#) in asking for the Mayor to dedicate 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Community gardeners have been left to fend for themselves for decades. It is time for the city to invest in its communities and uplift the benefits community gardens contribute to neighborhood success. The budgetary constraints facing NYC Parks's GreenThumb division underscore the urgent need for our platform to focus on protecting and enhancing vital services and initiatives integral to the well-being of our city and its residents.

Andrea Pompili
Decatur Street Garden

June 18th, 2024
1:00pm

Council Member Shekar Krishnan Chair
Committee on Parks and Recreation
New York City Council

**Written Testimony by Brandon Pachuca
Elizabeth Street Garden Volunteer
Presented Before New York City Council
Committee on Parks and Recreation**

Thank you to Chairman Krishnan and members of the committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Brandon Pachuca. I am a resident of the Lower East Side. I work in architecture and urban planning as an urban data scientist and full-stack engineer focused on evaluating how our urban environment can become more sustainable.

Community gardens, such as the Elizabeth Street Garden, play a vital role in our urban environment. They provide our communities with access to quality green space, daylight, help mitigate water runoff, lower the urban heat island effect, and foster a sense of community. These aspects align with the committee's mission on Parks and Recreation and underline the importance of preserving such green infrastructure.

I volunteer and garden at the Elizabeth Street Garden, an approximately 20,000 sqft community garden in Little Italy Community Board District 2. Elizabeth Street Garden provides 100s of free programs to the community, such as concerts, poetry, movie nights, tai chi, yoga, and educational classes for the neighboring preschools, all offered at no cost to the city and are free to the public. These events unite the community and provide a clean, safe space for physical and mental health. When I lost my mother two years ago to battle cancer, grief, and depression became my reality every day. When I found Elizabeth Street Garden, it brought me back to life. It offered a way to put my gardening skills to good use and gave me a sense of community when I needed it most.

The city, specifically the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, is currently seeking to destroy the garden to build a 7-story, approximately 92,761-square-foot mixed-use building containing 123 units of affordable housing (guaranteed for 60 years), 4,454-square-foot ground-floor retail, 11,000-square-foot office space, and a 6,600-square-foot publicly accessible green space.

The proposed development, if implemented, would not only erase a precious green space from an area with already significantly low access to quality green space but also potentially disrupt the community's sense of belonging and the garden's positive impact on physical and mental health. This is not just a matter of losing a garden, but a threat to the very fabric of the community.

Elizabeth Street Garden is awaiting a decision from the NY State Court of Appeals, which will rule on whether the city met its obligation when it declared there would be no negative impacts by removing the 20,000 sqft garden from the community. This decision will have long-standing implications for environmental review at the city and state levels.

The city has framed this argument as green space versus affordable housing. That is a false choice between two profoundly essential pieces of the urban fabric. This is why Elizabeth Street Garden submitted a plan to the Mayor's office that preserves the garden and achieves its housing goals within the community district at underutilized sites. Over the past month, we have launched a letter-writing campaign in our community and have sent over 100,000 letters to the Mayor's Office, HPD, and the administration. Instead of working with us to find a viable solution, the city insists on fighting in court and spending taxpayer dollars.

I call upon this committee and the city of New York to formally recognize community gardens as essential cornerstones of communities that stitch together the urban fabric. Reject the notion that we can only have more housing or green space. Restore the 2.6 million in funding for Green Thumb and support our mission of 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Embrace Elizabeth Street Garden and work with us to find a solution that meets our housing goals and preserves a one-of-a-kind garden. Come by the garden with your friends, family and loved ones to see how a community garden can give people a place to thrive.

Thank you for your time.

Carolyn Ratcliffe

New York, NY 10009-5220

June 10, 2024

Re: Importance of support for Parks and Community Gardens

NYC Council Committee on Parks and Recreation
250 Broadway, 16th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear City Council Members,

I have been a Community gardener in New York City's East Village/Loisaida Neighborhood since 1990. I have worked with many volunteers to transform "vacant lots" into havens of green space that nurture trees, grow vegetables, compost food waste and plant matter, and teach people and children how to care for the environment. It has transformed this neighborhood from a deteriorating urban slum by engaging neighbors to care about their neighborhood and has promoted the integration of diverse racial and ethnic communities to work together.

This has been an important part of New York City's revitalization and helped to spur it's recovery by making neighborhoods viable safe places to live. NYC Parks and Recreation support for these efforts through the GreenThumb, Grow NYC and Green Guerrilla programs has enabled and nurtured these efforts since the late 1970's.

Please do not cut the funding for Parks and Recreation and recognize the vitally important role that green spaces and trees contribute to the health and welfare of all New Yorkers, who are coping with climate change, heat island effect, rainwater runoff, flooding an rising sea levels to name a few of the issues that impact on all of our lives. Parks and gardens are not a luxury, they are necessity for inner city life.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Ratcliffe

Dear Legislators, Mayor Adams and Commissioner Donoghue,

I am a nurse and I ask you to please do not turn over this lot to polluting gas and diesel-fueled parked vehicles that will sit on the site and pollute our groundsoil.

I strongly disagree with NYC Parks Department's decision to evict Big Reuse from their community composting site underneath the Queensborough Bridge by June 30, 2024 and provide a new renewable license agreement to allow them to continue to operate as they have for the last decade.

We also ask Mayor Adams to restore community composting funding in the FY25 budget as supported by many city council members.

The Big Reuse community composting site annually produces 700 yards of compost for Queens Parks and 150+ community groups while activating 1000s of residents and volunteers in greening New York City. Evicting their community composting site under the Queensboro Bridge would end these community programs and remove the site from public use.

The composting site's eviction by Parks is not needed to complete the improvements to Baby Queensbridge Park and should not be evicted to create an additional Parks Department parking lot, especially since they have an underused parking lot nearby.

All local elected officials including Council Member Won, Krishnan, and Caban; Queens Borough President Richards; and Community Board have told Parks they want the Big Reuse composting site to remain. Parks had two Community Input meetings on improvements of Baby Queens in 2021-2022, in which local residents overwhelmingly called for preservation of Big Reuse's composting site in the new Park designs. Evicting Big Reuse disregards the Scoping meeting input from residents and elected officials for use of public space in their own community.

NYC Bar Association and New York Lawyers for Public Interest have stated that community composting is appropriate use of Parks space.

Evicting Big Reuse from the Queensbridge compost site will eliminate a program that composts New Yorker's food scraps and western Queens Parks' yard waste and distributes the compost back to Parks and the community. The program also supports dozens of smaller community composting sites with materials and technical advice.

The compost produced by Big Reuse's site annually supports healthy soils for community gardens and street trees, helps with flood mitigation and activates thousands of volunteers in improving New York City's green infrastructure. Losing this site would mean that Big Reuse cannot provide these vital public services towards meeting the city's sustainability goals in PlaNYC and Green Economy Action Plan.

Big Reuse supports improvements to Baby Queensbridge Park and improving Parks' sustainability efforts and green space. Big Reuse has worked for over a decade to help revitalize derelict, abandoned spaces under the Queensboro Bridge in Baby Queensbridge Park. In 2015, Big Reuse opened a state of the art composting site after getting 40 dumpsters of garbage removed.

NYC Parks Department's improvements of Baby Queensbridge Park should not force the eviction of Big Reuse's composting site. The Big Reuse site is not located in the footprint of the improvements. There exists an underused 22,000 sqft Parks Department parking lot next to the site that could be used for sector maintenance. The new Baby Queensbridge Park will be adjacent to the existing composting site which is already beloved by the community and internationally recognized as a model for urban sustainability. This proximity will amplify opportunities for community engagement, learning, and sustainable practices. For over a decade, Big Reuse has been exactly the type of community partner that the Community Parks Initiative strives to work with: we have engaged local residents on the maintenance and care of Parks at the Queensbridge site.

Last year, the Big Reuse's community composting site:

- Composted over 200 tons of leaf and yard waste from western Queens Parks.
- Returned over 700 yards of compost to Parks, street trees and community gardens.
- Provided most of the compost to Queens Parks Horticulture which uses the high quality compost for their most important planting projects.
- Distributed compost to an additional 154 community groups, gardens, and schools.
- Worked with over 500 volunteers.
- Partnered with 62 food scrap drop off sites at community gardens and other groups.
- Provided compost and mulch that was applied to over 1,200 street trees with over 1,000 volunteers as part of Big Reuse' street tree care program.
- Services based at the site reach over 20 city council districts in Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan and Queens.

Big Reuse has developed a network of community organizations, volunteers, and avid composters. This network is an integral part of the city's rollout of curbside composting and the expansion of NYC urban agriculture and Community Parks Initiative

As a nurse I urge you to reverse this decision and allow Big Reuse's award-winning composting operation to remain on their Queensbridge composting site to continue providing free compost to Parks, community gardens and street tree care for NYC residents while diverting millions of pounds of New Yorkers' and Parks' organic waste from landfills.

"The Queensbridge Baby Park was brought to life by Big Reuse. They created a vision for the space to be used for the community and it also underscores the importance of preserving their composting program, which residents clearly supported during the Park's scoping process for the new Park." -- Queens Borough President Donovan Richards

“As elected officials whose communities benefit from community composting, we urge the Parks Department to offer Big Reuse a new license agreement so that they can continue their composting operations.” -- Council Members Julie Won, Shekar Krishnan, Shaun Abreu, and Tiffany Caban

Testimony Provided by
[Dyaami D'Orazio, Programs Administrator, Farm School NYC]
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Budget Hearing on the FY25 NYC Budget
June 10 , 2024

Thank you to Chairman Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Dyaami D'Orazio, and I was a member of Jardin de las Rosas located in the Bronx and am now working at Farm School NYC where we partner with gardens in all 5 boroughs to explore urban agriculture with NYC residents. Our organization has a rich history of community involvement for over 12 years and has been a vital network builder for green spaces in many neighborhoods.

As a partner organization of the Green Guerillas [Council of Gardeners](#), a dynamic coalition uniting community gardeners across New York City, I want to highlight several crucial recommendations for advancing a sustainable and equitable food system in our city.

Recent 10% NYC budget cuts, particularly to the Department of Parks and Recreation, have severely affected NYC GreenThumb. This essential agency has seen a significant reduction in its budget, hindering its capacity to provide technical assistance, necessary supplies, and adequate staffing, thus impeding its ability to effectively support community gardeners. Therefore, we call upon the city to invest in:

1. Increasing funding to the Parks Equity Initiative (PEI) and allocating \$300,000 of PEI funds to create a pilot program empowering garden groups to access funds directly, through a simplified application and reporting process, fostering equity and sustainability.
2. Continuing to invest in A Greener NYC to empower local organizations in providing youth with green jobs, infrastructure, and advocacy opportunities to community gardeners.
3. Increase funding to the Get Stuff Clean initiative to enable the DOHMH Rat Academy to address rodent infestation and illegal dumping affecting community gardens, while also strengthening collaboration between DSNY and GreenThumb, and enhancing the relationship and outreach of the Department of Health & Mental Hygiene Rat Academy Training program with community gardeners for effective access to this citywide resource.
4. Restore \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.
5. We support the [Play Fair Coalition](#) in asking for the Mayor to dedicate 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Community gardeners have been left to fend for themselves for decades while being displaced from the very communities they helped revive. It is time for the city to invest in its communities and uplift the benefits community gardens contribute to neighborhood success. The budgetary constraints facing NYC Parks's GreenThumb division underscore the urgent need for our platform to focus on protecting and enhancing vital services and initiatives integral to the well-being of our city and its residents.

Dyaami D'Orazio
Jardin de las Rosas and Farm School NYC

June 18, 2024

Testimony from Ellen M. Cooper, NYC:

I urge City Council to Pass legislation that secures Queensbridge composting site. As a Master Composter in NYC, I have seen first-hand the power of sites like this to bring together communities. Big Reuse's composting site supports over hundred community groups each year with compost, provides browns for composting and supports food scrap collection from community gardens. It supports Parks operations by composting Parks leaves and wood chips -- providing 700 yards of compost to Parks annually -- at NO COST to Parks, providing nourishing compost to more than 1,200 street trees and 150 Greening Projects. These are exactly the kinds of essential projects that should not be cut.

