

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

1

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

----- X

December 7, 2021

Start: 1:05 p. m.

Recess: 2:39 p. m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING (VIRTUAL ROOM 3)

B E F O R E: Hon. Peter Koo, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Joseph C. Borelli
Justin L. Brannan
Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
Fernando Cabrera
Darma V. Diaz
Eric Dinowitz
James F. Gennaro
Mark Gjonaj
Robert F. Holden
Mark Levine
Francisco P. Moya
Kevin C. Riley
Carlina Rivera
Eric A. Ulrich
James G. Van Bramer

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

A P P E A R A N C E S

Gabrielle Fialkoff,
Commissioner of the New York City Department of Parks
and Recreation

Margaret Nelson,
Deputy Commissioner for Urban Park Service and Public
Programs at the New York City Department of Parks and
Recreation

Matt Drury,
Director of Government Relations at the New York City
Department of Parks and Recreation

Sherrise Palomino,
Director of Advocacy and Programs at New Yorkers for
Parks

Neile Weissman,
Head of Complete George

Jessica Burke,
President at Friends of Crocheron & John Golden Park

Michael Schnall appearing on behalf of:
David Ludwig
Senior Director of Community Programs & Governmental
Affairs at Asphalt Green

David Small
Red Hook Resident

Jacqueline (Jacqui) Painter,
Founder of Red Hook Relief

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION

[BLANK]

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 4

2 SERGEANT SADOWSKY: Pc recording has started.

3 SERGEANT LEONARDO: Cloud is rolling.

4 SERGEANT SADOWSKY: Thank you.

5 SERGEANT PEREZ: Back... Back up is rolling.

6 SERGEANT SADOWSKY: Thank you, and good afternoon,
7 and welcome to today's remote New York City Council
8 Hearing of The Committee on Parks and Recreation.

9 At this time, would all council members and
10 council staff please turn on their video?

11 To minimize disruptions, please place all
12 electronic devices to vibrate or silent mode.

13 If you wish to submit testimony, you may do so at
14 testimony@council.nyc.gov, once again, that is
15 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

16 Thank you, Chair Koo, we are ready to begin.

17 CHAIRPERSON KOO: [**GAVEL**]

18 Thank you for joining our virtual hearing today
19 before the council's Committee on Parks and
20 Recreation.

21 I would like to acknowledge my fellow council
22 members on their presence. We have Council
23 Members... One second. We have Council Member
24 Rivera, Council Member Diaz, and Council Member
25 Riley, and Council Member Holden.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 5

2 Good afternoon, I am Peter Koo, Chair of the
3 Committee on Parks and Recreation. And, I would like
4 to welcome all of you to this public hearing, which
5 will examine answers to the Parks Department
6 recreational programs and facilities.

7 Today, The Parks Department operates and thirty-
8 six recreational centers throughout the five
9 boroughs. They offer services ranging from indoor
10 pools and weight rooms to basketball courts, dance
11 studios, boxing rings, art studios, game rooms,
12 afterschool programs, and even libraries.

13 Recreation centers offer a wide range of programs
14 as well, such as aerobics, tai chi, fencing, dancing,
15 theater, and sculpture. And, each center is equipped
16 with staff that provides, organizes, and prepare
17 activities for all age groups.

18 The city has long realized the value of promoting
19 physical activity to encourage healthy living among
20 all groups of New Yorkers.

21 At today's hearing, we will examine the overall
22 state of the Parks Department recreation centers when
23 it comes to maintenance, programmatic offerings,
24 accessibility, and members safety during the COVID-19
25 pandemic.

The Parks Department has operated recreation centers since the turn of the 20th century. They are a hallmark of the progressive history of the city, and its efforts to provide opportunities to all of its residents.

The city should take every reasonable step we can to encourage more participation in physical activity and other types of recreation.

Recreation centers are one of the major vehicles at the city's disposal towards promoting and encouraging physical activities and other types of recreation.

Recreation centers are open all year round, and during inclement weather or the winter months recreation centers offer consistent opportunities for social interactions and recreation to many of the New Yorkers who could be isolated otherwise. It is therefore critical that the city do all it can to promote its recreation centers and ensure that they are well-staffed and maintained so that more and more New Yorkers can make use of them.

It is important that Parks has a plan to keep recreation centers open and keep members safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Membership and attendance rates have also varied over the years. In 2011, the membership rates at recreation centers were essentially doubled in order to close a \$2.4 billion budget gap. The adopted plan consisted of adults paying \$150, up from \$75 for centers with pools, \$100, up from \$50 for centers without pools, and seniors paid \$25, up from \$10. Children 18 and under continue to have free admission.

In 2016, the council passed Local Law 18 to address concerns about the high fees and declining attendance in membership rates, which created discounted membership tiers and fees for youths under 18, seniors, disabled persons, and veterans. This resulted in an almost immediate uptick in attendance.

However, the most recent numbers indicate that membership and attendance numbers fell from fiscal year 2017 to the current one.

For example, attendance fell from 3.4 million in 2017 to 1.9 million in 2020 while membership fell from 161,000 in 2017 to 142,000 in 2020.

The recent pandemic has had a significant impact on attendance and memberships, especially since

recreation centers were closed in March 2020 to keep them safe from exposure to the virus.

Additionally, there have been concerns over the years regarding the maintenance and upkeep at some recreation centers.

Nearly half of the city's recreation centers were built prior to 1950, which is now resulting in weakening infrastructures at certain facilities, and moreover facilities have not received renovations since they were constructed. This is causing recreation centers to close for renovations. For example, the Tony Dapolito Recreation Center in Greenwich Village closed in July of this year. Flushing Meadows Corona Park Aquatic Center, which opened in 2008, closed last year for renovations. And, six pools in recreation centers throughout the city have also been closed for renovations.

However, recreation centers are once again open to the public for recreation use, and Parks have offered, for a limited time, free memberships to residents who signed up between September 7th and December 31st of this year.

The free membership will last for one year from the date the individual signs up. Members have access to facilities citywide.

I am eager to explore an update on attendance and memberships at recreation centers and what else Parks is doing to incentivize members of the public to use those facilities after their reopening.

I would also like to explore how Parks maintains and upgrades these facilities so that New York City residents can take advantage of our recreational facilities and maintain a healthier lifestyle.

Also, the committee wants to ensure that our recreation centers must have resources they need to maintain their level of service and are able to grow in the long-term.

So many New Yorkers rely on the Parks and Recreation centers for the services and programs that they offer. So, we have put forward every effort to maintain a dynamic recreational environment for current and future generations of New Yorkers.

I look forward to discussing these issues at today's hearing and examining what other possibilities are out there for improving resources for our parks. Thank you.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 10

2 We are also joined by Council Members Gennaro,
3 Gjonaj, Council Member Cabrera, Council Member
4 Dinowitz, Council Member Rivera, and Council Member
5 Holden.

6 I will now turn you over to our moderator,
7 Committee Counsel Kris Sartori to go over some
8 procedural items.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair Koo, I'll m
10 Kris Sartori, Senior Counsel to the Committee on
11 Parks and Recreation, and I'll be moderating this
12 hearing.

13 Before we begin, I'd like to remind everyone that
14 you will be on mute until you are called on to
15 testify, at which point you will then be unmuted by
16 the host.

17 During the hearing, I will be calling on panelist
18 to testify, so please listen for your name to be
19 called, as I will periodically be announcing who the
20 following panelists will be.

21 We will first be hearing testimony from the Parks
22 Department followed by testimony from members of the
23 public.

24 During the hearing if council members would like
25 to ask a question of the administration or of a

specific panelist, please use the Zoom Raise Hand Function, and I will call on you in order.

Council member questions will be limited to five minutes, including the time it takes to answer those questions.

For members of the public, speaking time will be limited to three minutes in order to accommodate all who wish to speak today.

Once you are called on to testify, please begin by stating your name and the organization you represent if any.

I will now call on representatives of the administration to testify. Appearing today for The Department of Parks and Recreation will be Gabrielle Fialkoff, Commissioner of the department, Margaret Nelson, Deputy Commissioner for Urban Park Service and Public Programs, and Matt Drury Director of Government Relations.