While I support the long overdue improvements to Baby Queensbridge Park, Big Reuse is a cornerstone of this Park. Big Reuse has worked to improve Baby Queensbridge Park for over a decade and should be grandfathered in. The site currently occupied by GreenThumb is land Big Reuse cleaned up and made operational in 2011 to host their first composting site. In 2015, Big Reuse revitalized their current location, which was a garbage strewn lot. The equipment that Parks is claiming they need for staff parking can be put elsewhere. There is overwhelming community support for this site to remain, with over 3,000 letters submitted, 115 Community groups, the Queens BP, Council members and Community Boards in favor. If you allow Big Reuse's Queensbridge site to shutter, it will precipitate the unravelling of a neighborhood and city anchor and resource!

The composting site also supports the Mayor's efforts on green jobs, climate accounting and urban agriculture, and is an effective hedge against climate change and for resiliency. Why fix something that is not broken, and requires zero effort or cost from the city?

**Testimony Provided by
Emily Harting, Community Garden Fan
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Budget Hearing
on the FY25 NYC Budget**

June 18, 2024

Thank you to Chairman Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Emily Harting, and I am a fan of the numerous community gardens (Jane Bailey Community Garden, Clifton Place Memorial Garden and Park, Golden Harvest Garden, 462 Halsey Community Garden, 100 Quincy Community Garden, Tranquility Farm, and Hattie Carthan Community Garden to name a few) Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn . Our gardens have a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our neighborhood.

As a supporter of the Green Guerillas [Council of Gardeners](#), a dynamic coalition uniting community gardeners across New York City, I want to highlight several crucial recommendations for advancing a sustainable and equitable food system in our city.

Recent 10% NYC budget cuts, particularly to the Department of Parks and Recreation, have severely affected NYC GreenThumb. This essential agency has seen a significant reduction in its budget, hindering its capacity to provide technical assistance, necessary supplies, and adequate staffing, thus impeding its ability to effectively support community gardeners. Therefore, we call upon the city to invest in:

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4. Restore \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.
5. We support the [Play Fair Coalition](#) in asking for the Mayor to dedicate 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Community gardeners have been left to fend for themselves for decades. It is time for the city to invest in its communities and uplift the benefits community gardens contribute to neighborhood success. The budgetary constraints facing NYC Parks's GreenThumb division underscore the urgent need for our platform to focus on protecting and enhancing vital services and initiatives integral to the well-being of our city and its residents.

Emily Harting

Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn

Testimony Submitted by
Leah Kabran Eden, Executive Director, Equity Advocates
Before the New York City Council Oversight Hearing on
Community Gardens and Support for Urban Agriculture
June 18, 2024

My name is Leah Kabran Eden, Executive Director, Equity Advocates. Thank you to Chair Shekar Krishnan and the other members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for holding today's oversight hearing on community gardens and urban agriculture.

Equity Advocates' mission is to build the capacity of community food justice leaders—primarily women and leaders of color—to address the root causes of food insecurity through policy and systems change. We provide our partners with the tools they need to be more effective advocates and shape the policies that impact their everyday lives through policy education, advocacy training and coalition leadership.

Since March 2020 we have convened and acted as the backbone for the [NYC Food Policy Alliance](#), a multi-sector group of 60+ food system stakeholders from across New York, including frontline CBOs directly impacted by food insecurity, that work together to identify and advocate for public policies and funding that not only respond to our current economic and hunger crises, but also address the ongoing vulnerabilities and injustices of the food system.

Growing spaces such as gardens, community land trusts, and urban farms are critical green spaces that provide benefits including increased access to and production of locally grown fresh food, minimize contributions to the climate crisis, education, promote community well-being, plant biodiversity, lessening air pollution, and mitigating stormwater run-off and drive local economic activity.

Before the 2021 passage of [Local Law 121](#) and [Local Law 123](#) mandating the establishment of a Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture and an Urban Agriculture Advisory Board, there was no formal mechanism for the urban agriculture community to provide input into City policy or funding decisions. The establishment of the new Office of Urban Agriculture (MOUA) housed within the Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability (OLTPS) has been a great step forward and we encourage allocating funding for the MOUA to maintain appropriate levels of staffing and increase transparency about Office goals and activities among the community of urban agriculture practitioners. Further, we encourage the use of funding to create a position dedicated to ongoing, intentional community engagement to inform the urban agriculture advisory's development of a set of recommendations as outlined in Local Law 123. And yet, the MOUA has yet to publicly appoint and announce the members of the Urban Agriculture Advisory Board. In "Cultivating Urban Agriculture" New York City's first urban agriculture report released in October 2023 states: "The board is currently in development and expected to be fully appointed later this year." We urge the MOUA to finalize the appointment and publicly release the 13 members of the

Advisory Board as well as develop its own rules of procedure, which shall include a procedure or mechanism by which members of the public may make submissions to the board as outlined in Local Law 123. This will serve to strengthen equitable and inclusive urban agriculture governance in New York City.

The Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture (MOUA) recently published an informative report on its efforts and future goals. We further submit the following recommendations based on their priorities to bolster urban agriculture, support the next generation of farmers, and foster long-term resiliency and economic opportunity in the food system:

Bolster existing community gardens and urban farms. (MOUA Priority 2)

There is a critical lack of City investment through grant funding or programming to effectively support urban agriculture and gardens. Particularly lack of resources to ensure easy and equitable access to land, healthy soil and clean water sources. Therefore, it is disappointing that GreenThumb, the one City department that does focus on providing resources to community gardens, is consistently underfunded. We urge the City to restore \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb in the FY25 City Budget to support the hiring of additional Community Engagement Coordinators, seasonal staff members and to increase the distribution of resources, including the delivery of compost, topsoil, and lumber, for community gardeners.

To support community gardens and farms that are not under Greenthumb jurisdiction (and therefore do not receive support through GreenThumb), the newly established Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture should allocate funding and resources to address gardeners' water access needs and costs, including hoses, contractors to set up water access, irrigation tools, rainwater catchment systems, maintain water systems, backflow prevention, water system inspections, turning water off and on, plumbing issues, soil testing, and more.

High-quality compost is a vital resource for urban gardens and farms and therefore the City should restore \$7 million in NYC Community Composting program funding in the FY25 City Budget, with a focus on engaging Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in the brown bin rollout initiative. This initiative creates local jobs, reduces landfill waste, and fosters community engagement and helps move the City towards its Zero Waste goals.

We prioritize the notion that moving public land with insecure tenure to trust land will strengthen land security and sovereignty and prioritize access to lands for people who have deep and historic community connections, especially BIPOC farmers, growers and community gardens. In the FY25 budget, the City Council should fully fund the Citywide Community Land Trust Initiative at \$3 million. Launched in FY2020, the citywide CLT discretionary funding initiative has helped catalyze CLT organizing, education, training and technical assistance. We support the [NYC Community Land Initiative \(NYCCLI\)](#) in its call for full funding to support 20 organizations working to develop and preserve deeply-affordable housing, community and commercial spaces, and advance a just recovery in Black and brown NYC communities. Public land must be used for public good, and be reserved for CLTs that provide for meaningful

community control. It is also critical to raise awareness that CLTs can be utilized for commercial urban agriculture. We believe that this embodies the ability to balance local land control and long-term, stewarded development that addresses changing community needs. Supporting both Community-owned businesses and Community-controlled land together is part of an effort to democratize economic development in NYC's food system.

Empower students to become climate and urban agriculture stewards through their experiences in gardens and classrooms. (MOUA Priority 4)

We applaud the Administration for its release of [“Prioritizing Food Education in Our Public Schools: A Path to Developing a Healthy Next Generation.”](#) a comprehensive roadmap to improving food education in New York City's public school system. A comprehensive approach to food education should create hands-on opportunities for students to learn about the larger food system itself — the production, processing, distribution, retail, consumption, and post-consumption of food. When school gardens become classrooms and spaces for students to both build knowledge about healthy eating and have access to consuming healthy food in schools everyone wins. With this in mind, we endorse the renewal of \$2 million in the FY25 budget for the Food and Nutrition Education in NYC Pilot, extending it to more schools, especially those in high economic need areas. This education is crucial for the health and wellness of all NYC students, positively impacting academic performance, educational behavior, and cognitive skills. However, we encourage the Administration to allocate dedicated funds towards school garden infrastructure into future budgets to further support the nutrition education expansion. Currently funding can be used for staffing and programming but not for garden creation and infrastructure. It is valuable that the expansion allows for external nonprofits to bring supplies to support on site cooking lessons (burners, pots, etc.) but it is not possible for partners to bring in gardens - they need to be on site. Enabling funding for school garden infrastructure and build-out will further fuel the momentum being built around food and nutrition education in schools and provide site-based, hands-on opportunities for environmental, science, and food justice education in schools.

We also urge the City to maintain \$10.3 million in baseline funding to support youth in urban agriculture careers, including expanding the DOE's Career and Technical Education Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources program. Allocate substantial funding from the CTE program to support the growth of urban agriculture initiatives and create a seamless pathway from the DOE's expansion of Food and Nutrition Education for PreK-8th Grade to Career and Technical Education programs.

The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) is the nation's largest youth employment program, connecting NYC youth between the ages of 14 and 24 with career exploration opportunities and paid work experience each summer. However, this valuable program does not work for urban agriculture sites as it does not allow for them to provide high-quality, learning and work opportunities for New York youth. The current SYEP model only provides funding to cover youth payment but not compensation for worksites to manage, plan for, staff, educate and support the youth which is a particular challenge for urban agriculture organizations. While we support the maintained investment of \$206.5 million in baseline funding for SYEP, we also call on the City to establish a new Urban Agriculture Youth

Employment Pilot program that meets the needs of local urban agriculture organizations and youth. This program would focus on youth leadership and development in urban agriculture spaces, providing structured, educational, and paid employment opportunities in urban agriculture, thereby nurturing the next generation of food system and environmental advocates. Critically the program would run during optimal agricultural periods to align with the peak growing seasons and provide City funding to adequately compensate urban agriculture worksites to host youth interns, covering costs for supplies, staff, planning, and operational needs in preparation for and during the internship periods.

Grow business opportunities for emerging urban agriculture & food entrepreneurs. (MOUA Priority 7)

There is great power and opportunity within NYC’s urban agriculture community to build socio-economic opportunities and improve wealth outcomes for NYC residents. We are heartened by the Office of Urban Agriculture’s effort to create opportunities for urban agriculture and food entrepreneurs. In particular the initiative to make gaining Minority/Women Owned Business Enterprises (M/WBE) certification easier through launching the Urban Agriculture M/WBE Training and Certification Program with NYC Small Business Services as well as the community education about the DCPs “City of Yes” zoning regulations can support business development in the food and agriculture sector have been positive.

We encourage the City to continue its support of the Good Food Purchasing Program initiative and continue exploring supports needed and implementing pipelines for urban farmers and growers to access procurement contracts.

To further grow economic opportunities for food entrepreneurs and growers, we urge the City to create a new Food Justice Fund to allocate \$5 million towards community-led projects to grow food justice and build wealth in BIPOC and low-income communities. In *Food Forward NYC*, the Mayor’s Office of Food Policy calls for the establishment of a Food Justice Fund. We urge the City to invest in this program at \$5 Million and offer grants for both planning and implementation projects serving high need areas identified by Racial Equity Task Force. Funding would be allocated directly to community food organizations historically serving NYC residents with a demonstrated history of meeting the cultural and food needs of their communities. As this field of work requires long term investments, the fund should prioritize 2 year grant cycles and allow for flexibility on spending deadlines upon receiving grants. We also ask that the City explore a private-public partnership and leverage its convening power to secure matching investment from local philanthropic foundations. Types of projects funded under this pilot could include, but not be limited to:

- Worker Ownership: activities may include establishing or providing technical assistance for worker cooperatives, Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) and other employee-ownership models within the food system. Providing access to capital for employee ownership models in the food systems is a key strategy to build community ownership within the local food system, especially in BIPOC communities that have historically had low rates of business establishment by residents.



- Strengthen Food Systems and Supply Chain Infrastructure: activities may include creating or expanding community kitchen programs, affordable kitchen and processing space, improving efficiency in food distribution; technical assistance to support MWBE from participating in the City’s procurement contracts; local or climate-friendly food production or procurement; food recovery and waste management; support for support community food hub models, and community-owned food retail to leverage existing and growing community-owned food, health, farming and retail infrastructures; and data/technology projects.
- Growing Food System Career Pathways: activities may include community based culinary training and workforce development opportunities to support regional rural and urban agriculture enterprises, especially for youth and BIPOC farmers, to create a pipeline of urban farming and food systems career opportunities.

Thank you for your time. To follow up, you can contact me at: Leah Kabran Eden, Equity Advocates, Leah@nyequityadvocates.org.

**Testimony Provided by
[Francine Rogers, Garden Coordinator, Bronx Land Trust]
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Budget Hearing
on the FY25 NYC Budget**

June 18, 2024

Thank you to Chairman Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Francine Rogers, and I am a member of **Neighborhood Advisory Committee Community Garden** located in the Bronx. We are part of the Bronx Land Trust. Our garden, The Neighborhood Advisory Committee Community Garden, **started in 1983** and has a rich 40-year history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our South Bronx neighborhood. One of the reasons our garden has been able to survive over these past 40 years of highs and lows is the constant support and guidance from Green Thumb staff along with the much needed resources that they provided such as trees, plants, lumber, tools, and garbage bags, to name just a few items.

As a supporter of the Green Guerillas [Council of Gardeners](#), a dynamic coalition uniting community gardeners across New York City, I want to highlight several crucial recommendations for advancing a sustainable and equitable food system in our city.

Recent 10% NYC budget cuts, particularly to the Department of Parks and Recreation, have severely affected NYC GreenThumb. This essential agency has seen a significant reduction in its budget, hindering its capacity to provide technical assistance, necessary supplies, and adequate staffing, thus impeding its ability to effectively support much needed community gardeners. Therefore, I join their call upon the city to invest in:

- 1. Restoring \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.**
2. Continuing to invest in A Greener NYC to empower local organizations in providing youth with green jobs, infrastructure, and advocacy opportunities to community gardeners.
3. Increase funding to the Get Stuff Clean initiative to enable the DOHMH Rat Academy to address rodent infestation and illegal dumping affecting community gardens, while also strengthening collaboration between DSNY and GreenThumb, and enhancing the relationship and outreach of the Department of Health & Mental Hygiene Rat Academy Training program with community gardeners for effective access to this citywide resource.

Community gardeners have been left to fend for themselves for decades. It is time for the city to invest in its communities and uplift the benefits community gardens contribute to neighborhood success. The budgetary constraints facing NYC Parks's GreenThumb division underscore the urgent need for our platform to focus on protecting and enhancing vital services and initiatives integral to the well-being of our city and its residents.

Francine Rogers
Neighborhood Advisory Committee Community Garden

██████████, Bronx, NY 10451; ██████████

Testimony Provided by

Irma Sanchez, Community Garden Member, Rodale Pleasant Park, Pleasant Village and Vernon Cases Community Gardens
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Oversight Hearing
on the FY25 NYC Budget
June 20, 2024

Thank you to Chairman Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Irma Sanchez, member of Rodale Pleasant Park, Pleasant Village and Vernon Cases Community Gardens located in Manhattan and Brooklyn. During my brief time at these gardens I have been actively involved in reaching out to the community to provide education on planting and composting, providing creative outlets for families and an opportunity to engage with nature in beautiful green space. See attached fliers of two previous events and an upcoming one on June 29, 2024. This connection to nature is KEY.

As a member of these GreenThumb gardens and Green Guerillas [Council of Gardeners](#), a dynamic coalition uniting community gardeners across New York City, I want to highlight several crucial recommendations for advancing a sustainable and equitable food system in our city.

Recent 10% NYC budget cuts, particularly to the Department of Parks and Recreation, have severely affected NYC GreenThumb. This essential agency has seen a significant reduction in its budget, hindering its capacity to provide technical assistance, necessary supplies, and adequate staffing, thus impeding its ability to effectively support community gardeners. Therefore, we call upon the city to invest in:

1. Increasing funding to the Parks Equity Initiative (PEI) and allocating \$300,000 of PEI funds to create a pilot program empowering garden groups to access funds directly, through a simplified application and reporting process, fostering equity and sustainability.
2. Continuing to invest in A Greener NYC to empower local organizations in providing youth with green jobs, infrastructure, and advocacy opportunities to community gardeners.
3. Increase funding to the Get Stuff Clean initiative. I believe the key is connecting people to nature. It is much harder to discard trash in the river or on the street when you see how that affects the quality of the water we drink. It's critical that we address trash in the city. We don't have a rat problem; we have a trash problem.
4. Restore \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb. Empower Outreach Coordinators to enforce garden bylaws. This is CRITICAL to ensure gardens function efficiently, without discrimination, retaliation or bias. That there be required transparency in how gardens use funds, and a required conflict resolution plan that is adhered to. I have personally had to file escalate several complaints to GreenThumb due to a member's behavior. GreenThumb has been very slow to respond to this serious matter due to staffing issues.
5. We support the [Play Fair Coalition](#) in asking for the Mayor to dedicate 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Community gardeners have been left to fend for themselves for decades. It is time for the city to invest in its communities and uplift the benefits community gardens contribute to neighborhood success. The budgetary constraints facing NYC Parks's GreenThumb division underscore the urgent need for our platform to focus on protecting and enhancing vital services and initiatives integral to the well-being of our city and its residents.

Irma Sanchez

Rodale Pleasant Park Community Garden
Pleasant Village Community Garden
Vernon Cases Community Garden

Testimony Provided by
[Jenny Deida, Board Member/ Greenthumb Liason, Pancho Ramos Community Garden]
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Budget Hearing
on the FY25 NYC Budget

June 10, 2024

Thank you to Chairman Krishnan and the Committee on Parks and Recreation members for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Jenny Deida, and I am a Pancho Ramos Community Garden member in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Our garden, Pancho Ramos Community Garden, has a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our neighborhood.

As a member of the Green Guerillas [Council of Gardeners](#), a dynamic coalition uniting community gardeners across New York City, I want to highlight several crucial recommendations for advancing a sustainable and equitable food system in our city.

Recent 10% NYC budget cuts, particularly to the Department of Parks and Recreation, have severely affected NYC GreenThumb. This essential agency has seen a significant reduction in its budget, hindering its capacity to provide technical assistance, necessary supplies, and adequate staffing, thus impeding its ability to support community gardeners effectively. Therefore, we call upon the city to invest in:

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3. Increase funding to the Get Stuff Clean initiative to enable the DOHMH Rat Academy to address rodent infestation and illegal dumping affecting community gardens. Strengthen collaboration between DSNY and GreenThumb and enhance the relationship and outreach of the Department of Health & Mental Hygiene Rat Academy Training program with community gardeners to effectively access this citywide resource.
4. Restore \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.
5. We support the [Play Fair](#) Coalition's request that the Mayor dedicate 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Community gardeners have been left to fend for themselves for decades. It is time for the city to invest in its communities and uplift the benefits community gardens contribute to neighborhood success. The budgetary constraints facing NYC Parks's GreenThumb division underscore the urgent

need for our platform to focus on protecting and enhancing vital services and initiatives integral to our city's and its residents' well-being.

Jenny Deida
Pancho Ramos Community Garden

Jenny Deida

Jerome Proberbs

To whom it may concern,

People often disregard the The New York city Parks department as a segment of this great city's infrastructure. From humble beginnings, it has faithfully served *everyone* who sets foot in New York city resident and tourist alike, it's wards a standout feature of the lore of New York. Our public spaces serve as event venues, meeting spaces, yoga studio's office rooms and safe havens, The Parks Department responsible for maintenance and upkeep of 30,000 acres across 14% of the city's landmass is very much part of its infrastructure. What is often forgotten are the tertiary good that the parks department safeguards. [include deep cut parks services and include 3 upcoming events until the end of the year.]

I have been a parkie since I was 8 years old. I had just transitioned from the Bed-Stuy YMCA to St.Johns Recreation center to continue swimming competitively and continued to frequent the cities pools throughout my 7 year career as a Parks lifeguard. There I met a diverse cast of some of the most honest, hardworking individuals I've had the pleasure of working with to this day. Fond memories of many firsts including my introduction to personal and financial responsibility as *I needed working papers* my first year. I pen this message in memory of Bubba, Tiyanna, Marty & Javier [lg school] Drew, Alex [St.Johns], Philip, Aaron This is just my experience, but don't take my word for it. There are 3,745 others that can attest to the positive impact, care and community that his department fosters.

We have plenty individuals capable of doing the work presently. We need not alienate New Yorkers from their own parks department to alleviate other issues. The supposed "housing crisis" can be resolved through better management of the resources available at present, in addition I hear Driscoll farms has 9M to put toward this effort as well, NYC's public works are not a place to look for savings as the work being done here is invaluable to the survival of the city. City Parks needs an increase in funding.



June 18, 2024

Council Member Shekar Krishnan Chair
Committee on Parks and Recreation
New York City Council

**Written Testimony By Joseph Reiver, Elizabeth Street Garden Director
Presented Before New York City Council,
Committee on Parks and Recreation**

Dear Council Member Krishnan,

On behalf of Elizabeth Street Garden, I thank you and your committee members for holding this oversight hearing on the importance of New York City's community gardens. In seeking to better support community gardens, the Council must prioritize protecting existing gardens that are at risk of being destroyed.

Elizabeth Street Garden is a roughly 20,000-square-foot community sculpture garden cherished by many people from the surrounding neighborhood as well as from around the City and the world. Currently, over 150,000 people visit the garden annually. The volunteer-based nonprofit of the same name manages the space, offering hundreds of free public events for the community throughout the year including, wellness programs, live music & poetry, movie screenings, and educational events for the local public schools.

The City, specifically the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, is currently seeking to destroy the garden to build 123 units of senior affordable housing (affordable for 60 years), luxury ground floor retail, and over 11,000 sqft of office space for one of the developer partners.

In our efforts to preserve the garden we are seeking a solution that saves the garden and achieves much-needed affordable housing at existing alternative sites within our Community Board and Council districts. Such a solution could achieve more housing and more public open space in a neighborhood already underserved in terms of affordability and public open space. ESG's proposal to Mayor Adams can be read here: www.elizabethstreetgarden.com/proposal

ESG is awaiting a decision on a case before the New York Court of Appeals, the outcome of which will either uphold or severely weaken environmental law at a city & state level.

While this work is deeply personal to me and many community members, preserving ESG reflects city-wide issues including the lack of true green public open space, environmental law, and the need to prioritize community gardens as vital infrastructure.

It is common knowledge that community gardens help maintain healthy air quality, collect stormwater runoff, benefit mental & socioeconomic health, and cool down our city, which is considered one of America's hottest heat islands due to urban development. Yet the odds of city government creating any new community gardens are slim to none.

If the above knowledge were to be formally recognized, the City would reject any false choice of housing vs green space, and embrace Elizabeth Street Garden along with a solution that achieves up to 5x the amount of housing at alternative underutilized sites. Instead, the City is currently spending thousands of tax-payer dollars to fight the community in court and perpetuate misleading narratives about the garden.

The political case surrounding Elizabeth Street Garden is a prime example of the failure of city government to achieve viable solutions addressing climate change, our public spaces, and the housing crisis without any loss to the people of New York. The case of Elizabeth Street Garden itself is a prime example of how the people of this city can maintain and govern a vital public green space iconic to New York.

I call upon this committee and the city of New York to formally recognize community gardens as essential cornerstones of communities that stitch together the urban fabric. Reject the false choice of green space vs housing. Restore the \$2.6 million in funding for Green Thumb and support the mission of at least 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

A copy of Elizabeth Street Garden's proposal to Mayor Eric Adams is attached to this testimony.

Sincerely,

Joseph Reiver
Executive Director,
Elizabeth Street Garden



Elizabeth Street Garden Proposal

A solution that preserves Elizabeth Street Garden and achieves more affordable housing for those in need.