And, at this time I will administer the affirmation to each representative of the Parks Department. I will call on each of you individually for a response.

So, at this time, please raise your right hands.

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 12

2 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth,
3 and nothing by the truth, before this committee, and
4 to respond honestly to council member questions?

5 Commissioner Fialkoff?

6 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Yes.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

8 Deputy Commissioner Nelson?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Yes.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

11 And, Director Drury?

12 DIRECTOR DRURY: Yes.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

14 At this time, I will invite Commissioner Fialkoff
15 and Deputy Commissioner Nelson to present their
16 testimony.

17 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you.

18 Good afternoon, Chair Koo, members of The Parks
19 Committee, and other members of the council. I am
20 Gabrielle Fialkoff, The Commissioner for New York
21 City Parks.

22 I am thrilled to be here with you today, joined
23 by Margaret Nelson, our Deputy Commissioner for Urban
24 Parks Service and Public Programs, and Matt Drury our
25 Director of Government Relations.

Commissioner Nelson will be providing testimony for today's specific topic, but as we approach the end of this calendar year, this legislative session, and this administration, I wanted to take a few moments before to provide some thoughts on the successes and challenges experienced by the agency.

First and foremost, I want to thank Chair Koo for his leadership of this committee and for his dedicated public service for New Yorkers, and offer congratulations on an impressive career in the city council. We have very much appreciated your advocacy for parks and open space, and have enjoyed working with you and your fantastic district and committee staff in a productive spirit of partnership.

I also want to thank the other members of the Parks Committee and other council members for their service and for working alongside us towards our shared goal of providing New Yorkers with the wonderful parks system they need and deserve.

The council support for the agency including the Play Fair Public Advocacy Campaign has been tremendously beneficial in ensuring that the agency has the resources it needs to get the job done.

Mayor de Blasio granted me an incredible privilege in being able to lead this agency, and I thank him for his strong commitment to making our parks system more equitable, inclusive, and resilient.

Most of all, I want to thank our incredible team of dedicated parks staff who keep our parks safe, clean, and accessible. Serving alongside them as Commissioner is truly an honor.

These recent years have been challenging and complicated times for the Parks Department as New York continues to grapple with COVID and the new normal created by the global pandemic. But, over the course of this administration, New York City Parks has had some tremendous achievements in proving parks across the five boroughs and increasing access to open space for all New Yorkers.

Dedication to equity and fairness has been a strategic cornerstone of this administration and this agency. My predecessor, Mitchell Silver, launched the Community Parks Initiative at the start of this administration's term targeting 318 million dollars in investment towards 37 neighborhood parks that had

been under appreciated and disregarded for far too long.

Upon my arrival, my top priority was making sure that the legacy of that dedication to equity would continue long past this administration, which is why I was so proud to announce with Mayor de Blasio, that the CPI Program will be extended and expanded with an additional investment of 425 million dollars in new administration funding -- which will completely reimagine, redesign, and rebuild one-hundred neighborhood parks across the city over ten years.

We were able to identify opportunities to create new green and open space, with Parkland Acquisitions, that pushed the total of city open space to over the 30,000 acre threshold.

Our Anchor Park Initiative revitalized flagship parks throughout the boroughs. The Parks Without Borders Program completely changed the way our parks connect with neighborhoods that surround them. And, our Cool Pools turned sixteen drab and unappealing outdoor pools sites into vibrant opportunities for all New Yorkers to enjoy a fun and cool summer getaway.

With the support of the council and Mayor de Blasio, over the course of this administration, the city has invested close to 8 billion dollars in capital improvements and renovations representing well over 2,000 projects of ever shape and size, creating new or improved playgrounds, comfort stations, athletic fields and courts, seating areas, dog runs, and waterfront amenities.

Our commitment to community is more than revitalizing amenities; it's also providing vital infrastructure to neighborhoods around the city so they can survive and thrive.

In partnership with our fellow city agencies and our state and federal partners, we're implementing resiliency measures and shoreline protections plans to combat climate change and severe weather.

We were able to complete The Million Tree Planting Initiative two years ahead of schedule, and the Cool Neighborhoods Program has provided over a 100 million dollars to protect our city's tree canopy and plant trees in heat vulnerable neighborhoods, which will save lives and make our neighborhoods more pleasant and comfortable.

We have focused on creative and proactive efforts, such as The City Cleanup Corps, which leveraged federal COVID recovery funding to provide the agency with 32 hundred new maintenance employees to pick up litter, wipe away graffiti, maintain parks and playgrounds offer tremendous value to our parks and public spaces when they were in dire need.

We closely examined our Maintenance and Operations Portfolio and brought on a chief operating officer to oversee all the borough operations and standardized best practices.

We designed a more data driven approach to manage or finite resources and found more ways to improve the longevity of our Parks' assets through preventive maintenance.

In matched spirit of efficiency and modernization, our capital team has worked tirelessly to streamline agency driven processes and facilitate projects that are on time and on budget.

Of course, there is still more to do, and our agency will continue identifying ways to improve. So we look forward to continuing that dialogue with the council in the future.

Turning to the topic of today's hearing, our recreation centers are an incredibly important part of our agency portfolio making an incredible range of free or low cost recreational, educational, and cultural opportunities available to every New Yorker.

We have 36 recreation centers around the city, and they are more than just gyms; they are spaces where they community can gather, stay socially engaged, develop new skills and hobbies, and of course stay in shape and have fun.

We are dedicated to expanding access to the great recreational programming we provide for as many New Yorkers as possible. This means keeping our existing centers in a state of good repair as well as exploring any potential opportunities for new facilities in communities that lack access to recreational programming.

Like much city infrastructure, some of our facilities are considerably older, and that certainly creates some challenges. And, the construction of new facilities is an expensive and complicated undertaking. But, we are working to prioritize the most pressing needs and identify the resources necessary on a case by case basis.

During the course of this administration, the agency has managed close to 70 capital projects at our existing recreation centers worth 370 million dollars. And, we've worked closely with DDC on several new recreation center projects -- well over 600 million dollars of addition investment, including the Ocean Breeze Athletic Complex, which opened to the public in 2015.

I would now like to introduce Margaret Nelson, our Deputy Commissioner for Urban Parks Service and Public Programs, who will provide more information about the value that our recreation centers are providing for New Yorkers, and a useful overview of our public programs and recreation efforts.

Thank you.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Thank you so much. Uhm, good afternoon, Chair Koo and members of the Parks and Recreation Committee. I am Margaret Nelson, Deputy Commissioner for Urban Parks Service and Public Programs at the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.

Thank you for inviting us to testify today regarding improving access to our recreational programs and facilities.

We think it would be helpful to first provide some broader context about the recreational and programming aspects of our agency's mission.

The Recreation Unit at New York City Parks falls under the umbrella of the Public Programs Division, which is also comprised of a Products Media Education and Education Wildlife, which includes our Urban Park Rangers.

Recreation's mission is to enable all New Yorkers to lead physically active and intellectually stimulating lives through sports, fitness, outdoor adventure, technology, education, and the arts.

Recreation centers are essential infrastructure for communities, providing space to recreate, learn, gather, and relax.

Citywide, we have 36 recreation centers, which include our newest and largest building, as The Commissioner just mentioned, the Ocean Breeze Athletic Complex, it's a 135,000 square foot indoor track facility that hosts over a 175,000 athletes at approximately 80 competitions in a typical year. The remaining 35 centers range in size, and are primarily older facilities with an average center age of 66 years, the oldest having been built in 1900.

Many of our centers were originally designed to serve other purposes such as libraries and bath houses, and then were handed over for recreational use and have thus experienced a great degree of heavy use and wear and tear over their long lives.

Our centers offer a diverse range in both form and function, 21 have gyms, 12, as you mentioned have indoor pools, 12 feature outdoor pools.