Elizabeth Street Garden
Proposal



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5	A Win - Win Solution
6	Alternative Site Comparison
7	Conservation Land Trust Report

Watch the Community Video Here:

<https://www.elizabethstreetgarden.com/videos/2019/6/22/elizabeth-street-garden-community>

Elizabeth Street Garden
Proposal



Introduction Statement

Elizabeth Street Garden is a unique community sculpture garden cherished by many people from the surrounding neighborhood as well as from around the city and the world. Over 150,000 people visit the garden annually. The volunteer-based nonprofit of the same name manages the space, offering hundreds of free public events for the community throughout the year including, wellness programs, live music & poetry, movie screenings, and educational events for the local public schools.

Despite wide support from residents, local organizations, local representatives, and the community board, the City is seeking to replace the garden in order to construct 123 units of senior affordable housing, retail, and office space for the developer partner.

We recognize the need for affordable housing and support the development of more affordable housing at alternative sites, including at 388 Hudson Street which is located in the same Community board district and can provide up to 3 - 5 times as much senior housing (350-380 units). Additionally, we are aware of other existing potential sites within the same City Council District 1 that could provide approximately 295-325 units for affordable housing. Both opportunities offer a solution that achieves more affordable housing without destroying Elizabeth Street Garden, which exists in a neighborhood already underserved in terms of public open space. This solution achieves more housing and more green space and neither at the expense of one another.

Preserving Elizabeth Street Garden as a Conservation Land Trust is the best, most cost-effective way to preserve the garden in its entirety as a public community green space for all. Elizabeth Street Garden (ESG) already fulfills all of the functions of a Conservation Land Trust including keeping the garden open to the public, providing public programs, and managing all garden maintenance and expenses. All of this is provided as a public amenity at no cost to the city whatsoever.

As a Conservation Land Trust, the organization would require no City funding in order to continue and expand upon the garden's operations; including public programs and open hours. While there are alternative methods for preserving the garden, such as transferring the land to NYC Parks Department or under the GreenThumb program, continuing to operate the garden independently would save these agencies funds and resources that could be better utilized with other green spaces across the district.

Ensuring that all of the unique statuary and architectural elements of the garden remain maintained and on display for the community is a crucial element to preserving the garden in its entirety. Preserving the garden as a Conservation Land Trust would ensure that all of the unique qualities remain in the garden while maintaining community involvement in the space. The unique qualities of the garden are what have inspired so many people to organize so passionately to protect this beloved community space. For all these reasons, we urge the City, Mayor Eric Adams, and HPD to join our community in embracing and preserving Elizabeth Street Garden.





Elizabeth Street Garden Provides

A chance to engage with nature in the middle of the city

+20,000 sq ft of
open green space

Official Monarch
butterfly waystation

Recreational
space & seating

Trees, raised flower beds,
landscaped greenery
& native plant species

Certified wildlife habitat
recognized by the National
Wildlife Federation

WWW.ELIZABETHSTREETGARDEN.COM



A Space for Community

Free public programs
year round

Garden sustainability & educational
workshops with local Public Schools

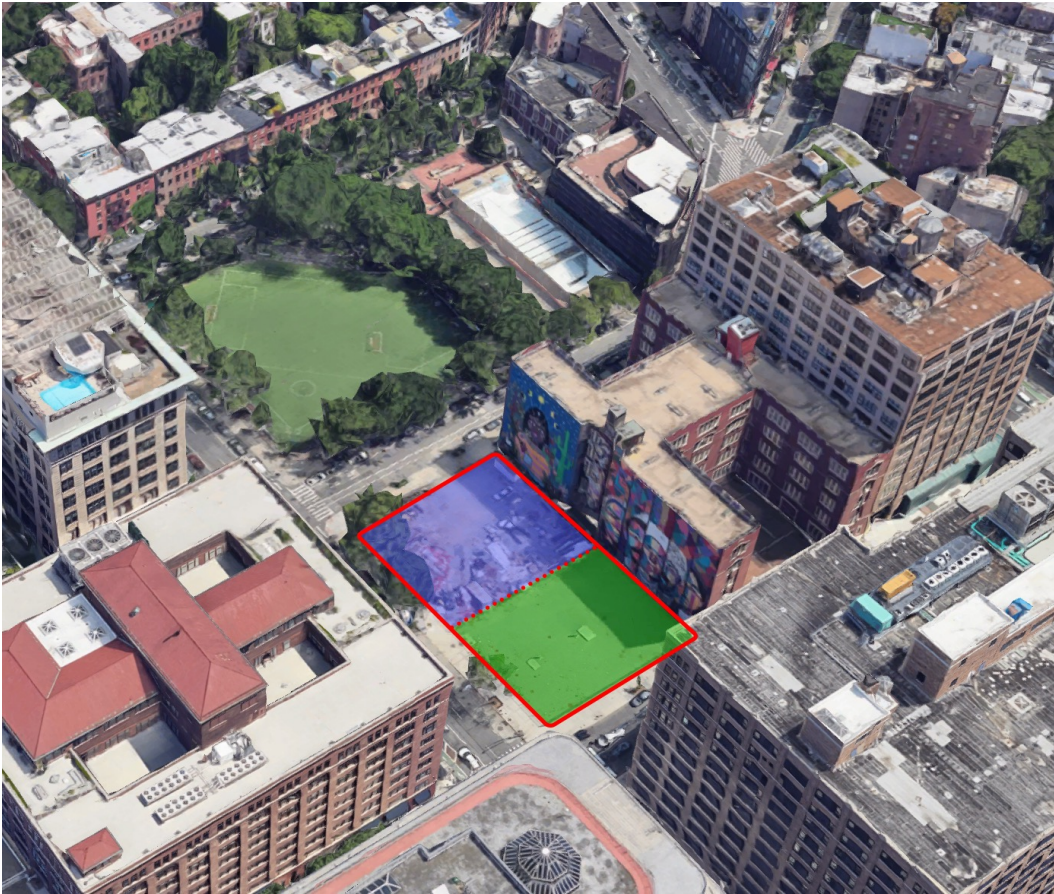
Well-being, arts and culture,
& holiday events

Hundreds of volunteers, local
contributors, and partners

WWW.ELIZABETHSTREETGARDEN.COM

388 Hudson Street

An Alternative to Elizabeth Street Garden, **proposed by Councilmember Christopher Marte**



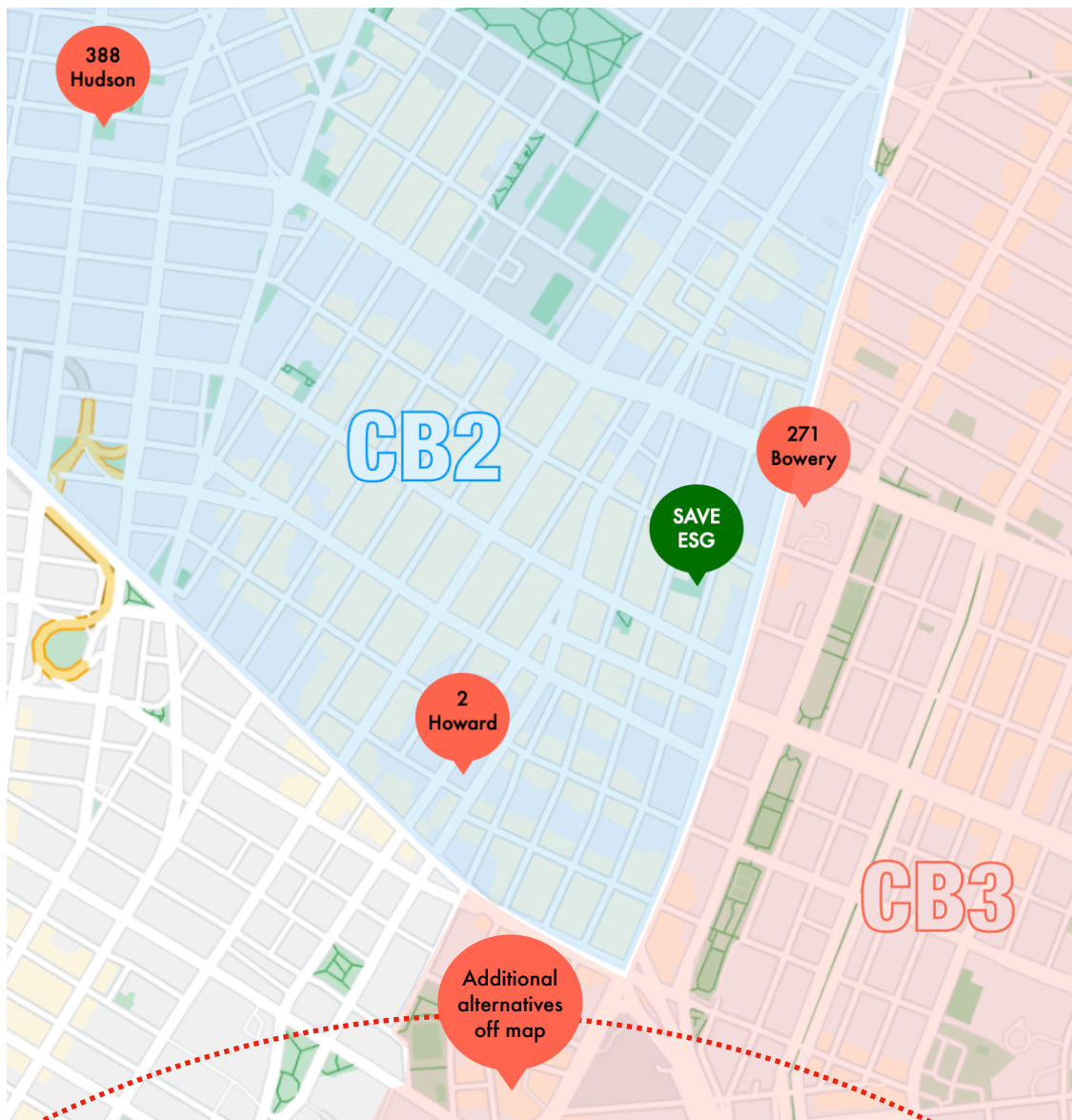
- Existing zoning is M1-5, from the areas past manufacturing uses.
- Site area is 25,000 SqFt with an existing DEP easement covering 9,375 SqFt of the southern portion of the lot.
- Approximately 15,600 SqFt of buildable area exists on the lot.
- Site Opportunity includes:
 - Rezone north portion of the lot to R10 or R10 equivalent for community facility & affordable housing.
 - Open green space opportunity on DEP easement - similar to Rapkin-Gayle Plaza & Manuel Plaza.

Hudson Square Zoning Changes

- Nearby rezonings include Special Hudson Square District, Special Hudson River Park District, and Special SoHo-NoHo Mixed Use District
- Recent rezonings in area all incorporate to some extent R10 or R10 equivalent provisions, with up to 12 FAR with inclusionary housing
- Local rezonings have all updated area to allow for more residential and commercial density
- Block in question includes a five-story school and a 12-story commercial building

Win - Win Solution

- Currently the City plans to build an affordable housing project in Little Italy, slated to be built at the existing site of Elizabeth Street Garden
- Our community, local organizations, and elected officials agree that this housing development can be located elsewhere to preserve this needed green space and achieve more units of housing.
- We are aware of additional alternative sites within the same City Council District 1 that could provide approximately 295 - 325 units for affordable housing, in addition to 388 Hudson Street.
- A funding transfer from Haven Green, in collaboration with upzonings from the Council, can realize up to approximately 705 new affordable housing units and preserve Elizabeth Street Garden



Alternative Site Comparison

388 Hudson

- Approx. 250 - 280k SqFt Residential
- Approx. 350 - 380 affordable units
- Approx. 25 - 32k SqFt community facility



2 Howard

- Zoning M1-5/R10
- Approx. 89k SqFt Residential
- Approx. 205 affordable units



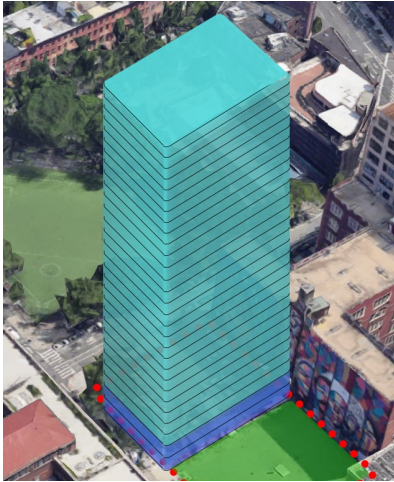
271 Bowery

- Zoning R8X/C6-1/C2-5
- Approx. 15k SqFt Residential
- Approx. 30 - 50 affordable units



Other Potential Citycouncil D1 Site(s)

- Approx. 30 - 40k SqFt Residential
- Approx. 60 - 70 affordable units
- Approx. 4 - 6k SqFt community facility



Total Achieved

- Approx. 384k - 424k SqFt Residential
- Approx. 645 - 705 affordable units
- Approx. 29 - 38k SqFt community facility

VS



Haven Green Development

- 78k SqFt Residential
- 123 affordable units
- 11k SqFt Office Space



ELIZABETH STREET GARDEN

CONSERVATION LAND TRUST REPORT

SUPPORTERS

ESG'S CONSERVATION LAND TRUST PLAN IS SUPPORTED BY THE FOLLOWING LOCAL BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS

ORGANIZATIONS

Bowery Alliance Of Neighbors
Brooklyn Queens Land Trust
Center for Italian Modern Art
Chinatown YMCA
Coalition to Protect Chinatown
Earth Celebrations
East River Park Action
Green Guerillas
iDig2Learn
Inside Out Project
Inspired Word NYC
Inwood Legal Action
Loisaida United Neighborhood Gardens (LUNGS)
Metro Area Governors Island Coalition (MAGIC)
Make Music NY
Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space
Movement to Protect the People (MTOPP)
Moving Forward Unidos
Northern Manhattan Community Land Trust
NYC Community Garden Coalition
Pathway to Paris
Preserve Our Brooklyn Neighborhoods
Sierra Club NYC
The Cultural Landscape Foundation
Think!Chinatown
TIME'S UP!

LOCAL BUSINESSES

Ahlem
Albanese Butcher
American Vintage
Bag-All Inc
Bagel Boss
Balzem
Bash
Bisou
Bronson's Burgers
Buck Mason
Cafe Habana
Cafe Ino
Café Select
Cafetal Social Club
Clare V.
Coclico NOLITA
Codex Books
Concrete Love
Corridor NYC
Credo Beauty
Cuyana
DECIEM The Abnormal Beauty Company
Descendant of Thieves
Diptyque
Eileen's Cheesecake
Emporio
Epistrophy
Ermine New York
Felix
Fiat Café
Fjällräven
Fried Rice NYC
Gelateria Gentile
Gorjana
Hair Philosophy
Hit House
INA
Industry of All Nations
Isalis
Jack's Wife Freda
Judi Rosen New York
Juice Press
Kiehl's
Kimika
La Colombe
La Esquina
Le Labo
Les Miss
Little Cupcake Bakeshop
Little Rascal
Little Moony
Loeffler Randall
Lombardi's
Lovely Day
Lunya
Malin + Goetz Nolita
Marine Layer
McNally Jackson Bookstore
Modern Mystic Shop
Mizensir
Noah NY
Nolita Wine Merchants
Nom Wah Nolita
Nudie Jeans
Numi
Only Hearts
Overthrow
Parisi Bakery
Parm
Peasant
Pietro Nolita
Plantshed
Plump Cosmetics
Print Fresh
Rubirosa
Ruby's
Scent Bar NYC
Schott NYC
Soludos
Standard & Strange
Thai Diner
The 420: A CBD Store
Taiim
The Grey Dog
The Meadow
The Musket Room
The Nolitan Hotel
Tom & Jerry's
Variazioni
Velasca
Vince
Wayan
Wayla
Westerlind
Wine Therapy
YAMA Hair Salon
Yours Truly
Zooba

UP-TO-DATE SUPPORTER LIST AND DIGITAL VERSION CAN BE FOUND AT

WWW.ELIZABETHSTREETGARDEN.COM/CLT

INTRODUCTION

ELIZABETH STREET GARDEN is a community sculpture garden located in the neighborhood of Little Italy, Manhattan. The Garden is kept open to the public by neighborhood volunteers and offers hundreds of free public programs amidst just over 20,000 square feet of public green space and ornamental sculptures. Elizabeth Street Garden, Inc. (ESG) is the 501(c)3 nonprofit that oversees all operations in the Garden including maintenance, programming, fundraising, and administrative duties.



SITE HISTORY OF ESG

To view our full timeline, visit ElizabethStreetGarden.com/intro

1822

The Free School Society builds a progressive public school that undergoes future expansions

1975

After many successful years, the Public School is torn down, leaving half of the block vacant

1981

Little Italy Restoration Apartments builds affordable housing on the lower half of the lot, leaving the future garden plot vacant

1991

City enters month to month lease with Allan Reiver, who plants trees and greenery and installs sculptures creating the foundation of the Garden

2005

Upon acquiring the adjacent building, Reiver provides limited public access to the garden through Elizabeth Street Gallery.

2012

City Councilmember Margaret Chin slates Garden to be destroyed for affordable housing in a backroom deal with no community review

2013

Community organizes to help revitalize the Garden, expanding public accessibility and free public programming

2018

City begins formal Land Use Process after awarding the Garden lot development project to selected developer

2019

After 6 years of community outreach, ESG files lawsuit against the City to stop the development that would destroy the garden

Present Day

Despite the city's attempt to circumvent the pending court case with eviction, ESG continues to remain open to the public, advocating for the preservation of the Garden

WE ARE PROUD TO HAVE EXPANDED THE GARDEN'S PUBLIC ACCESSIBILITY OVER THE LAST 9+ YEARS. AS ESG CONTINUES OUR WORK TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE THE GARDEN, WE ENVISION A BRIGHT FUTURE IN PRESERVING THIS LAND AS A CONSERVATION LAND TRUST.

WHAT IS A LAND TRUST?

A land trust is a nonprofit organization that owns and manages land.

A **Conservation Land Trust** is a nonprofit corporation in the US that acquires land or conservation easements for the purpose of preserving open space, natural areas, waterways, and/or productive farms and forests.



Brooklyn Queens Land Trust



New York Restoration Project

URBAN GARDEN CONNECTIONS

Bronx Land Trust • Manhattan Land Trust

LAND TRUST EXAMPLES

Multi-Site Land Trusts

New York Restoration Project

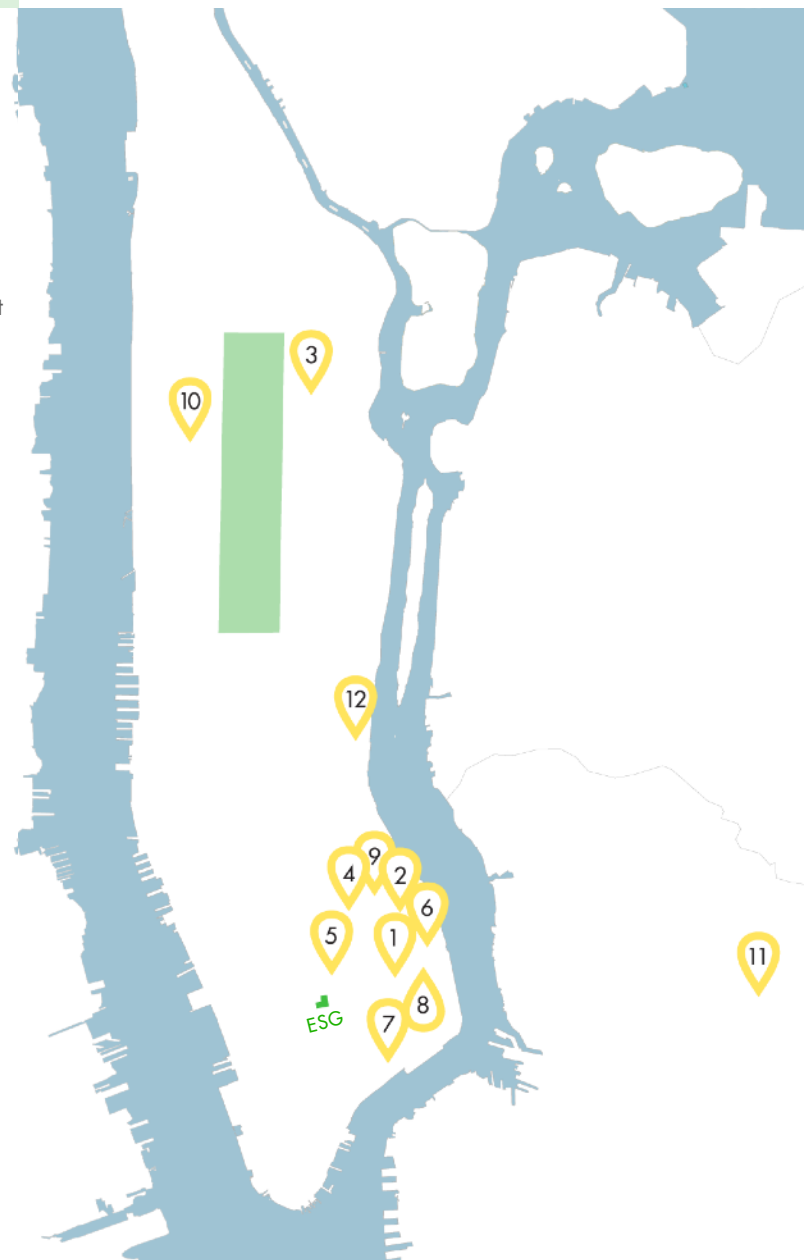
- 1 The Dorothy Strelsin Memorial Community Garden, 174 Suffolk St
- 2 Toyota East Children's Learning Garden, 603 E. 11th St
- 3 103rd Street Community Garden, 105 East 103rd St

Manhattan Land Trust

- 4 11 Street Community Garden, 422 E 11th St
- 5 Albert's Garden, 18 E 2nd St
- 6 All People's Garden, 295 E 3rd St
- 7 Lower East Side People Care, 25 Rutgers St
- 8 Parque de Tranquilidad, 318 E 4th St

Single-site Land Trusts / Nonprofits

- 9 El Sol Brillante, E 12th St btwn 1st Ave and Ave A
- 10 West Side Community Garden, 123 w 89 St
- 11 Arboleda de Ninos/Children's grove, 1480 Myrtle Ave
- 12 Tudor City Greens, 38 Tudor City Pl



LAND OWNERSHIP

How can the Garden become a CLT under ESG? ESG already performs all the functions of a CLT. The last step to establishing ESG as a CLT is a transfer of ownership of the garden lot to ESG.