Our recreation centers far exceed neighboring commercial fitness facilities in terms of character, culture, and community. They boast pools, gyms, multi-purpose rooms, fitness rooms, media labs, indoor tracks, cardio rooms, and classrooms, and our loyal core staff provide an inclusive atmosphere not often found and your typical private fitness center.

At New York City Parks, we seek to provide lifelong, holistic enrichment nurturing New Yorkers of all ages and abilities. We offer a wide variety of programming from instructional sports to competitive leagues, yoga to swimming, rooftop stargazing to painting, Pickle Ball to Double Dutch, chair aerobics to Zumba, concerts to lectures, roller skating to advanced Adobe Design Software

certification training, and many more opportunities for engagement.

Additionally, we provide youth of New York City an opportunity to learn, grown, and develop skills and interests through programs like swim teams, afterschool summer camp, and adaptive recreation for people with disabilities.

Creating these types of life changing, soul enriching opportunities is our focus and is what we do best. We further expand our ability to make these opportunities available to all by working with partner organizations to provide specialty programming for New Yorkers, collaborating with such groups as The Public Theater, The Jazz Foundation of America, The New York Red Bulls, Madison Square Garden, and the New York Jets.

As previously mentioned, we also offer opportunities for New Yorkers to enrich their interests and skills in media and technology, which is so important in these modern society and economy. The Media Education Unit of Public Programs provides high quality digital resources and creative learning opportunities in 33 media labs within recreation centers -- including certification programs for

Microsoft Office, video editing and storytelling, photography, and steam aligned classes offering 3-D imaging and robotics.

Within the walls of our recreation centers, we offer thousands of individual programs to approximately 140,000 recreation center members. In addition to programs, our recreation center members have access to over 1,300 pieces of fitness equipment that provide excise and wellness opportunities in countless combinations.

But, in New York City Parks, we don't let bricks and mortar limit our ability to provide programming, and we have a plethora of offerings for all audiences throughout the city, well beyond the confines of our recreation centers.

Our mobile recreation programs, including the Play Mobile and Fitness Mobile, allow us the ability to visit various community events from April through October, and bring these recreational opportunities directly to New Yorkers, reaching over 25,000 people each season.

One of our most popular mobile programs is Movies Under the Stars program. This annual summer movie series, hosted in partnership with The Mayor's Office

of Media and Entertainment, grants us the opportunity in a typical year to show over 400 movies in our local parks.

By partnering with private organizations, we have also been able to offer New Yorkers the chance to take part in our Arts, Culture, and Fun program series throughout the five boroughs including tango classes in Washington Square Park, Jazz concerts in Harlem, and Taikoza drumming performances in Queens.

We also offer outdoor programming in our parks that is specifically tailored to youth through our Kids in Motion and Summer Sports Experience Programs. Kids in Motion engages children in active outdoor play. In a typical year, this program is hosted at approximately 100 sites citywide and has over 470,000 visits.

Similarly, The Summer Sports Experience program teaches sport skills, capturing an audience of young athletic enthusiasts who are interested in further developing their skills. On average, that program sees 34,000 visits a year.

Another successful program for children, The Puppeteers Program, has a home stage in the Swedish

Cottage in Central Park and offers free mobile puppet performances and puppet making workshops citywide.

Though youth programming is a priority for New York City Parks, we know that recreational opportunities are just as important for adults and seniors. Our Signature Fitness and Wellness program that targets adults and seniors, is the Shape Up NYC programming.

Leveraging financial support from Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield and private donors, Shape Up NYC provides free fitness programming in our parks, recreation centers, and beyond in locations throughout the city. Since the program began in 2003, it has received over one million visits, which is an incredible success. This program also features a train the trainer component, where members of the public have the ability to become trained fitness instructors.

As you can hear, our recreation unit prides itself on offering a wide variety of programming to people of all ages, abilities, and interests. For that to be possible, we need to sustain our recreation facilitates ensuring that they are in the

best condition possible, which we monitor with specific regular processes and benchmarks.

Parks utilizes the agency's Asset Management Parks System to request repairs and track maintenance and routine operational information. Over and above the daily monitoring, provided by our centers' staff, to continually monitor the state of our recreation centers, they are also inspected twice a year for safety, cleanliness, and structural condition via the Recreation, Evaluation and Center Assessment Program. These inspections are independently administered by the agency's Operations and Management Planning Division similar to how they conduct the agency's parks inspection program.

While we cannot simultaneously address the myriad of capital projects necessary to keep aging facilities in tip top shape, we do invest the time and resources with care in order to better serve New Yorkers.

To help improve the physical condition of our centers we routinely focus on quick wins, small but impactful improvements implemented to improve the quality of our recreation centers and to enhance the experience of our members.

Projects have included targeted facility improvements, improvements to a specific room of a center, or new equipment purchases. But, beyond the everyday maintenance conducted by our staff, many of our recreation centers have received part of that 370 million dollars, \$11.9 of which is council funded -- so, thank you to all of the members who have given us funding for our rec centers -- of capital investment during the current administration, to address structural and mechanical deficiencies, upgrade fire alarms, and bring buildings up to a state of good repair.

In order to properly assess all of our buildings' needs, starting in 2019, an in house technical inspection team from Parks Capital Projects Division began to conduct a thorough assessment of each centers' capital needs, collecting the condition data according to a standardized protocol that allows for capital project prioritization and long-term capital planning. To date, we have assessed nine building using this process. Using the analysis, we have worked with OMB to address issues identified. For example, we recently secured 20.7 million dollars to address an old and leaking roof that was causing

water damage in one of these buildings -- Hamilton Fish Recreation Center.

Additionally, we currently have approximately 45 active recreation centers renovation projects being managed by our Capital and Citywide Services Divisions, totally over \$334 million.

But, the needs of many of these centers are significant, given their age, unique layouts not intentionally designed for recreation... Uh, hold on, I just lost my place here... recent storm and heavy use, we are putting the tools in place to properly prioritize and plan for the future, so they can remain robust and vital amenities for the communities they serve.

Our recreation centers have also provided services to the community during the time... during times of emergencies. During the COVID pandemic, after recreation centers closed to the public, they were temporarily repurposed to serve many emergency functions such as food distribution that collectively distributed over 42 million meals, COVID testing and vaccination sites, Learning Bridges sites in coordination with DOE, and hubs for our staff to distribute masks to the public.

In addition to providing these essential services to our community, our staff served as Social Distance Ambassadors educating park patrons about social distancing and distributing face coverings. We also provided outdoor programs near the recreation centers as soon as it was deemed safe to gather.

I want to take the time to thank our staff who reported to work throughout the pandemic and pivoted their focus to emergency management. I am so appreciative of their bravery, flexibility, creativity, and commitment to our city. And, we began opening recreation centers in June, and by September, all centers that were not still serving COVID related functions, or closed for renovations, have reopened, I'm happy to say.

We're very happy to see New Yorkers once again able to turn to our recreation centers for the primary benefits they provide, improving our city's health and wellness with incredible recreational opportunities.

Our mayor recognized the importance of our recreation centers and programs in his 2020 State of the City Address by announcing a number of initiatives not expand our reach: The elimination of

the \$25.00 annual membership for anyone under the age of 24, the expansion of late nights and weekends hours at our 36 sites, the completion of two recreation centers already in the pipeline, and the building of seven brand new recreation centers in neighborhoods that currently lack them.

While the plan to increase the operating hours of centers was put on hold due to COVID, the expansion of the sites is moving forward. Over \$500 million is being invested in five new recreation centers, Shirley Chisholm Recreation Center in Brooklyn; Mary Cali Dalton Recreation Center on Staten Island; Roy Wilkins Park in Queens; and the neighborhoods of Soundview and Tremont in The Bronx.

We successfully eliminated the \$25.00 annual membership fee for everyone 24 and under and are currently offering free memberships for anyone of any age, who signed up before December 31st. So, make sure to get the word out, and visit your nearest center.

We are always looking for innovative ways to increase our programming footprint, which I know is one of the other focuses of this hearing. Recently, three new field houses at Levy, De Matti, and

McDonald playground on Staten Island have been completed and programming has begun. Our Parks at home -- #ParksAtHome! -- Initiative was launched in March 2020 to keep New Yorkers engaged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this initiative, Parks has delivered numerous educational, fitness, and wellness programs over Facebook Live, Twitter, and Instagram stories. Additionally, the Parks At Home webpage, has served as a central hub to alert patrons of upcoming opportunities.

In addition to our appreciation of the mayor, I want to thank of the council members who are so thoughtful in their appropriation of funding towards our facilities and programming. This fiscal year, we were allocated over \$685,000 in council member discretionary funding towards programming, events, and staff to public programs. We greatly appreciate this funding and your continued advocacy and support.

In closing, we would like to reiterate the positive impact that not only our recreation centers but our entire recreation unit have made across the five boroughs.

I would like to acknowledge particular the flexibility and dedication of this incredible

recreation team, as they have consistently and effectively navigated an ever changing landscape of practical concerns, policy changes, and safety considerations. Our staff worked tirelessly during the height of COVID to continue to serve New Yorkers in critical ways, and now they are creatively bringing back programming that will engage kids, help adults get fit, decrease social isolation for seniors, and so much more. We strive to bring free and low-cost accessible programming to all New Yorkers. You each have a standing offer to join us at any of our recreation centers or outdoor programs, which I know many of you have.

And, thank you for the opportunity to share our work with you as we serve New Yorkers focusing on fun, health, and happiness. Our staff will be watching the public's testimony via the council's livestream, but in the meantime, we will now be happy to answer any questions you might have.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. And, I will now turn it to over Chair Koo for his questions.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, Kris, yeah.

Uh, first of all, I want to thank, uh, Commissioner Fialkoff, and Deputy Commissioner

Nelson, uh, to come here to testify and give us the really detailed information about the recreation centers.

Uh, we're also joined by Council Member Van Bramer, Council Member Levine, Council Member Brooks-Powers, Council Member Borelli, and Council Member, uh, Ulrich.

Uhm, so, I guess I will start some, uh, questions. Uhm, I don't know who will answer, either Deputy Commissioner or the Commissioner can answer all these questions.

Uh, so, what is the current capital allocation for future recreation center projects and renovations?

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you, Chair Koo, for your questions. Uhm, right now we do have five rec centers, new rec centers in work for a cost of 500 million dollars. Uh, that is, uh, in partnership with DDC. Uh, we also have... Well, I should say during this administration, we have, uh, we have had 70 capital projects, uh, by the Parks Department in terms of maintenance, uh, for our 36 rec centers.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Hmmm...

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Uh, that's for a total 370 million dollars. Uh, 23 of those projects are complete, and 45 are, uhm, in work. And, then, on top of that, we have our new rec centers, uh, five new rec centers as Commissioner Nelson, uh, spoke about, with a cost -- a budget -- currently of 500 million dollars.

But, Commissioner Nelson, if you'd like to expand upon those numbers, please do.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: No, I think that covers it. I think the only thing it doesn't cover is Ocean Breeze, which was built during, uh, which was finalized during this administration, which was another 100 million dollar investment in recreation.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

So, can you please provide a status update on each of the recreation centers that are currently closed, and their timeline for reopening?

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Yes, I'll... I'll give you an overview and then turn it over to, uh, Commissioner Nelson... (Cross-Talk)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yes.

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Uh, we are pleased that we have 28 of our rec centers open today. Uh, we

opened 12 in June of, uh, 2021, uhm, and then in September, we were able to open the remainder of our rec centers. Uh, we do have some right now closed for construction -- five. We do have one that sustained damage, uh, during Hurricane Ida. One that serves as a COVID testing center, and another as a vaccine center, which we are thrilled to still, of course, be supporting the city, uh, in COVID relief. But, as to when they're opening, and the progress, I'll let, uh, Commissioner Nelson dig in.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Thank you so much.

Uhm, so, and, again, I think it's... It's important to keep in mind, I think as we all talked about, that our whole portfolio of recreation centers, because they're so old and need a certain amount of capital work, that at any given time, you know, ten years ago to now, they're always going to be a certain number of our recreation centers that are closed for capital construction. And, I think even though we try to minimize the amount of time centers are closed and try to do, you know, see if we can do some partial phasing so that we can keep some of the centers open, or do work while its open, that it's a symbol of our investment, and wanting to keep

these centers kind of functioning for the next generation by doing this investment, which does lead to some closures of some rec centers, uh, you know during the course of any given year.

So, right now, uhm, the Von... Herbert Von King center in Brooklyn is currently closed for construction. And, we are looking at a completion and a reopening, uh, this coming spring/summer. Uhm, so that's great.

Uh, Tony Dapolito, which I think you mentioned, uh, Chair Koo, in your testimony, again that's an example of a very, uh, old and aging and well-loved recreation center that we've started to do some work on that was an exterior project. We were keeping the center open while we were doing that project, but in the course of that project, uncovered some structural issues that needed to be addressed. So, that, unfortunately was a... kind of an unanticipated closure. But, the good news is that we've done probes. We've identified, uh, with the design consultant what the issues are. We were able to move some money around from the administration to cover the increase costs, and that... that is in progress. And, we're hoping, to be able to reopen, kind of

shore up this structural issue, reopen the center temporarily, and, you know, then have to close it again. So, that's... That's an example of like what happens when there's been a lot of kind of deferred maintenance, and now, once we get in to a building sometimes we uncover more than we thought we were getting in to. So, that, again, uh, we're hoping to have that reopen for a partial reopening, uhm, this spring/summer. Uhm, and then there's going to be a phase two of that project, uh, that we're going to start design on in, uhm, that's going to probably cause another closure for that construction project.

Uh, Flushing Meadows, uh, Aquatic Center, which you also mentioned, again this is a... a relatively new center, uh, and what happened is that there have been issues with the roof. So, we had to close the center to put up some temporary netting. We're hoping to open that early in the new year, while the design for the kind of full renovation of the roof to figure... to address the spalling conditions. So, it will reopen in the... in January, February, sometime early in the New Year; we will keep it open until that larger project starts, which is yet to be determined.

Uhm, Pelham Fritz, uh, is closed. That's in Manhattan. Uh, we're renovating the storefront. That was a planned project. Uhm, and that should be reopening early in the New Year as well -- spring, uh, I believe.

Uhm, Owen Dolan, in The Bronx, uh, it's kind of going to through two separate capital projects. So, I don't have a timeline for when that second project will be completed, because I believe it's in procurement. So, sometimes that's hard to give an estimate. So, we can get back to you and keep you updated on that.

In addition, uhm, as the Commissioner said, there's actually two recreation centers that were damaged by Ida. There were three, but we just opened Saint Mary's yesterday, which was great news.

Uhm, Red Hook, uhm, we're installing a temporary boiler, and then hope to have that open when that boiler is in so we have heat.

And, then Saint James, uh, had significant flooding in The Bronx. Uhm, and that is going to unfortunately require a whole new replacement of what was unfortunately a fairly new HVAC system. And, we

1 don't have a timeline yet on kind of how long it will
2 take us to do that capital process.

3 But, again, I think this administration, uhm, has
4 invested a significant amount of money to repairing
5 our aging recreation centers. And, unfortunately
6 sometimes that leads to the public not be able to use
7 those recreation centers while we do this work. But,
8 when they reopen, they will be in a much better place
9 to serve the public for future generations. So,
10 we're excited for the long term of this work.

11 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

12 So, uh, how often are recreation centers
13 inspected to ensure that they are clean and that the
14 equipment's in proper working order? Are they part
15 of the, uh, part of The Inspection Program -- PIP?
16 And, is such data publicly available?

17 COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: We, uhm, take several
18 different steps to make sure that our, uhm,
19 recreation centers are well maintained and in a state
20 of good repair and cleanly. Uhm, it is our greatest
21 priority to deliver the quality programming that we
22 do, uh, it requires our facilities to be in a state
23 of good repair, uh, to be clean, and welcoming. So,
24 we do take that of course as our first priority.
25

Uhm, and... And, so as I said, we do that in several different ways. There are of course maintenance staff that are assigned to the facilities that are there fulltime, uh, cleaning and maintaining those rec centers. We also do, uh, as to your question, as part of the PIP program that we spoke about in the last hearing, we do a twice-yearly inspection that is the same protocol as the PIP Inspection Program. It is done by the same unit, uh, The Maintain and Operations Planning Division. It is an independent audit, and each rec center... It has a different name, but it is essentially the same program as the Parks Inspection Program. And, that happens twice yearly.