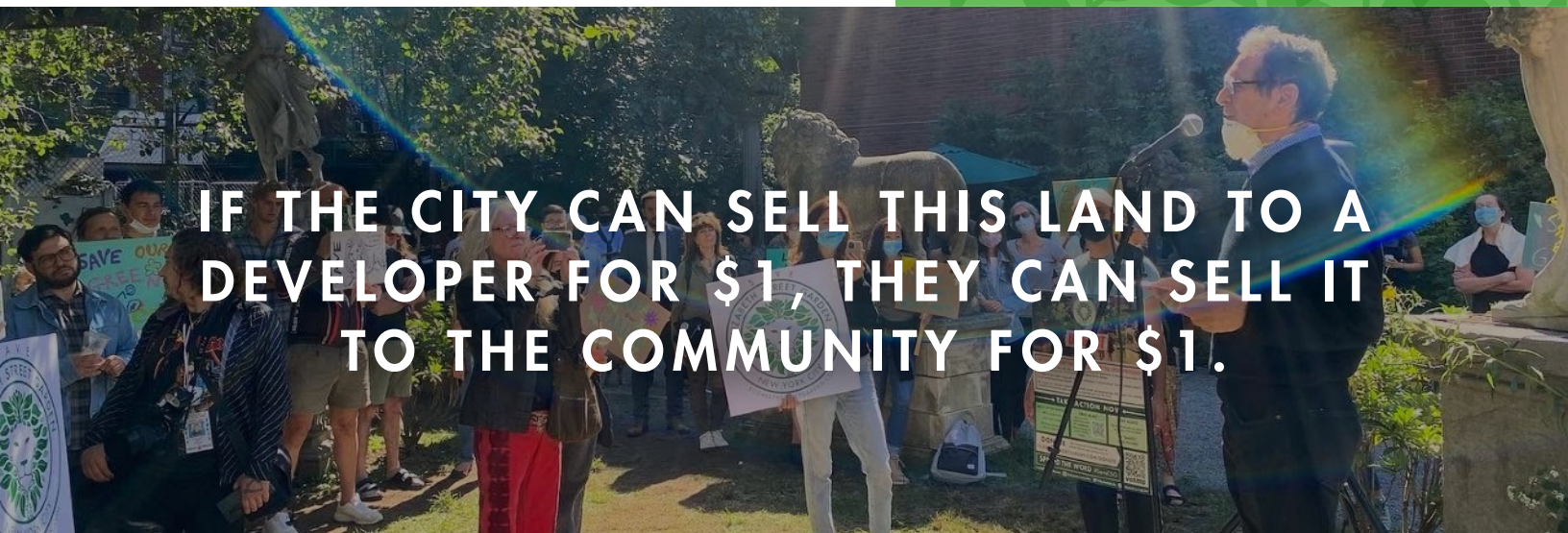
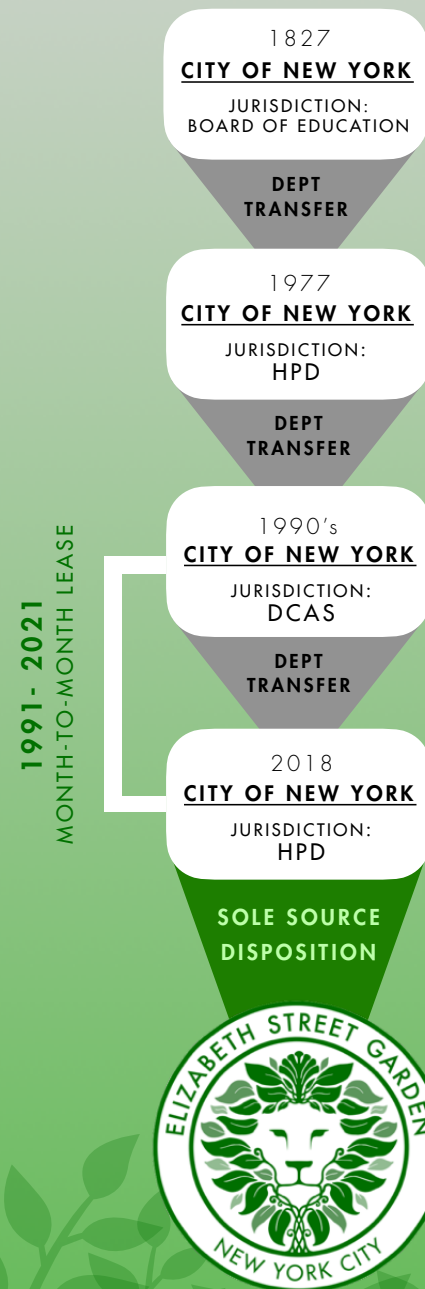
CONVEYANCE FROM THE CITY

Once the City of New York determines that it will convey the garden to ESG, in the group's capacity as a single-site land trust, the parties must determine the best mechanism for the transfer.

Most City-owned property is controlled by the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) and can only be transferred via public auction (i.e. to the highest bidder). However, two agencies — the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), and the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) — can convey a property via "sole source disposition" to a designated organization. Since HPD currently controls the property, a direct conveyance to ESG may be the most feasible option.*

*If there are obstacles to HPD conveyance, there is a precedent for EDC involvement: EDC was the vehicle identified by the Mayor's Office in 1999 for conveyance of 114 community garden to The Trust for Public Land and New York Restoration Project.

GARDEN LOT OWNERSHIP



IF THE CITY CAN SELL THIS LAND TO A DEVELOPER FOR \$1, THEY CAN SELL IT TO THE COMMUNITY FOR \$1.

PROTECTING THE LAND AS A PERMANENT COMMUNITY GARDEN

Conveyance of the land to ESG does, by itself, provide significant protection for the garden. ESG's status as a NY State nonprofit corporation, and its federal 501(c)3 tax exempt status, depend on the organization's adherence to its mission of operating and protecting the garden.

Several legal mechanisms are available to further insure that, once conveyed to ESG, the site will remain a public open space in perpetuity. The most common mechanisms are deed restrictions and conservation easements. According to The Land Trust Alliance (LTA), "**deed restrictions** and **conservation easements** are essentially the same thing, a legally binding restriction on the use of land in the form of a written instrument that affects the title to the land and is generally recorded where deeds are recorded." Both mechanisms generally "run with the land", meaning that any future owner will discover these mechanisms via a deed search and will be required to adhere to them.



DEED RESTRICTIONS

In the small number of cases where the City of NY has conveyed community gardens to land trusts, deed restrictions have been commonly used.

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, The Trust for Public Land worked with several gardens (operating as single-site land trusts) to acquire land from the City. In these cases, the City placed a restriction in the recorded deed to the property, stating that "*the use of the property is restricted to nonprofit community organizations for open space purposes,*" adding that "*in the event that such use shall be discontinued, title shall revert to the City.*"

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Conservation easements are used to protect over 2/3 of the 25 million acres preserved by land trusts in the U.S. *source: LTA, 2015 Land Trust Census Report*

Unlike the use of deed restrictions, which simply involves adding restrictive language to the deed that is exchanged between two parties, easements require an additional real estate document and an additional party to the transaction.

In this scenario, the City would convey the garden to Elizabeth Street Garden Inc. (ESG) and ESG would then convey (via an additional recorded deed) a conservation easement to a third party—generally a nonprofit—that is entrusted to monitor and enforce the specific open space restrictions contained in the easement document.

ESG AS A CLT

ESG wants to save the Garden we all know and love! For this reason, we aim to protect & preserve the Garden in a way that allows the unique qualities, statuary, and architectural aspects to remain, while providing the public open green space our community desperately needs at no cost to the City.

BENEFITS OF BECOMING A CLT

- ✓ Preserving unique garden qualities
- ✓ Community governance
- ✓ Financial independence
- ✓ Saving NYC Parks Budget

UNIQUE QUALITIES

As a Conservation Land Trust, the Garden would be saved in perpetuity and the statuary and architectural elements would remain. ESG already owns key historical elements such as the balustrade along the main walkway and the Olmstead Gazebo located on the front lawn.

If the garden were transferred to NYC Parks Dept, most if not all of the statuary would be removed. Any monuments on Mapped Park Land would have to be accepted into the City's collection and reinstalled, costing thousands of dollars.

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

As a CLT, the garden would be managed by the people for the people. ESG is a volunteer-based nonprofit where neighborhood volunteers keep the garden open, plans, and facilitate public programming, and more! Currently, Volunteers supervise and manage the garden by signing up for 1 hour time slots. If paired with staff/interns, volunteers slots could be offered primarily during the weekend. Volunteer slots provide the opportunity to strengthen and grow the sense of community where neighbors have the opportunity to meet one another and foster a relationship. Staff could be used to expand operating hours, especially during the colder months and weekdays.



FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

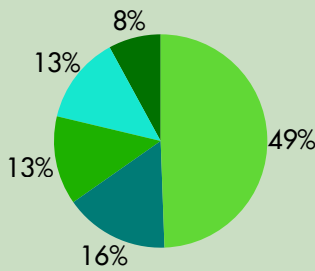
As a Conservation Land Trust, ESG will require no City funding in order to maintain the Garden's physical upkeep, hundreds of free public programs, staffing, and future plans. In fact, approximately 75% of ESGs budget goes to legal fees. **Imagine what we could do with those funds if the Garden is saved!**

WITH THE GARDEN NO LONGER AT RISK, ESG COULD DIRECT FUNDS TOWARDS

- ❖ Expanding operating hours and accessibility
- ❖ Building new components such as a greenhouse, composting station, covered area with solar panels.
- ❖ Establishing our very own ESG grant program for other community gardens around the city.

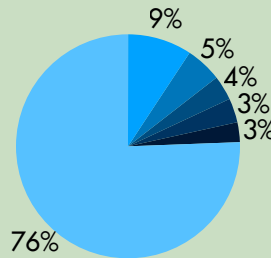


Earnings



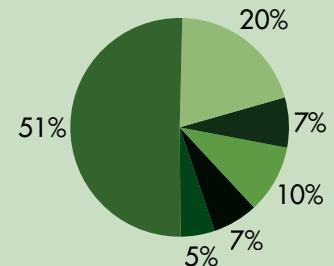
- Garden Rentals
- Grants
- Garden Cash Box
- Unrestricted Donation
- Donated Goods

Expenses



- Legal Fees
- Admin Fees
- Staff Wages
- Programming & Events
- Garden Lot Utilities
- Maintenance

Projected Expenses if Saved



- Garden Improvements
- Admin
- Garden Lot Utilities
- Staff Wages
- Programming & Events
- Maintenance

SAVING NYC PARKS BUDGET

ESG recognizes that there are alternative methods for preserving the garden, such as transferring the land to NYC Parks Department as mapped parkland or under the GreenThumb program.

While these other methods would also preserve the garden, continuing to operate ESG independently could save Parks Department funds for other green space initiatives across the district and the five boroughs, increasing park equity for all.

Potential project suggestions collected from a mixture of CD1 public participatory budget projects, CB1, 2, & 3 Fiscal year requests.

- ❖ Supporting city green infrastructure program (DEP) - to assure all city parks and green streets have pervious green space and adequate stormwater capture
- ❖ Increasing Parks Dept staff in district 1 for improved upkeep and maintenance of district parks
- ❖ Park additions/improvements beneath Manhattan anchorage of Brooklyn Bridge and Revitalizing Coleman Skatepark
- ❖ Restoring and reopening Brooklyn Bridge Bank Open Space
- ❖ Creating public open space to better utilize the areas underneath the Manhattan side of the Williamsburg Bridge
- ❖ Allen Street Mall renovation for community usage
- ❖ SDR improvements - upkeep, improvements, addition of dog-run
- ❖ Columbus Park improvements - fountains and sprinklers
- ❖ Seward Park Playground renovations