We also instituted, and Commissioner Nelson, uh, spoke about this in her testimony, in 2019 began a new program, a Capital Needs Assessment Program. Uh, and this is a program, uh, by the Parks Capital Team, that goes in to each rec center, and, uh, does a full capital needs assessment. We have done nine thus far. And, the first, uh, the first rec center that received this assessment, uh, we worked with OMB to fund, uh, the full range of capital improvements

needed there -- 20 million dollars at the Ham Fish Rec Center that, uh, Commissioner Nelson spoke about.

So, those are some of the, uh, things we do. We also, uh, have a program or an initiative called The Quick Wins, and that is within the rec centers, small projects that we can do with expense funding, uh, that the team at the rec center can address quickly - - new furniture, new front desk, some painting -- for the smaller projects.

So, that's the... the broad strokes of our different approaches.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

Uhm, for the most... For the most recent fiscal year, 2020, that we have data, the MMR indicates that 100 percent of centers were rated as having an acceptable rating for cleanliness, and 90 percent for an acceptable overall condition. Now, can you explain in more detail what the inspection process for recreation centers is? Are they the same as the other PIP Programs?

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: We do follow the PIP protocol, but Commissioner Nelson, why don't you give a little more detail?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Sure. Yes, so, that's reporting on what The Commissioner just outlined, which is it's kind of PIP for recreation centers. So, where a PIP is a Parks Inspection Program, RECAP in the Recreation Center Inspection Program. It's done by the same folks. So, they're trained in how to do these independent inspections. And, obviously, what they're looking for in a recreation center, may be different than what they're looking for in a park. Right? So, in a park they're looking at, is there a dangling limb, or is there exposed something -- wiring-- in a recreation center. They're looking for, you know, exit signs, cleanliness, uhm, a big focus is the AEDs in our centers. So, all of our centers have, uhm, the AEDs, and the PIP inspect... Uh, the RECAP Inspectors look to make sure that those are operating and have all of the pieces of equipment they're supposed to have.

So, that is what's reported in the MMR, and as you said, uh, you know, we... Before closure, I think we overwhelmingly were, uh, passing those inspections, uh, the data I have, I have it for FY 19, uh

,you know, again they're all visited twice a year, and, uh, I think six centers failed; the rest of the 34 passed, uhm, and those six that were failed were mostly for AED issues. Uhm, so that is reported to the MMR. And, it's also available on the, uhm, NYC Open Data Portal.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, what factors the determine whether they have (Background Noise) an overall (INAUDIBLE 00:54:11)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Uhm, again, I don't have their exact... (Cross-Talk)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Because (INAUDIBLE 00:54:18)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: methodology... I don't have their exact methodology, we could get it to you, like the actual checklist, uhm, you know, and how much things are weighted, but we get the... The reports, the kind of the roll up reports, uhm, in terms of like the pass/fail.

But, we're happy to follow up with your office... (Cross-Talk)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: and get you more detail about that program certainly.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, yes.

For the centers that are currently closed, did they fail any of the inspections?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Uhm, again, my sense is that they probably passed the inspections, so the closures were related to things that were not on the, uh, inspection checklist. But, we can go back and crosswalk that, uhm, to just get a sense. I think your... your sense is like, were things getting flagged that then led to the closure? I think for the most part, our capital inspections are things like... are larger structural issues, which aren't necessarily the kinds of things that the RECAP Inspections are looking at. I think the RECAP Inspections are much more like health and safety violations, cleanliness, uh, they don't... They don't evaluate structural conditions, like, is the roof old, is... you know leaking and needs to be replaced? And, then that becomes a capital project if that's helpful.

But, we can certainly go back and check and get you the statistics for the RECAP for the centers that are now closed.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, thanks.

So, what is the process that The Parks use to bring a recreation center back up to cleanliness standards when it does not meet standards during an inspection?

So, how do you... What's the process to bring it up to their cleanliness standard?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Thank you. Uhm, you know, I think once we get the report, uhm, then we have center managers, we have Chiefs of Recreation, we have a whole kind of structure that makes sure we're looking at the results of the report and taking action.

I would like to also say that our center managers, who are on site every day, you know, one of their jobs is to kind of walk through the center on a daily basis and check for cleanliness. And, I think that especially as we reopened our centers, uh, in ,you know, June and in the summer, our staff were very, very careful and conscientious to really bring the centers back at a whole new kind of higher standard even of cleanliness that we had before , because of the concern about COVID. So, we, you know, we made sure we had maintain staff. We made sure we're doing regular cleaning. Uhm, we had

definitely COVID safety protocols. So, I just...
I... I commend our staff for developing the
protocols to bring our recreation centers back safely
for the public, and make sure they are meeting, uh,
you know, a high level of cleanliness.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, thanks.

So, uhm, who develops and implements, uh, the
many different types of programming at the centers?
Uh, do individual centers have their own authority
over programming, or does Parks take on a more hands
on role?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, uhm, so,
basically the centers have a lot of flexibility to
develop their own programming. Uhm, they develop
program schedules in advance of, you know, we kind of
set things in to quarters or thirds or different kind
of sections of the year. So, you'll have folks who
are in a center who might propose different kinds of
programming or maybe that programming has existed in
the past and has been very successful. So, they'll
develop a tentative schedule that will be discussed
with the supervision, which are The Recreation Chiefs
for each of the boroughs. Uhm, and then they go all
the way up to The Assistant Commissioner, Emily Chase

and myself; although, I don't tend to get involved in very detailed, uh, programming decisions -- although I like to, I think, overall as a division we try to look at making sure we have a diversity of programming, that we're serving different, uh, ages, that we're serving different interests. I think we try to make sure that as we see kind of new, uhm, new programs or new interests in certain kinds of sports or activities, we try to meet that demand. We certainly are open to member suggestions about what they would like to see. I think we engage with elected officials about what they would like to see. So, for example, as Pickle Ball has become more popular, uhm, ,you know, our rec centers were kind of in the forefront of using gym space to create some time for Pickle Ball. And, now we're creating more outdoor sites as... When we closed our recreation centers and people were still looking to play Pickle Ball outside, so now we have more outdoor Pickle Ball courts. So, I think it's a very, uh, dynamic process. Uhm, I think we provide a lot of really great, uh, variety of programming. But, certainly if any of you here have ideas, or you hear from your

constituents about some sort of gap in programming, we would love to hear from you.

And, I would say that, you know, as we are restarting we are also trying to be careful, uh, given the COVID safety protocols, to not, uhm, over schedule or create crowding conditions. So, I think we're in the process of kind of ramping up a public programming schedule, in a careful way, so that we don't have too many people in the center at once to be able to maintain that social distancing, which is, uh, recommended at this time. So, that's another consideration. So, while we might... (Cross-Talk)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: open a center, and people can use the different rooms, it might not be as programmed as yet, as it was in the past.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, for individuals who are, like, experts on some kinds of activities, say an individual was very good in tai chi, and if they want to offer to teach that skill to a local recreation center, do they approach the local center or do... would they approach the central office?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Uhm, I think either way would be fine. Uhm, and certainly you should

feel free to, uh, have people do that. I think we have to... We have certain volunteer standards. We just... You know, people would have to go through a background check. There's certain rules about having volunteers in our buildings working with children. So, it's a careful process. Uhm, and, you know, usually we rely on our own staff to do official programming. But, we're always open to partnering with organizations traditionally, uhm, you know, and volunteers. So, I wouldn't want to say, no, I would want to say, we're certainly open to exploring that. And, in fact, we... We probably have some examples of that. I just don't have that in front of me to share today. But, I can get back to you on that... (Cross-Talk)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: So... So, okay. So, all of the instructors, uh, of activities, are they staff at The Parks Department? Are they regular staff? Or, they are like contracted... (Cross-Talk)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Yeah, so, primarily... No, primarily all of our programs offered at our recreation centers, or the vast majority are done by our own staff. Uh, we have recreation specialist, we have recreation

1 supervisors, you know, different folks who are
2 trained, uhm, and knowledgeable that had to put
3 together a curriculum, and had to deliver a
4 curriculum of all sorts of different types of
5 programming.
6

7 We also do, as I said in my testimony, partner
8 with organizations, and ,you know, we'll partner
9 together to create some programs that maybe we
10 couldn't offer on our own or an organization is
11 interested in working with us to offer to the public.
12 But, in any partnership, uh, with an organization
13 that comes in, it would have to be, you know, open to
14 all of our recreation center members, it would have
15 to be free, it becomes part of our programming. We
16 don't rent out our space to organizations for them to
17 do their own programing in.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, those are strictly
19 volunteers, right? You don't pay them for outside
20 people to who come in to teach?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Right. Usually our
22 partnerships, like, you know, we have a partnership
23 with The Public Theater, we have a partnership with
24 the... Hold on, I think I have a list here. Uhm,
25 you know, we have... Mostly it's an organization

looking to partner with us and providing free programming. Uhm, so, there are some cases where will pay for programming, uh, because we're doing it in partnership with an organization, so they might... So, for example, like, The Jazz Foundation of America, ,you know, where we have a partnership with them, and they will provide ,you know, I think it's like ,you know, about ten free concerts during the year, but there might be a few other concerts that we help subsidize ,you know, to get those few extra concerts. So, it's primarily, we're not paying organizations to come in and do programming, they're, ,you know, it's partnership where they're bringing the programming, and it's an added ,you know, extra, great opportunities for our members to experience different kinds of programming.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, uh, are staff at recreation centers able to communicate in multiple languages to serve their local communities? I have heard stories of New Yorkers not able to participate in center activities, uh, due to language barriers. You know?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: I think we... We definitely strive, uh, we have a very diverse workforce in our Public Programs and Recreation

Division, so I do think we have a lot of, uh, programs where the, uh, instructor can speak more than one language. But, again, I think it's something that we should always kind of look at doing kind of more of where we can. I mean, so, if you have ideas or you certainly hear of any specific concerns for a center, we would be totally interested in working with you to see what more can be done at that center.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Sure, yes, because, like say for example of Flushing, right, more than half of the populations here are Asians, you know? So, you would be better if you have staff that speaks, like, Mandarin, or Korean, you know, to help the local people, especially senior citizens where they want them to come to participate. Uh, they don't speak the language, so they don't want to come. But, if you speak the language, of course they will come.

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Certainly, I think we agree with that... (Cross-Talk)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: importance and focus, that that... We'd be... We'd like to discuss that more with you, and we agree of that importance for sure.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, so, this is simple, it doesn't... For someone who is a member of one recreation center, does that give them access to all centers or only once specific center? When you sign up, is it only one center, or they can go to all centers?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, we have two general kinds of membership. We have a membership that allows access to all recreation centers but that don't have a pool. And, so for adults that's a \$100 a year. And, then, there's a membership that allows you access to all recreation centers, including those with a pool, and that is a \$150 a year. But, again, remember, most people are paying far less than that, that's just for the strictly adult population.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. So, I have a local question. (INAUDIBLE 01:06:58)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: And, we think that's a very...

CHAIRPERSON KOO: I have... (INAUDIBLE 01:07:00) enough. I mean, it's a fair price, yeah, yeah. For seniors, it's much cheaper, right? It's \$20... \$25 or something, yeah.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Exactly, I mean,
again... (Cross-Talk)

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: \$25, yes...

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: a \$150 for access to
any recreation center in, you know, in the city that
has a pool or not a pool, is a... we think is a
great deal ,you know, it's a great bargain, it's a
great deal, we think we give great programming. And,
again, I think as you referenced in your testimony,
when that increase went in to effect in 2011, that
did have a drop in our membership, but I think, you
know, now that price has held for the past 10 years,
you know, inflation has actually made that price a
lot less than it was when that was first implemented.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Right.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, uhm, again...
(Cross-Talk)

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: And, we do offer...
(Cross-Talk)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: (INAUDIBLE 1:07:45)

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: for, (INAUDIBLE 01:07:48)
uh... Oh, I'm sorry, Chair, we... We do offer a
discount as well, uh, with IDNYC. Uhm... (Cross-
Talk)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Mm-hmm

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Uh, to the regular membership as well.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: And, now it's free before the end of the year, right? If you sign up now...

(Cross-Talk)

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, I'll probably go after this hearing. Let's sign up (LAUGHING).

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Yes!

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Yes, please help us... You know, please help us get the word out. I think that would be really helpful, because...

(Cross-Talk)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Again, knowing, you know, people were just kind of... The pandemic, I think is, you know, a lot of people aren't necessarily ready to come indoors for programming, but now is the time to get that free membership. Uhm, even if you know you're going to wait a month or two to start coming indoors for your recreation, uh, we definitely want to get that word out, and would appreciate the council's help on that.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: So, uh, the question is, uh, particularly local to our residents around here.

So, every year during the US Open, the USTA is allowed to make use of the parking areas adjacent to the Flushing Meadow pools and rink, uh, which is used by many members in my district while utilizing the recreation center. So, during the two weeks of the US Open, they are not allowed access to this area, uh, to park their vehicles. I think this is really unfair to these city residents, and would like to know how the city can address the problem.

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: We would be happy to discuss that with you further and find a solution for everyone. We'll make a note and circle back on that, if that's okay, Chair Koo?

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Sure, sure, yeah, okay. Yeah, we'll talk offline.

So, are all recreation centers, that meet The Parks Department definition, run solely by Parks Department? Are there any recreation facilities that are essentially operating as a concession? And, does Parks consider such facilities to be recreation centers?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: I can take this. I think.

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: You got it.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Uhm, so, when we talk about our 36 recreation centers, those are all centers that we own the buildings, and we are running as The Parks Department.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Mm-hmm

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: I think there are some legacy buildings that are owned by The Parks Department that other organization are running, uhm, as recreation centers or community service facilities. It's only a few. I think we can get you that list. Uhm, I think there might also be, you know, again our Concessions or Revenue Division, also runs concessions and, uhm, other programming that people -- organizations -- compete to have that concession. And, then they offer fee-based programming out of certain buildings or, you know, ten... You know, we tennis centers, we have other kinds of recreational facilities, uh, that are run by organizations that have an agreement with us to do that.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay... (Cross-Talk)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, for example, we have a building in The Bronx, uhm, in Mullaly Park, uh, that is a building that is, uh, we have a license agreement with a nonprofit organization, I believe it's SCAN, uh, and they run a series of programs in that building, uhm, and... But, we don't call it our recreation center.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, thank you.

So, what is the... (Cross-Talk)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: I hope that answers your question.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yes, yes, yes.

What is the Americans with Disabilities, uh, ADA, combines workers for, uh, recreation centers? Uh, how do they rate when it comes to overall disability, uh, access? Uh, were all centers... (Cross-Talk)

UNKNOWN: (INAUDIBLE 01:11:57)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: ADA combined?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: So, all of our centers, uh, are ADA accessible to get in the building, to get up to the building, uhm, many of them have elevators. I think what's important to... And, we are constantly looking to increase our

accessibility, uh, in to all spaces in our recreation centers for members.

But, ADA accessibility, really kicks in when you are doing a renovation, and as we all know, many of our centers are so old, right? So, they are... Are compliant with whatever regulations exists those buildings. But, when they go through a renovation, they would have to be then ADA compliant to the new standards. But, again, it's something The Parks Department feels very strongly about. We have a, you know, an ADA Compliance Officer. We are always working to make improvements to our parks and our comfort stations and our recreation centers and other public facing facilities to make them as accessible as possible.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

I think I have finished my questions. I will ask other members of this committee to ask questions.