PROJECTED ESG PROJECTS

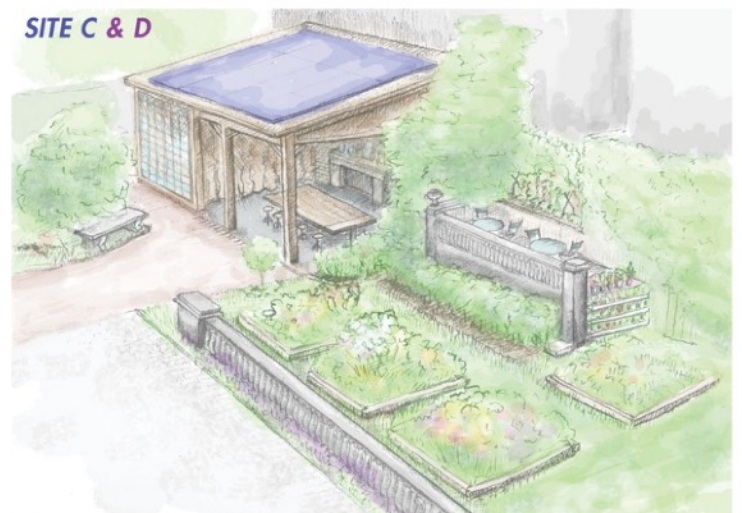
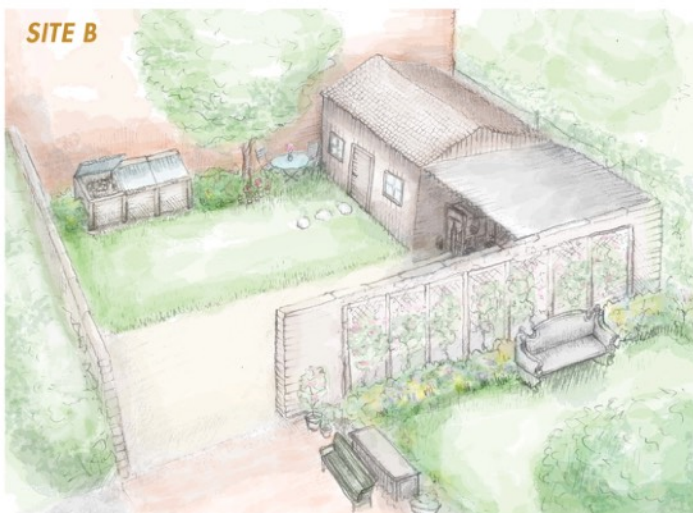
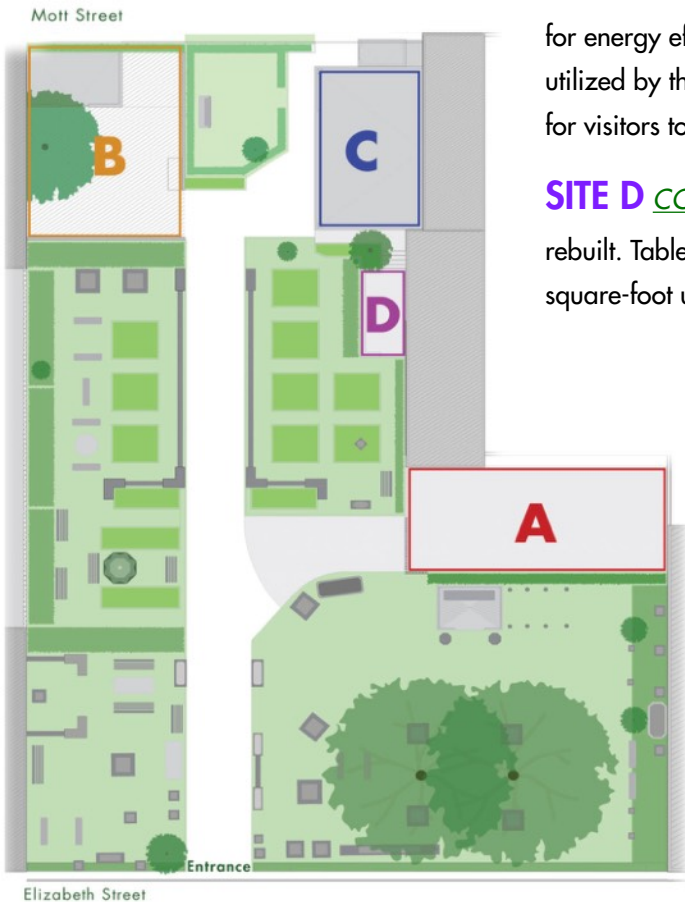
GARDEN IMPROVEMENTS

SITE A ESG will use this area to build a new greenhouse conservatory for year-round gardening, harvesting & food security. Year-round Public School workshops will be expanded to allow students to continue learning about seed growth and cultivation through the winter.

SITE B This area will be cleaned to make room for a composting station and improved volunteer and storage shed.

SITE C The roof of the lean-to will be restored and equipped with solar panels for energy efficiency. The structure will be further outfitted so that it can be better utilized by the public through the winter. A community lending library will be built for visitors to share and enjoy.

SITE D COMPLETED IN 2021 Stairs to the existing balcony will be rebuilt. Tables and chairs will be added to increase accessibility and square-foot usage.



PROJECTED ESG PROJECTS CONTINUED

EXPANDING PUBLIC HOURS

Utilizing a combination of hired staff and volunteers, ESG could expand open hours to the public to increase accessibility.

2021 HRS	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Weekdays	11 am - 5 pm	11 am - 6 pm	11 am - 5 pm	Noon - 4 pm
Weekends	10 am - 5 pm	10 am - 6 pm	10 am - 5 pm	11 am - 4 pm

Projected HRS	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
Weekdays	9 am - Sunset	9 am - Sunset	10 am - Sunset	10 am - Sunset
Weekends	9 am - Sunset	9 am - Sunset	10 am - Sunset	10 am - Sunset



GARDEN GATE RENOVATION

The main entry gates would be replaced with existing mid-century French cast iron gates and the existing chainlink fence along the perimeter would be replaced with the classic NYC Parks steel fence for a more aesthetically appealing design.



ESG GRANT PROGRAM

Establishing our very own Elizabeth Street Garden grant program to support other community gardens across the city. Nonprofit community gardens across the city could always use more funding. With one average garden rental, ESG could offer several grants to support operating expenditures such as water, maintenance, gardening supplies, and educational project budgets.





OUR MISSION: TO PROTECT & PRESERVE THE MAGIC OF ELIZABETH STREET GARDEN AS A PUBLIC COMMUNITY GREEN SPACE AND TO DETERMINE HOW THE CITY OF NEW YORK TOGETHER WITH THE COMMUNITY CAN PROTECT THIS SPACE FOR GENERATIONS TO ENJOY.

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Joseph Reiver

SECRETARY

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SPECIAL THANKS TO ANDY STONE

FOR HIS RESEARCH AND COLLABORATION ON THIS REPORT

ElizabethStreetGarden.com | info@elizabethstreetgarden.com

 @ElizabethStreetGarden |  @ElizabethStGrdn

Testimony Provided by
Jutta Neumann, The Manhattan Land Trust (Treasurer) & Parque de Tranquilidad (Chair)
For the Committee on Parks and Recreation Budget Hearing
on the FY25 NYC Budget

June 18, 2024

Thank you to Chairman Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Jutta Neumann, and I am a member of Parque de Tranquilidad (Chair) & The Manhattan Land trust (Treasurer) located in Manhattan. Our garden, Parque de Tranquilidad, has a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our neighborhood.

As a member of the Green Guerillas [Council of Gardeners](#), a dynamic coalition uniting community gardeners across New York City, I want to highlight several crucial recommendations for advancing a sustainable and equitable food system in our city.

Recent 10% NYC budget cuts, particularly to the Department of Parks and Recreation, have severely affected NYC GreenThumb. This essential agency has seen a significant reduction in its budget, hindering its capacity to provide technical assistance, necessary supplies, and adequate staffing, thus impeding its ability to effectively support community gardeners. Therefore, we call upon the city to invest in:

1. Increasing funding to the Parks Equity Initiative (PEI) and allocating \$300,000 of PEI funds to create a pilot program empowering garden groups to access funds directly, through a simplified application and reporting process, fostering equity and sustainability.
2. Continuing to invest in A Greener NYC to empower local organizations in providing youth with green jobs, infrastructure, and advocacy opportunities to community gardeners.
3. Increase funding to the Get Stuff Clean initiative to enable the DOHMH Rat Academy to address rodent infestation and illegal dumping affecting community gardens, while also strengthening collaboration between DSNY and GreenThumb, and enhancing the relationship and outreach of the Department of Health & Mental Hygiene Rat Academy Training program with community gardeners for effective access to this citywide resource.
4. Restoring \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.
5. We support the [Play Fair Coalition](#) in asking for the Mayor to dedicate 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Community gardeners have been left to fend for themselves for decades. It is time for the city to invest in its communities and uplift the benefits community gardens contribute to neighborhood success. The budgetary constraints facing NYC Parks's GreenThumb division underscore the urgent need for our platform to focus on protecting and enhancing vital services and initiatives integral to the well-being of our city and its residents.

Jutta Neumann,
Parque de Tranquilidad & The Manhattan Land Trust

June 11, 2024

Maria Fernandez

██████████
Astoria, NY 11103

Dear Committee on Parks and Recreation:

I am submitting this written testimony to express my full support for Big Reuse to remain at the current Queensbridge composting site.

The Queensbridge composting site is supported by all local elected officials, CB1 and CB2 community boards, legal experts, 115 community orgs & over 3000 community members who have spoken out in support of extending their license agreement.

Big Reuse has run a successful community compost site on the Parks' controlled property under the Queensboro Bridge since 2011. With the permission of the Parks Department, in 2016 Big Reuse transformed a Parks space -- which had been squatted and illegally dumped on by a private contractor -- into a nationally recognized community composting and educational site. Big Reuse removed 40 dumpsters of construction waste from the lot, built out a composting facility, and designed and installed a bioswale for water draining off the bridge to prevent ongoing street flooding. Their community composting program has processed 3 million pounds of organic waste, worked with thousands of volunteers and provided free compost to hundreds of parks, schools, community gardens and greening groups.

Their work there has been hugely successful, efficient, and beneficial for Parks, our communities and NYC's climate goals:

1. They work with Parks to compost their leaves and wood chips (at no cost to the department), along with residential food scraps collected at community gardens, farmers markets and community groups.
2. They provide free compost to Queens Parks Horticulture, Greenthumb, and many other greening groups for community gardens and street tree care.
3. Local elected officials, community boards, and Parks' Community Input meetings all strongly support their composting site remaining.
4. They are advancing state and city goals for curbing global warming emissions and achieving Zero Waste to landfills.
5. The site itself represents a significant investment of city taxpayer funding, DSNY resources, and Big Reuse resources. Why waste that investment?

Big Reuse supports improvements to Baby Queensbridge Parks and make Parks more sustainable! Parks can move their current operations to barely used Parks parking lot instead of evicting their community composting site.

If you still somehow see a valid reason to evict this amazing organization, the Parks Department must allocate a valid space for them to continue contributing to our city.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Maria Fernandez
Astoria, NY

To: New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation
Tuesday, June 18, 2024

Dear Committee Chair Krishnan and Fellow City Council Members:

I belong to the 51-year-old Liz Christy Garden, the founding site of the New York City community-garden system, and of the Green Guerillas non-profit. We enjoy participating in the core economic structure of that system, now within the Parks Department.

GreenThumb, within Parks, requires that we open to the public 10 posted hours and 10 more varied hours each week. Since the gardens are entirely volunteer, Parks gains an additional 600 green spaces without paying any staff other than the small administrative unit at GreenThumb. In exchange, the gardeners are allowed to have a country weekend of cultivating these very valuable lots. We have always felt that this economic exchange is fair and that it is extremely beneficial for the city.

During tulip time in the spring , the Liz Christy Garden hosts around 400 visitors each weekend day. Once vacations begin after Memorial Day, we see the same number stretched over the longer day. We usually stay open from noon until dark.

I hope the Council will provide ample funding for all of the city's greening organizations. That money lessens other expenditures in physical and mental health, environmental problems, cooling, and food banks that the city would otherwise have to cover. The gardeners are genuinely happy to afford the city our free services. We are proud to have all of our visitors see our beautiful work.

Thank you,
Penny Jones

[REDACTED]

From: Shanee Helfer [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 17, 2024 5:04 PM
To: Testimony
Subject: [EXTERNAL] TESTIMONY: Community Gardens and Support for Urban Agriculture, 6/18/24

[REDACTED]

Thank you to Chairman Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Shanee Helfer, and I am a member of Harlem Rose Garden located in Manhattan. Our garden, Harlem Rose Garden, has a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our neighborhood.

As a member of the Green Guerillas [Council of Gardeners](#), a dynamic coalition uniting community gardeners across New York City, I want to highlight several crucial recommendations for advancing a sustainable and equitable food system in our city.

Recent 10% NYC budget cuts, particularly to the Department of Parks and Recreation, have severely affected NYC GreenThumb. This essential agency has seen a significant reduction in its budget, hindering its capacity to provide technical assistance, necessary supplies, and adequate staffing, thus impeding its ability to effectively support community gardeners. Therefore, we call upon the city to invest in:

1. Increasing funding to the Parks Equity Initiative (PEI) and allocating \$300,000 of PEI funds to create a pilot program empowering garden groups to access funds directly, through a simplified application and reporting process, fostering equity and sustainability.
2. Continuing to invest in A Greener NYC to empower local organizations in providing youth with green jobs, infrastructure, and advocacy opportunities to community gardeners.
3. Increase funding to the Get Stuff Clean initiative to enable the DOHMH Rat Academy to address rodent infestation and illegal dumping affecting community gardens, while also strengthening collaboration between DSNY and GreenThumb, and enhancing the relationship and outreach of the Department of Health & Mental Hygiene Rat Academy Training program with community gardeners for effective access to this citywide resource.
4. Restore \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb.
5. We support the [Play Fair Coalition](#) in asking for the Mayor to dedicate 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Community gardeners have been left to fend for themselves for decades. It is time for the city to invest in its communities and uplift the benefits community gardens contribute to neighborhood success. The budgetary constraints facing NYC Parks's GreenThumb division underscore the urgent need for our platform to focus on protecting and enhancing vital services and initiatives integral to the well-being of our city and its residents.