Uh, Kris, uh, I am going to turn this over to you, and you will call on members who use the sign up, uh, the hand sign up thing to, uhm, to ask questions.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair.

At this point, I would ask any Council Members who wish to ask a question, to please use the Zoom Raise Hand Function if you have a question for any representative of The Parks Department.

At this point, Chair, there are no other members who have any questions, so we can turn it back to you if you have additional questions, or we can move on to testimony from members of the public who have registered to speak.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Uh, I think we can move to public testimony.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, very well.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, very well, thank you, Chair. Thank you... (Cross-Talk)

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER NELSON: Thank you... (Cross-Talk)

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Commissioner Fialkoff. Thank you Commissioner Nelson... (Cross-Talk)

COMMISSIONER FIALKOFF: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Director Drury. Thank you.

As the Chair mentioned, we will now hear testimony from members of the public who have registered to speak.

And, as I've also previously mentioned, unlike our typical council hearings, we will be calling on individuals one by one to testify, and each panelist will be given three minutes to speak.

Uh, so begin once the Sergeant At Arms has started the timer and given you the cue to begin.

Council Members who have question for a particular panelist, should also use the Zoom Raise Hand Function, and I will call on you in order.

At this point, we hear from testimony first from, uh, Sherrise Palomino of New Yorkers for Parks, followed by Neile Weissman.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

SHERRISE PALOMINO: Okay, good afternoon, my name is Sherrise Palomino, and I am The Director of Advocacy and Programs at New Yorkers for Parks. We are a founding member of the Play Fair for Parks Coalition, which includes over 400 organizations from across the five boroughs, many of whom will testify today.

Thank you to the City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation for inviting us to speak about our city's recreation opportunities and centers.

I would also like to take the time to thank Chair Koo for his leadership and his partnership in the Play Fair Coalition and for raising these important issues.

The New York City Parks Department operates and maintains 59 recreation centers across the city to serve a population of over eight million people. Of the 59 community board districts, 26 don't have a New York City Parks recreation center within it, meaning that 44% of community boards do not have a recreation center.

New York City's recreation centers used to serve as community centers with programs for youth and seniors alike. Unfortunately, New York City's network of recreation centers never recovered from the steep cuts to the Parks Department in the 1970's and '80'S. They should provide critical opportunities for youth development and empowerment with free programming and sports, and they should provide older adults opportunities to socialize and be active, which is essential to their overall well-being. Instead, New

York City's recreation centers are chronically understaffed and badly in need of repairs, with roughly one-third of them closed at any given time.

Now is the time for transformative investment in our parks system - 1% of the city budget for Parks could ensure that recreation centers are fully staffed and functioning to provide the programming that New Yorkers need.

The New York City Parks Department does a valiant job maintaining these aging resources but needs more funding to do so. This is one of the many reasons why New Yorkers for Parks and the Play Fair for Parks Coalition are calling for an increase in the Parks budget to 1% of the city's budget - a call that the majority of incoming city council members -- and current council members -- support along with the incoming Mayor.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Uh, thank you, uh, we will now move on to our next panelist, uh, who is, uh, Neile Weissman, who will be followed by Jessica Burke.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

NEILE WEISSMAN: Uh, good afternoon, uh, thank you for the opportunities to speak. My name is Neile Weissman, I head up Complete George, 200 organizations and communities calling on the Port Authority to widen bike paths across The George Washington Bridge. I'm also a past president of New York Cycle Club.

Uh, today, I would introduce Grayways proposal to connect city parks with 500 miles of recreational bike ways. My extended remarks, uh, which I've submitted, include 15 suggested routes through the four boroughs, plus a drafted council resolution.

Uh, Grayways aggregates separated paths, on road bike lanes, low volume secondary roads, and low traffic industrial areas. Destinations feature local food stops and nearby parks to facilitate outdoor dining.

The Grayways proposal supports core park initiatives. By highlighting scenic vistas and landmark neighborhoods, uh, we blur the boundaries between parks and their environs, which is the objective of Parks Without Borders.

Like Walk to the Park, Grayways enhances resident access to green space, not just to local parks but to

facilities throughout the city, including marquee projects funded by the Community Parks Initiative. And, in so doing, it will help reduce disparities in park funding by expanding the constituency for each facility.

Collateral beneficiaries include the city's 800,000 cyclists who have few venues to ride that are not crowded by pedestrians and runners, and neighborhood food vendors can see in a surge in customers.

Grayways can be implemented quickly and cheaply by hosting GPS data on the DOT website. As routes gain acceptance, they can be upgraded with safety improvements and signage.

What's needed is for the council to make the ask. I welcome the opportunity to do an extended presentation.

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

Our next speaker is Jessica Burke, who will be followed by... pardon me for one second... who will be followed by Michael Schnall.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

JESSICA BURKE: I am the President at Friends of Crocheron & John Golden Park. We help NYC Parks with stewardship of the 12th largest park in Queens, Crocheron Park. It is over 60 acres large, and it includes John Golden Park, O'Rourke Playground, and Golden Pond.

As a park in north east Queens, we do not have any recreation centers in our district. The closest one is 4.6 miles away in downtown Flushing. There is a nearby pool in Flushing, but at an initial investment of 67 million dollars, it is now crumbling and closed since January 2020.

In place of recreation centers, our district and community utilizes outdoor parks. NYC Parks works with private partners to bring outdoor recreation to the parks. This is not done in equal ways. Senior fitness programs that should ideally be held in areas with higher populations and percentages of seniors are not, and instead are held in areas with established conservancies or friends of groups.

We are grateful to the funding that Council Member Vallone and city council, Speaker Johnson have provided for programming in our parks. This includes Movies Under the Stars. Sometimes events that are

1 within the parks, such as The Play Mobile seemed to
2 be planned at the last minute. This means that
3 established groups like mine are not told until about
4 48 hours before the event.
5

6 Our group has been able to work with our park
7 administrator to bring a yoga instructor to our park.
8 This only happened because our group had ongoing
9 programming and had started a relationship with one
10 of the yoga instructors. She was excited about
11 bringing programming to the park, and it's something
12 that our group was able to do. This honestly is at a
13 bit of risk to a small group like ours, as we do not
14 have insurance. Once again, there is a
15 public/private partnership that New York City Parks
16 has where you can obtain grants to pay for yoga
17 instructors, but these grants do not really provide
18 everything that this small group needs.

19 This is why we're looking to have more
20 programming in parks that is administered by New York
21 City Parks.

22 We are lucky that our park administrator put the
23 yoga instructor in touch with New York City Parks,
24 and she is currently working with them to become a
25

yoga instructor through New York City Parks Summer Fitness Program.

Thank you very much for your time, and thank you to everyone at New York City Parks for your ongoing work and dedication to fitness and outdoor recreation in our community.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, and thank you for your testimony.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

Our next speaker is Michael Schnall, who will be followed by David Small.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

MICHAEL SCHNALL: Uh, good afternoon, my name is Mike Schnall; I'm here submitting testimony on behalf of my colleague David Ludwig who serves as The Senior Director of Community Programs & Governmental Affairs for Asphalt Green.

Uh, if he was here, he would say, Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Committee on Parks & Recreation on access to recreational programs and facilities.

Asphalt Green is a nonprofit organization committed to providing access to sports and fitness opportunities for all New Yorkers. And, as a

nonprofit, they foster a love of physical activity with a focus on providing positive experiences in sports and fitness for young people to develop skills and habits that will help them lead healthy, active lives.

Asphalt Green manages a multi-million budget with 500+ employees across their two Manhattan campuses where they operate world-class aquatics, sports, and fitness programs to which we ensure access through over \$400,000 in annual scholarships.

We extend our reach beyond the campuses through a variety of free community programs that impact tens of thousands of children in low income neighborhoods across New York City.

These include Waterproofing, a large swim program that has taught 35,000 public school second graders to swim since 1994; Recess Enhancement Program, which ensures daily physical activity for tens of thousands of children; and Community Sports Leagues, which gives 750 children per year the chance to represent their school in sports teams.