Shanee Helfer
Harlem Rose Garden, 129th Street, NY NY

Community composting is the most economical, ecological, engaging, and equitable way to process Parks yard waste. Composting locally reduces waste impact on other communities, improves surrounding green infrastructure, reduces diesel transportation emissions, and provides climate resiliency resources to community organizations.

Big Reuse provides sustainable waste management to Parks at no cost to Parks. I have personally volunteered to distribute community compost from Big Reuse to community gardens at East New York Farms and it is a vital resource for the community.

Monday, June 10th, 2024

11:00 am

Testimony for Meeting of City Council: Committee on Parks and Recreation

Greetings Council Members!

I am Valerie Hall, representing the 3200 Mickle Ave Block Association. We have embarked on a transformative project to convert the corner of Mickle and Burke Avenues into a community garden. This initiative aims to combat the persistent issue of unlawful dumping of debris and trash in that area.

For years, our community has raised numerous complaints to 311 about illegal activities and dumping on this site. Recently, Council Member Kevin Riley's office scheduled two clean-ups, the first on April 7, 2024, and the second on May 21, 2024. Unfortunately, we found that dumping resumed immediately after each clean-up. This situation prompted us to take proactive measures to beautify our neighborhood by establishing a community garden.

We are currently in the initial phases of this project. I decided to take action after consulting with Jahmal Yapp, Deputy Chief of Staff, and Cynthia Prisco, Legislative Coordinator and Constituent Services Director in Council Member Riley's office. Their guidance was invaluable in understanding the steps necessary to initiate this project. However, I discovered that there is no clear blueprint or written document on how to bring such an idea to fruition, despite the existence of other community gardens in the city.

I urge the attendees of this hearing to consider creating accessible guidelines for developing community gardens. This would greatly benefit citizens like us who are eager to improve our neighborhoods.

Through my correspondences, I learned the importance of involving community members most affected by the blight. Petitioning these members revealed a deep gratitude for this initiative, and many requested the re-establishment of the Block Association, previously led by the late J.W. Smith. From this initiative's inception, we discovered that our community members genuinely want to beautify where they live and are willing to organize behind common goals.

To date, the 3200 Mickle Ave Block Association has held two community meetings to plan the next steps and funding for our garden. We are also working towards reinstating our association as an official 501(c)(3) organization. This project has already succeeded in bringing estranged neighbors together and igniting a civic spirit in our community.

I appreciate your time and consideration and look forward to your support in making the development of community gardens more accessible to all citizens.

Thank you!

Valerie Hall

President, 3200 Mickle Ave Block Association

252-327-1627

3200blockassociation@gmail.com

Thank you to Chairman Krishnan and members of the Committee on Parks and Recreation for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Wendy Brawer, and I am a member of Siempre Verde Garden located in Manhattan. Our garden, Siempre Verde, has a rich history of community involvement and has been a vital green space in our neighborhood.

We need soil! please restore community composting as this is where the soil comes from for community gardens, street tree beds and parks. The City's compost collection just makes methane, which is a powerful greenhouse gas. The community composters make rich soil that keeps the city green and reduces climate change impacts!!

As a member of the Green Guerillas [Council of Gardeners](#), a dynamic coalition uniting community gardeners across New York City, I want to highlight several crucial recommendations for advancing a sustainable and equitable food system in our city.

Recent 10% NYC budget cuts, particularly to the Department of Parks and Recreation, have severely affected NYC GreenThumb. This essential agency has seen a significant reduction in its budget, hindering its capacity to provide technical assistance, necessary supplies, and adequate staffing, thus impeding its ability to effectively support community gardeners. Therefore, we call upon the city to invest in:

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3. Increase funding to the Get Stuff Clean initiative to enable the DOHMH Rat Academy to address rodent infestation and illegal dumping affecting community gardens, while also strengthening collaboration between DSNY and GreenThumb, and enhancing the relationship and outreach of the Department of Health & Mental Hygiene Rat Academy Training program with community gardeners for effective access to this citywide resource.
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5. We support the [Play Fair Coalition](#) in asking for the Mayor to dedicate 1% of the NYC Fiscal Budget to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

It is time for the city to invest in its communities and uplift the benefits community gardens contribute to neighborhood success. The budgetary constraints facing NYC Parks's GreenThumb division underscore the urgent need for our platform to focus on protecting and enhancing vital services and initiatives integral to the well-being of our city and its residents.

Wendy Brawer
Siempre Verde Garden
[REDACTED], NYC 10002

Topic: Community Garden hearing

History:

<https://www.thecity.nyc/environment/2019/7/8/21212170/locked-out-key-needed-for-this-unofficial-park-in-harlem>

Currently, the residents that live on 148th Street between 7/8 have an ongoing issue of a park with no name and no maintenance.

Why would HPD transfer a deed to a nonprofit that has no staff to maintain the park? Has no history of maintaining parks like Green Thumb or Bette Midler's organization. Why would HPD transfer a deed to a nonprofit who was in the middle of being investigated and their then CEO went in jail. The developer received a tax break and the abatement gets changed, the city loses tax dollar income and the property gets transferred to a nonprofit that can't manage their current portfolio. The park keys were changed with no notification to the public, community board or local elected officials and this park has currently a bicycle unlock (see photo) on the gate below.

Over the years the residents have asked the following questions to HPD and HCCI with NO response. In addition, there is NO information on HCCI's website about the park and no information about the deed transfer by HPD. We have asked Mr. Malcom Punter the Executive Director upon learning of the deed transfer to HCCI if he would send out a press release that would alert the public, elected officials, CB10 and neighbors and he's yet to do that. We ask each year the following questions:

1. Maintenance budget - overall budget to manage park
2. Public access ability - hours of operations, how ppl gets keys
3. Should include lay out park rules
4. Better opportunity to promote better recycling on the street, and green initiatives
5. Mold issue - top priority - abutment wall
6. Budget for a community charrette

Questions submitted to HCCI -

Does HCCI own a lawn mower? Do they have staff to maintain the open space? How will the keys for the park be distributed and tracked? Is there a public review of the agreement before anything is signed? Does the CB get notified before the ink is dry? Local elected officials are they informed? Do you have a gardener on staff? Did you ever see the movie Being There? Can you hire Chauncey the Gardener? Will there be goals set for HCCI to request grants and beautify the area? Each year we have asked the same questions with NO response by HCCI's Executive Director and their head of real estate Sherrill Henry.

All NYC Housing & Preservation Development (HPD) could tell me is that HCCI was "responsible" for the park, so will they define this?

We need to have better transparency when deeds are transferred by HPD and any city agency of our public/private green spaces. We need better transparency when community agreements are made by developers where a public/private park was promised as part of the fact that the Guiliani administration gave away an entire street away for \$20 dollars and the old PS90 for a dollar. Right now, the park has a rat and mosquito infestation issue that has caused our coop, the Washington a big sanitary and environmental issue. The park is not being maintained and the rules on the sign do not reflect other NCY parks regulations like NO smoking. In the winter residents have to notify HCCI that they are responsible for shoveling the snow on the sidewalk in front of the park they are responsible for. To date we have reached out to the Public Advocate with no response thinking hey maybe they would want to advocate for better transparency and at the end of the street is Assembly Member Al Taylor whose office said, "it was not a problem". Yeah, rat infiltration is not a problem a block from his district office?

In conclusion, we all request that that public/private community agreements are reviewed by either the inspector general, dept of finance & landuse committees on a timely basis. Too many times we see developers making promises that are not fulfilled and this is a great example. We also should have better policies when deeds are transferred that there are public notices. This developer [L+M Development sells Asland Capital six-building Harlem site for \\$10M | Crain's New York Business \(crainsnewyork.com\)](#) made a profit while the community did not profit at all or benefit.

How do we change the narrative? Would the parks committee like to take a tour with me so I can showcase the daily mismanagement of this park by Harlem Congregation Improvement Development?

Wendy Frank



My name is Wesley Straton, I am a writer, bartender, and homeowner in Brooklyn (11207), writing to voice my support for Big Reuse's composting site in Queensbridge. Their license agreement must be renewed for the good of our parks, our city, and our planet.

For over a decade, this site has composted organic waste for the Parks Department and provided thousands of cubic yards of compost in return. It is arguably the only remaining truly functional composting program in New York City, and Parks' decision not to renew their licensing agreement will effectively bring all of that to an end. The composting of organic waste is one of the easiest and most effective ways for us to lower our city's greenhouse gas emissions, and as temperatures spike we must be increasing our composting, not cutting it further.

Moreover, local elected officials, community boards, and the community writ large overwhelmingly support the renewal of this site. To replace it with a parking lot would be an egregious and unnecessary slap in the face to all interested parties.

I love our city's parks and have enormous respect for the department that maintains them, but Big Reuse's eviction is a devastating mistake that must be corrected.

Please do the right thing and renew Big Reuse's licensing agreement.

Sincerely,

Wesley Straton

STOP BIG REUSE'S QUEENBRIDGE EXICTION

In the last ten years at site, Big Reuse has:

- Composted over 3 million pounds of Parks & Recreations Dept's leaves and wood chips and residential waste
- Provided over 3,000 cubic yards of compost back to NYC Parks
- Provided compost to hundreds of parks, schools, community gardens, and greening projects
- Worked with thousands of volunteers

At a time when we need to quadrupling our investment in climate solutions like community composting INSTEAD of the greenwashing campaign currently being run by the orange bins across the city, we CANNOT cut funds. Solving food waste is on of the most powerful solutions to cutting emissions that is right at our fingertips. We MUST continue to let Big Reuse fill the gap of the city government's responsibility AND continue to work as a city council to invest in community composting, gardening, and greening projects across the city. Thank you for supporting Big Reuse and thank you for your time to read this.

Sincerely,

A Concerned New York City Constituent

**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: June 18, 2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sharon Brown

Address: 130-10 140 Street suite 1

I represent: Rose Of Sharon Enterprises

Address: Jamaica N.Y. 11436

**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: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Justin Green

Address: _____

I represent: Big Reuse

Address: _____

**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: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ANNEHESE ZAUSNER - MANNE

Address: _____

I represent: BIG REUSE

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sherrice Palomino
Address: 250 Greenwich St
I represent: New Yorkers for Parks
Address: 250 Greenwich St

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Appearance Card

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

Date: 6/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matt Drury, Chief Citywide Legislative
Address: Affairs
I represent: Parks
Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 6/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Carlos Martinez, Chief of GreenThumb
Address: Affairs
I represent: Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture
Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
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Appearance Card

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

Date: 6/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Evan Burr, Deputy Director for

Address: MOVA Community Outreach + Partnership

I represent: Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture

Address: CRUKS

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: June 18, 2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anna Sacks

Address: [Redacted] 10024

I represent: self

Address:

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition oversight

Date:

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ERIC GOLDSTEIN

Address:

I represent: NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL

Address: 40 WEST 20 ST NY NY

**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: 6/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tyeshima Harris

Address: _____

I represent: Green Guerrillas

Address: _____

**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: 6.18.24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: CLARE MIFLIN

Address: _____

I represent: CENTER FOR ZERO

Address: WASTE DESIGN

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0642-2024 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anna Marie Vellone

Address: Flushing, NY

I represent: Paul Vellone

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. T2024-200 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 6/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brandon Pacheco

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. T2024-7006 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joseph Reive

Address: Elizabeth Street

I represent: Elizabeth St Garden

Address: _____

**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: 7/18/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chrissy Word

Address: _____

I represent: City Parks Foundation

Address: 830 Fifth Ave, New York

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 6/18/2014

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kerina Smith, Assistant Commissioner

Address: for community outreach & partnership

I represent: Land Development, Agriculture

Address: Parks

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