The world needs sports and fitness now more than ever. The Aspen Institute recently released physical activity trends during the pandemic and found youth

of all ages are half as active as they were prior to the pandemic.

As New York City continues to reopen, Asphalt Greens vision is to rebuild our community impact to pre-pandemic levels, and beyond.

We are excited by the possibility of providing world-class athletic programming in parks across the entire city. And, as the next Mayoral administration takes shape, we'll be talking with our partners at New York City's Parks & Recreation, Department of Education, and individual council members to determine how and where Asphalt Green can make the most impact in the neediest communities.

I also just want to say a shout out to Sherrise Palomino and the folks at New Yorkers for Parks and the incredible work they're doing.

And, uh, thank you for the time to testify today.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you for your service.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

Our next speaker is David Small, who will be followed by Jacqui Painter.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

DAVID SMALL: Yes, hello?

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Hi.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, go ahead... (Cross-Talk)

DAVID SMALL: Hi, oh, okay, I'm new at this.

Okay, this is David Small a resident of Red Hook, Brooklyn.

Our recreation center has been closed for over a year since the start of the pandemic, and we have the free membership, on what you were just talking about a while ago, to sign up, which I did. And, being that I am a retired (INAUDIBLE 01:26:15) for health reasons, the recreation is very important, because I can't walk as good, and I cannot stand up on my feet. So, my doctor, my physician, doesn't want us sitting in the house, but we've been sitting and we have nowhere else to go other than the recreation center - and it's been closed for almost close to two years. So, when we finally did get to sign up, now they say because of Ida, which happened in August, I believe, late August, that the gym is... they don't have any heating, and they are waiting on a boiler, and I want to know how long does it have to take to get the temporary boiler fixed up there... put in there? And, basically, we have to travel to Sunset Park, which is two busses, and really it's a long ride on the bus. And, then you have to walk up a hill to get

to the facility -- two long blocks. And, you know, we just want to know how long we have to wait to get this Red Hook Recreation Center open. It's very key to the area and to the community as well. We need answers, and we're not getting the answers that we need. We're just getting runaround, or "I don't know."

So, it would be very helpful if you all could give us definite timelines, when does it need to be opened -- that it has already been closed for approximately almost two years at the start of the pandemic?

And, thank you, and, uh, I appreciate everything you all are doing today.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you, we will forward your question to The Parks Department, and get an answer to you by email.

DAVID SMALL: Okay, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

Our next, uh, speaker, who is currently our last registered speaker, is Jacqui Painter.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

JACQUI PAINTER: Hello everyone, and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Thank you to the Chair, and thank you to the committee for all of your work.

I am also a resident of Red Hook. I am the founder of Red Hook Relief, a mutual aid organization, and a formal city council candidate for District 38.

I also want to speak on the importance of Red Hook Recreation Center. As I am sure a lot of you know, Red Hook is very, very prone to floods, to devastation, uhm, not only Hurricane Sandy, but now we have our rec center closed, because of a hurricane. And, honestly it's extremely sad that we're not putting... that the city isn't putting in the money to invest in a low income community like Red Hook.

In the past two years, because of construction, the neighborhood of Red Hook has lost over 457 trees, our outdoor parks have been closed because of toxic soil levels, and we have last-mile trucking facilities popping up all throughout the waterfront in our neighborhood.

So, we need this recreation center now more than ever, especially as my neighbor, who previously spoke just mentioned, with this free membership, it is going... Well, it would have really helped out our neighborhood. It really would have helped out our seniors. As mentioned before in this meeting, as well, their gym memberships are actually pretty pricy, and the city offers these rec center gym memberships at a super affordable price. That's very, very important to keeping a neighborhood and a community healthy, especially one with a very high asthmatic rate like Red Hook. And, like, previously mentioned, they want to forward people on to the Sunset Park Recreation Center, which takes about an hour to an hour and a half to get to from the Red Hook Recreation Center, and it's pretty much impossible for anyone with mobility issues or who may be elderly.

I want to implore, implore, implore the city council to please continue funding these centers. Please make sure there is money in this budget to repair this boiler in the Red Hook Recreation Center, and, uhm, continue this amazing service that we have

-- that's needed now after COVID, more than it's ever been needed before.

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay. Yeah, we'll do it, yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much.

Uh, I do see we have a question from Council Member Holden.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, uhm, Jacqui, uh, can we... Can I ask you a question about, uhm, the Red Hook, uh, Recreation Center?

What is Parks telling you about the renovations or, uhm, when it will be back online, the rec center?

JACQUI PAINTER: Yeah, uhm, well, what we're hearing right now is that there isn't enough money to replace the boiler, and that's most likely just going to be closed, uhm, in our neighborhood. And, there's a big possibility that it will be closed indefinitely, uhm, because as they were... have looked, I guess, at the repairs of the boiler, they have also noticed some other repairs from the flooding that need to be made.

Uhm, so that's all we... That's really all we know right now. And, no one was really informed of

its closure. We all just kind of found out last week.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDER: Oh, Chair, we should get some answers to that... these questions as to when, and how much, and these... These are important. We're not going to just give up on that rec center are we? So, I think, uh, is anybody on from Parks that could answer, uh, Jacqui's question?

Counsel, is anybody on... (Cross-Talk)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah, yeah, we will do that. Yes, we will, uh... (Cross-Talk)

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: But... But... But, Chair, they did, uhm, did Parks leave any representative on this call?

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yes, they have representatives.

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Alright, can we can an answer... (Cross-Talk)

CHAIRPERSON KOO: On (INAUDIBLE 01:32:27)

COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Can we... Can they answer us?

CHAIRPERSON KOO: I don't know if they access (INAUDIBLE 01:32:31)... (Cross-Talk)

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: They are currently not on the Zoom call, uh, Council Member (INAUDIBLE 01:32:34)

1 COMMITTEE ON PARKS AND RECREATION 77
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So, nobody from Parks is
3 on the Zoom call? They couldn't leave somebody to
4 hear the advocates?
5 CHAIRPERSON KOO: They're watching it, yes.
6 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: They're watching, but can
7 they answer?
8 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah.
9 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: What... You know, that's
10 important.
11 No? Okay.
12 Uh, well, Jacqui, I'm very sorry that Parks did
13 not have a representative that can... (Cross-Talk)
14 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Yeah
15 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: answer a question. But,
16 uh, we'll try to, you know, Chair, we'll try to get
17 that... That answer right away, and... (Cross-Talk)
18 CHAIRPERSON KOO: We will get the question... We
19 will get the answer for you, yeah.
20 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Alright, thank you.
21 Thanks, Chair. Thank you, Jacqui... (Cross-Talk)
22 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Okay, thank you.
23 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, David.
24 CHAIRPERSON KOO: Mm-hmm
25

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, uhm, Jacqui was...

Jacqui Painter was our last registered panelist.

But, uh, so as of now, if there are any panelist who had signed up to testify, who have not been called, please us the Zoom Raise Hand Function, and I'll call on you to speak.

There are none at this point, so I will turn it back to Chair Koo to offer any closing remarks and to adjourn the hearing.

CHAIRPERSON KOO: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Uh, so, this our last Parks Committee Oversight hearing of the season. And, I want to take the time to thank my committee staff for two years, uh, especially Kris Sartori, our moderator today, Patrick Mulvihill, Chima Obichere, and Monika Bujak.

Thank you also to our data team, Nate and Rose, our Community Engagement liaison, Frank Paris, our Land Use liaison, Chelsea Kelley, and our Press liaison, Walter Chi. Thank you also to the council's infrastructure divisor leadership, including Hasan (INAUDIBLE 01:34:34) and to Jeff Baker, the council's Legislative Director, and also to Megan Chang and Laura (INAUDIBLE 01:34:44) who have since left the council. And, of course, thank you to all you, all of

the advocates. Uh, none of these hearings would have been possible without the great work that all of you do, and continue to do behind the scene.

Everyone, thank you to everyone for all you have done on behalf of our city.

With that, I will close this meeting. **[GAVEL]**

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date January 13, 2022